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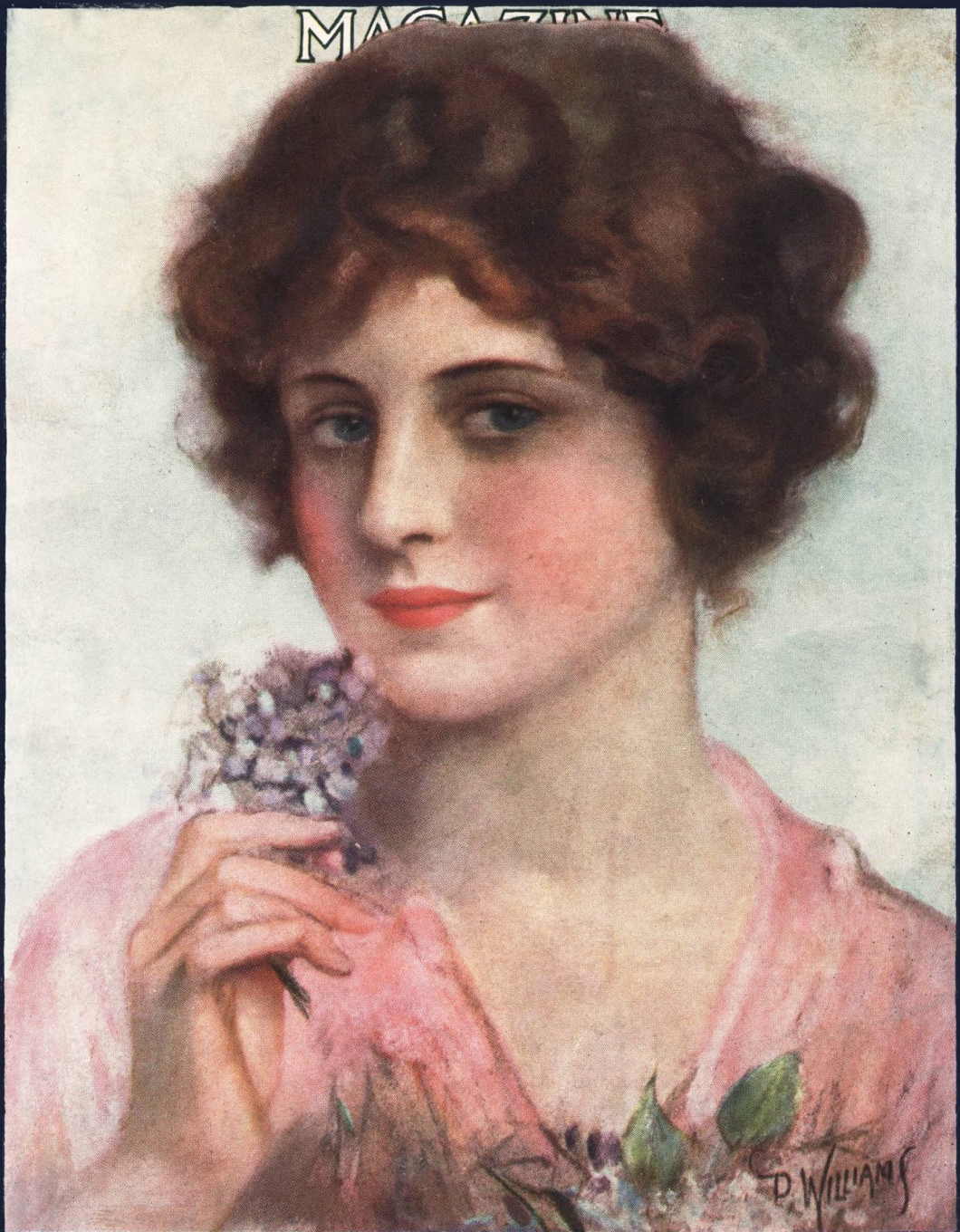
THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE



J. S. Fletcher's great mystery novel

Rex Vancil Bixby, Bertram Atkey Ellis Parker Butler and others

Another story of the Diplomatic Free Lances

The Little Things that Make Men Rich

UPON what small things the destiny of a man may turn. Today a man sits beside another on a park bench. Strangers, they fall into conversation. Their talk results in a business organization that puts them both "on easy street." Their names become household words.

Today a man makes a train acquaintance, a few years later this trifling event has lifted him from mediocrity to a splendid position at an enormous salary.

Today a man lends a friend enough to start a small business. His $500 advance brings him ninety million dollars.

Today a $25 a week clerk skims idly through a magazine. Tomorrow he has left his rut of low earnings for a position paying $8,000 a year.

And who knows what might have happened had not the two met on a park bench, had not the one made a train acquaintance, had the third refused his friend the assistance, had not the other looked idly through the magazine.

On how little a thing depended their success. And how close they came to staying poor but for these incidents.

Call it what you will; coincidence or a deep and incomprehensible plan of an all seeing fate; *this moment sees you in a position to take advantage of a little thing that may make you independent.* The very act of reading this message opens before you a vista of opportunity that has no limits, a chance to realize for yourself every desirable thing in life; money, influence, friends and success.

Had you skipped this message this opportunity might have been forever lost to you. If you fail to take advantage of this opportunity, *now that you can learn about it,* you might as well have never read this page. But—and here is the crux of the thing. If you follow the dictates of your better judgment, you will look back, a year hence, and say: "To think that my success in life hung upon so slender a thread as a printed message that I might have missed."

For my mission in life is to take men who are working for low pay, impart to them certain knowledge and suddenly lift them from the rut to positions that bring them magnificent earnings.

Thousands of men thank me for their success. Thousands of men say "Your message was the turning point in my life, the influence that has lifted me from poverty to $5,000, $7,000, even $10,000 a year and more."

And I am ready to do this same thing for you. Here is one of these golden opportunities that come to a man only once in a lifetime. All I ask of you is that you have ordinary intelligence, and that you have burning within you the ambition, the determination to step out of the ordinary position at low pay for a position that will permit you to realize every reasonable ambition.

If you are that kind of a man, then mail the appended request blank to me. I will send you my book entirely free and without obligation, telling in detail how you can quickly enter a wonderful field that pays 2, 5 or 10 times your present earning.

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J. E. Greenslade, President,
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Age.....Occupation.....

THE BLUE BOOK

KARL EDWIN HARRIMAN, Editor

COVER DESIGN: Painted by C. D. Williams

A Serial by a Master-hand

Thirteen Spirited Short Stories

THE CONSOLIDATED MAGAZINES CORPORATION, Publisher, The Blue Book Magazine,
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MAGAZINE

JUNE 1923

DONALD KENNICOTT, Associate Editor

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"He has a pull"

From a drawing by J. Henry

LET US FACE frankly this question of "Pull."

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A Yale graduate, who is a general manager, hires a Yale graduate as an assistant. Why? Not merely because the younger man is a Yale man, but because the general manager believes that *training will tell.*

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There are men in Cincinnati who say of this man: "He has a pull with the Directors." They are right. But the "pull" is a perfectly legitimate one. The Directors, who owe a part of their success to the training of the Alexander Hamilton Institute, picked him because they believed that the same training had made him a man whose judgment they could trust.

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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE
Vol. 37 JUNE 1923 No. 2

The Buried Alive Club

The first of a fascinating series dealing with the adventures of men who explore far places and achieve great things in secret for Uncle Sam.

By FRANK PARKER STOCKBRIDGE

ONE might live in Washington for years without learning of the Buried Alive Club. Its name is never spoken outside of its walls. Its telephone is an unlisted private number. Its home is in an old-fashioned mansion, facing one of the larger public squares, to all appearances a private dwelling. Among all the clubs of Washington there is none so exclusive; yet its members are men of whom the world outside never hears. They have been everywhere, seen everything, done everything. They are the workers in that vast beehive which we call the Government of the United States.

Statesmen and politicians live their little hour in the public eye, and then, like the drones of the hive, pass on in one brief burst of glory or succumb to the stings of public wrath or the frosts of popular indifference. But the work of the hive goes on. Administrations come and go, their partisans making a great buzzing sound that deceives the public and even themselves into thinking that they are running the country's affairs. Underneath all the noise and disturbance the real administrators of the Government work on, quietly, steadily, precisely. They ask nothing but to be let alone, seek nothing but the opportunity of serving well, fear nothing but publicity.

THE Buried Alive Club is the common meeting-place of such of these workers of the hive as have rendered services sufficiently important to their country to entitle them to membership, and one may talk casually to any one of them, confident that he could, if he would, disclose some of the romance that lies back of some Government report. He may be a

chemist whose research has disclosed a means of utilizing waste products of forest, farm or factory, and so relieving the economic pressure upon great numbers of his fellow-citizens. He may be an engineer whose resourcefulness and ingenuity have diverted a great river to the irrigation of a desert; perhaps he is a geologist who has pointed the way to untapped sources of mineral wealth. Perhaps—for, like the workers of the beehive, these toilers in the country's service travel fast and far in the pursuit of new riches to add to the store of the hive—he is a plant-hunter, back from the Himalayas or the Antipodes with a new food-plant wherewith to set up an added barrier against famine. He may be an astronomer whose photographs of the solar eclipse, taken from an Andean peak, throw new light on the relation of the cosmic cycle to the future habitability of the northern hemisphere. Perhaps he is an anthropologist who has unearthed, with tremendous risk and labor in a tropic jungle, fresh evidence of the beginnings of man. Maybe he is a seagoing adventurer, fresh from the iceberg patrol with news that the season's calving of the Greenland glaciers threatens to imperil liners on the ocean lanes; or in from the Coast Survey with the record of unsuspected reefs and pinnacles off the coasts of Maine or Alaska; or bringing a report to the Fish Commission of the return of the horse-mackerel to the Florida Keys.

These are the men who foregather at the Buried Alive Club. Divested of all human semblance, the bare bones of the things they do are chronicled, long after the event, in musty Government reports, to the great glory of bureau chiefs and the profit of the paper-mills. Within the precincts of the Club, however, these dry skeletons of fact are clothed with the living flesh of truth and romance.

Turn, for example, to Page 157 of the annual report of the Bureau of Standards for the fiscal year next preceding the one before the last. Therein you will find set forth the stark, uncolored facts about the great platinum robbery. All that officialdom thinks the public ought to know is there. But if Seth Halliday, who was officially a botanist of the Bureau of Plant Industry, had not taken it upon himself to give old man Tomlinson some advice about marketing osmium, concerning which Halliday knew nothing at all, there might have been no Government report whatever of the nature and tenor referred to. One does not, in official communications to Congress, report the theft of half a million dollars' worth of platinum until one is in a position to report its recovery, in the same document.

The chain of circumstance that led up to the facts set forth in the report began when old man Tomlinson came up to Hobart town from his mine in the back-country, and ran across Halliday, who had chummed up with him for a week during his search of the antipodean island for new plants that might be useful or ornamental in America.

"I'm glad I came across you," said old man Tomlinson. "I got a letter the other day from an American firm, and I thought you might know something about them. Their credentials look all right, but you never can tell."

He produced the letter from his pocket and handed it to Halliday. The printed letterhead read, "Sakaroff and Company, Metal Brokers," and it was signed "Michael Sakaroff." It was an invitation to old man Tomlinson to ship a quantity of osmium, from his mine, to Sakaroff and Company on consignment.

"I don't know anything about them," said Halliday, handing the letter back. "They may be all right and doubtless are, but I'd find out something more about them before I shipped them any goods. If you like, I'll look them up for you when I get back to the States, and if they don't size up all right, I'll try to find you an agent in New York who does."

"That might be a good idea," agreed Tomlinson. "I was going to ship them a few ounces, but I'll send it to my regular brokers in London, as usual, I guess."

SIX weeks later Seth Halliday dropped in at the Buried Alive Club. He interrupted his description of the new variety of strawberry plant he had brought back with him, as Ralph Calverley, of the Bureau of Mines, came in.

"Here's a souvenir I brought with me," he said, taking a lump of a grayish, metallic-appearing substance from his pocket and handing it to Calverley. "That's something in your line, Ralph."

"What is it?" asked Calverley.

"Osmium," replied Halliday. "They mine it down in Tasmania. Very rare metal, they tell me. Big demand for it

just now. They use it in making radio-tubes. Fellow I met up with in the back-country gave me this."

"I never saw it in this form before," said Calverley. "Usually we find it only in combination with iridium, gold and platinum. All platinum ores contain osmium, and most commercial platinum has a decided alloy of osmium."

He passed the specimen on to Paul Davis, who is a metallurgist of sorts, with a post in the Bureau of Standards.

"Funny thing," Davis said, "that Seth should bring in a chunk of osmium without any platinum in it, when I've got a piece of platinum in my pocket without any osmium in it.

"I brought it down to give to Tom Sheehan," he went on. "We've been missing a sizable amount of platinum from the Bureau—crucibles and such, worth around ten thousand dollars. Tom thought this might be some of our stuff. It's too pure for that, though."

Calverley was hacking with his knife at the specimen which Davis had passed him for examination.

"Soft as gold," he said. "This is pretty nearly the pure quill."

"It *is* the pure quill," responded Davis. "Assay Office standard—nothing purer possible. That's what makes it odd that Tom should have picked it up. There isn't much platinum of this purity in circulation, and I'm curious to know where he got it. Here he comes now."

TOM SHEEHAN, whose job with the Bureau of Criminal Investigation consists mainly of finding the missing piece of the puzzle where nobody else would think of looking for it, came into the room and joined the group around the fireside. Accompanying him was a slender, dark, spectacled young man who nodded shyly to the rest of the men.

"You all know Arthur Wellington, of the State Department, I think," said Sheehan.

"I don't believe we've met," responded Halliday. Sheehan introduced the two.

"Seth is just back from Tasmania," remarked Calverley. Wellington turned to Halliday with an eager question.

"Did you happen to run across anybody who knew any of the language of the Tasmanian natives?" he asked.

"Arthur's off on his hobby again," laughed Sheehan. "If there's a language or dialect spoken anywhere that he doesn't know, I don't know the name of it."

"That's drawing it rather strong," protested Wellington. "But I am tremendously interested in the speech of primitive races; and the Tasmanians, the last of whom died about the time I was born, were the last survivors of one of the very earliest types of human beings. Not much of their language has been preserved, but there's always an off-chance that some old settler might remember a few of their words."

"Only old-timer I got acquainted with was the miner I was just telling these fellows about," replied Halliday. "Sorry I can't help you out. It wouldn't have occurred to me to ask about the old Tasmanians, because I didn't know anything about them. Don't know anything about osmium, either, but I've got to find a responsible broker to handle it for old Tomlinson in New York."

"I can give you the names of a dozen reliable ones," suggested Calverley.

"I'll ask you for them, before I go over," Halliday replied.

DAVIS diverted the conversation by taking his specimen of platinum from Calverly and passing it to Sheehan.

"Not our platinum, Tom," he said. "I tested it chemically, and got Ellingham, down at the Bureau of Chemistry, to squint at a slice of it with his microscope. Chemically and structurally it conforms to the Assay Office standard of purity."

"And what might that mean?" asked Sheehan.

"Probably that it was stolen from some munitions plant," was Davis' answer. "During the war there was an immense demand for chemically pure platinum, for use in making sulphuric acid by the contact process, for the manufacture of smokeless powder and other explosives. The Assay Office developed a method of re-refining platinum that gave a purer product than had ever been made before, and this chunk comes up to that standard. I don't believe any of it ever got into private hands honestly; so the chances are you'll find out where this came from if you get a check-up of all the platinum on hand in all the Government plants."

"Where'd you get it, anyway?" asked Calverley.

"Fellow was trying to sell it in New York, for a good deal less than it was

worth, and the police picked him up on suspicion. He's some sort of a Hunky and doesn't speak much English. The best anyone can get out of him is that it came from a mine away up north. There's some platinum mined in Canada, isn't there?"

"Not like this, there isn't," responded Calverley. "This never came out of any mine or ordinary smelting-plant in any such form. How much of it did your Hunky friend have?"

"Around a hundred ounces, I believe," said Sheehan.

"Why, that's fifteen thousand dollars' worth!" exclaimed Calverley.

"Nearer twenty thousand," interposed Davis. "This pure stuff is easily worth two hundred dollars an ounce."

Wellington, who had pricked up his ears when Sheehan had referred to the man in question as a "Hunky," broke into the conversation again.

"Couldn't any of the police interpreters get anything out of this man?" he asked.

"They tell me they've tried him with everything they've got, and haven't been able to make contact," answered Sheehan, "though they think he's a Russian. That's what I wanted to see you about, Arthur. Could you get off to run up to New York with me? Officially this isn't Government business, now that Davis tells me this platinum can't be the stuff that was stolen from the Bureau of Standards, but it may be the Government's concern for other reasons."

"Got one of your hunches, Tom?" laughed Calverley.

"Partly that, partly the possibility that Davis suggests, that one of the Government munitions plants has been looted, though there's been nothing of the kind reported. This bird has been in the Tombs for a week or more, and I thought if Arthur, here, could turn his linguistic batteries on him until he got the range, he might be able to get the fellow to cough up some inside stuff. How about it, Arthur?"

"I can make it," replied Wellington. "I'll take the midnight train with you, if you're ready, provided I can get word to my chief that I'll be away tomorrow. I'll try phoning him at his house."

HE went to the telephone, and the conversation switched back to Halliday's adventures in Tasmania. Seth had just finished a mouth-watering description of the Tasmanian strawberries when Wellington rejoined the others.

"It's all right, Tom," he said. "I'll go over to my rooms and pack a bag and meet you at the twelve-twenty train."

"Stop at the desk as you go out and ask Charley to reserve two lowers, will you?" Sheehan requested.

"Make it three," said Halliday. "Officially I'm still on my way home, and as I've got this errand to do in New York for old Tomlinson, I might as well go when I can travel in good company. Give me the names of some of those metal brokers, will you, Ralph?"

Calverley wrote several addresses on a sheet of paper.

"Ever hear of Sakaroff and Company?" asked Halliday.

"Never," replied Calverley. "Sounds like a Russian name. Well, good luck to you."

Sheehan stopped at a telephone-booth on his way out.

"All set," he announced, as he rejoined Halliday.

AT breakfast in New York the next morning, Sheehan, Halliday and Wellington planned their day.

"I'll get all the dope the police have on this bird in the Tombs," said Sheehan. "That may take up a good part of the morning."

"Then why not come along with me this morning?" suggested Halliday to Wellington. "If this Sakaroff and Company is a Russian concern, you might be able to get a better line on them than I could. We could meet Tom at Pontin's for lunch, and you could go over to the Tombs to interview the Hunky after that."

"Suits me," responded Sheehan. "Make the lunch date downtown if you want to; I'll have to run down to the Customhouse to see the chief of our New York office after I've been to Center Street."

"Come over to India House, then," Wellington invited. "I'm a member there, and the chow is the best in New York."

"India House it is, then," said Sheehan. "Twelve-thirty?"

The others assented and started leisurely toward Fifth Avenue, down which they strolled.

"Speaking of Russians," remarked Wellington suddenly, "did you see the woman in that car that just passed?"

"Didn't notice her," said Halliday. "Some one you know?"

"I thought so, for a minute," Wellington answered. "She looked like a woman I met in Petrograd, when I was attached to the Embassy there. Probably not the same, though. It's a fairly common Russian type."

SAKAROFF AND COMPANY occupied a suite of offices on the second floor of one of the numerous old dwellings that have been remodeled into business buildings in lower Manhattan. Halliday wrote on his card *"Representing Mr. Tomlinson of Tasmania,"* and gave it to the decidedly American, gum-chewing young woman at the telephone switchboard.

"I'd like to see the head of the firm," he said.

The girl took the card and entered an inner office. As she opened the door, the sound of voices, a man's and a woman's speaking rapidly in some foreign tongue, came to Halliday's ears. He started to speak to Wellington, but broke off when the other nudged him in the ribs and shook his head violently, with his finger on his lips. Halliday glanced at the State Department man and saw that he seemed to be listening intently.

The young woman came back in a minute, leaving the door of the inner room slightly ajar.

"Mr. Sakaroff's in conference right now," she said. "He said for you to wait a few minutes."

Halliday and Wellington remained seated. The sound of conversation in the inner room, interrupted occasionally by spasmodic clicks of the typewriter of which the gum-chewing young woman was apparently the operator as well as of the switchboard, and by occasional buzzings issuing from the latter device, was still plainly audible at intervals. Wellington took an envelope from his pocket, wrote on the back of it and held it where Halliday could read it.

"Don't mention my speaking Russian," it read. Halliday nodded as Wellington put the paper back into his pocket.

In a few minutes the door of the inner office opened again and a woman came out. Both men arose as she crossed the room, but Wellington dropped his lead-pencil and seemed to be having difficulty in finding it as she passed them on her way to the outer door.

"Mr. Sakaroff'll see youse now," announced the gum-chewing guardian of the outer office, indicating the door of the other room.

Sakaroff, a slender, nervous, dark man of middle age, heavily bearded, whose English had the precise distinctness so often apparent in the speech of educated foreigners who have learned the language in school, was very much interested in Tasmanian osmium. There was a good market for it in America, and he would be glad to act as Mr. Tomlinson's New York agent. He hoped that Mr. Tomlinson had already shipped a consignment, under proper sight draft, of course. No? He was sorry, because the present market might fall off at any time. Naturally he would be pleased to furnish Mr. Tomlinson's representative with such references and credentials as might be required. He would see his bankers at once and arrange to have the papers in Mr. Halliday's hands within twenty-four hours.

MR. SAKAROFF was very nervous indeed as he bowed his visitors out with Old-World politeness.

"Something phony about that outfit," remarked Halliday, as he and Wellington gained the street. "Did you drop your pencil on purpose, or was it an accident?"

"That woman is the one I saw on Fifth Avenue," replied Wellington, "and unless I'm losing my memory for faces, she used to pose as a Polish countess named Veroneska, in the curious social stratum that linked the *monde* and the *demi-monde* in the old days in Petrograd. I don't think she recognized me; perhaps she wouldn't have remembered me, anyway, but I didn't want to take any chances, after what I overheard."

"Interesting conversation?" asked Halliday.

"Interesting, but rather disconnected, as I heard it. I want to think it over a little and see if I can fit it into anything else I know about. You'll not do any business with Sakaroff, of course?"

"Certainly not. I'm going to see some of these concerns Calverley vouched for."

"Then you'll not need me," responded Wellington. "I want to look up a Russian I know, who has an office over here on Battery Place, and see what I can find out about the Countess Veroneska. Come around to India House at twelve-thirty and we'll meet Tom there."

WHEN Halliday arrived at India House, Wellington and Sheehan were waiting for him.

"Got old Tomlinson an agent, all right," he greeted them. "How did you fellows come out?"

"I didn't find out much about the bird up in the Tombs, except that the police haven't been able to get under his skin yet," said Sheehan. "Their interpreters say he's some sort of a Russian, but he just wont talk to them in any language, except to repeat, in badly broken English, that he got the platinum from a mine 'up north.' They think he's probably one of the minor members of a criminal gang.

"So far, it's only an assumption that there's anything criminal about his possession of that platinum. I've just been talking to Washington from the Bureau's New York office. I got the chief on the phone last night from the Club and told him the stuff looked as if it had come from some munitions plant; so this morning he had the Ordnance Department check up with all of them—they're all direct-connected to the War Department switchboard.

"Not one of them reported any platinum missing. That didn't surprise me, for we would have heard of it before if any quantity of the stuff had been missed; but we've got them all busy now checking up their inventories, and in the meantime Arthur and I will see if there's any known language in which this chap they've got locked up at Center Street can be induced to talk."

"Did you ever hear of the Countess Veroneska?" asked Wellington.

"Haven't the pleasure of the lady's acquaintance," replied Sheehan. "Friend of yours?"

"I've met her," Wellington answered. "Met her again this morning, in fact."

He recited briefly, for Sheehan's benefit, the facts of his visit with Halliday to the offices of Sakaroff and Company.

"The gist of the conversation that I overheard, between the Countess and the man who calls himself Sakaroff, was that somebody named Ivan could not be trusted not to betray them, once he found out that some one else named Gregory was dead.

"The lady seemed to be insisting that Paul, as she called Sakaroff, should beat it at once while the beating was good, taking her with him; while the man kept protesting that they couldn't go without Ivan, because nobody but Ivan knew where Gregory had kept something—I couldn't make out what—without which flight would be impossible. He seemed to be greatly vexed, too, because she had let Ivan do something that was certain to make trouble for them all."

"Funny thing," interposed Halliday, "that she should have called him 'Paul' when the name on his letter is 'Michael.'"

"I wasn't concerned much about that," continued Wellington, "but I was quite curious about the Countess. I had no idea she was in America; so I called on my Russian friend, who was connected with the Consulate-General under the old régime and knew about everything there was to know about Russians and Russian affairs in America, in the old days.

"All he could tell me about the Countess Veroneska was that she was supposed to be working in the interest of the Soviet government, in some way. As he is not in the confidence of the Reds, and is trying to keep his own skin whole, he naturally couldn't give me much inside information. He did tell me, however, that the Countess had been seen around a great deal, lately, with Sakaroff, in spite of the fact that she had a husband. This husband's name, as it happens, is, or was, Gregory—Gregory Karaviev.

"My friend had not heard that Karaviev was dead; nor did he know of anyone named Ivan in connection with the Countess or her husband. He promised to make some inquiries and let me know what he learned. About Sakaroff he could tell me little except that he had started a brokerage business in precious metals some months ago, and that it was rumored in the Russian colony of New York that this establishment was an agency for the disposal of jewelry stolen from the royal family and the nobles of Russia by the Bolsheviks and smuggled into this country to be turned into money. —That might be worth while looking into on behalf of your office, Tom."

"There may be a good deal in all of what you have told us that is of interest to our office," commented Sheehan, who had listened with deep attention. "I think I forgot to tell you fellows that this bird up at the Tombs gave his name to the police as 'Ivan'—nothing else, just 'Ivan.'

"Of course, in Russia the woods are full of Ivans and Gregorys, but there's the

off-chance that this Ivan in the Tombs may be the same Ivan your Countess friend was talking about. That would hook Sakaroff and Company up pretty closely to a chunk of platinum that we believe to have been stolen."

A page approached their table. "You're wanted at the telephone, Mr. Wellington," he said.

"This may be my Russian friend with some more light on the matter," said Wellington as he rose. "I have told no one else that I was lunching here today."

"If Sakaroff is dealing in stolen platinum, I don't see what he wanted to buy osmium for," commented Halliday, as they waited for Wellington's return from the telephone.

"It's just that which makes me think there is a possible connection," replied Sheehan. "This fellow the police picked up was trying to sell some platinum which was so pure that its very purity aroused suspicion; otherwise he would have got away with it. Say a crook had a great quantity of that sort of stuff on hand and wanted to destroy its identity; wouldn't he naturally try to get some of whatever other metal makes a natural alloy with it? You remember what Davis and Calverley said last night, about osmium being always found in platinum ores and commercial platinum?"

"May be something in that," Halliday admitted. "Say, what a nuisance it must be to have to consider every bit of information you hear from the point of view of its possible connection with a crime! It would drive me nuts. I'm glad I was raised to be a botanist and not a detective."

Sheehan's only reply, as Wellington rejoined them, was a smile.

"Gregory Karaviev died two weeks ago, my Russian friend tells me," said Wellington. "He got that information from a man who told him that it was not generally known. From the same source, too, he learned that Gregory Karaviev's servant, Ivan Strogoff, had disappeared at about the same time.

"That seems to identify the Ivan the Countess and Sakaroff were talking about, but it doesn't explain how their particular Ivan doesn't know that Gregory is dead."

TOM SHEEHAN made no comment for a moment. Then he took a pencil from his pocket and began drawing diagrams on the tablecloth.

"Here are the elements of—something," he said at last.

"Ivan Strogoff disappeared somewhat more than a week ago.

"A fellow named Ivan has been in the Tombs for a little more than a week.

"This latter Ivan was arrested while trying to sell a hundred ounces of chemically pure platinum.

"The missing Ivan was the servant of Gregory Karaviev, whose wife, the Countess Veroneska, is the friend, let us say, of one Sakaroff, whom she calls Paul, but who calls himself Michael.

"Sakaroff and the Countess are worried because Ivan may make disclosures harmful to them if he learns that Gregory is dead.

"They cannot go away without Ivan, because only Ivan knows where Gregory kept something which they apparently value very highly.

"Sakaroff has been trying to buy osmium, not in the local market but direct from the mines in Tasmania.

"Osmium is useful, among other things, for alloying pure platinum and so destroying its identity."

Sheehan paused and checked off again the diagram he had drawn on the tablecloth.

"Those seem to be the facts we have. Only Ivan Strogoff, wherever he is, can tell us whether they are related in any way to each other. Now we've got to speculate a little.

"I am going to assume certain things to be true, until we learn differently.

"First, that the Ivan in the Tombs is Ivan Strogoff.

"Second, that the precious something the location of which only Ivan knows, is stolen goods, probably platinum.

"Third, that Ivan will talk, once he learns that Gregory Karaviev is dead, if he thinks that by talking he can make trouble for the Countess and her friend Sakaroff.

"Come on up to Center Street with me, Arthur, and tell this Ivan bird in his own language that his master is dead. We'll see how he reacts to that information. I guess you're a good enough bluffer to make him think you know a good deal more than you do."

"I was in the diplomatic service for a good many years," smiled Wellington. "Chances are this fellow, if he's Ivan Strogoff, speaks one of the Siberian or

Tatar dialects. I know five or six of them pretty well. Let's go."

"Coming along, Seth?" asked Sheehan, as they arose from the table.

"Not any in mine, thanks," replied Halliday. "This sort of thing is out of my line. I'll be interested to know, though, whether you get anything on Sakaroff and Company, so I can write old Tomlinson about it. I'm running up to Boston on the Merchants' Express. See you both in Washington next week."

ON the following Monday evening Halliday and Ralph Calverley were sitting before the fireplace at the Buried Alive Club when Paul Davis dropped in.

"Got to hand it to Tom Sheehan," he remarked. "He found our stolen platinum, all right."

"How'd he do it?" asked Halliday.

"He's coming over to tell me," said Davis.

A few minutes later Sheehan and Arthur Wellington arrived.

"Give the credit to Seth, here," said Sheehan, in response to Davis' congratulatory greeting. "It was Sakaroff and his crowd that pulled the platinum robbery at the Bureau of Standards, as well as the big one," he added, turning to Halliday. "But I forgot—you don't know the whole story.

"The fellow up in the Tombs was Ivan Strogoff, all right, and he weakened when Arthur told him his master was dead. I don't know yet what language Wellington talked to him in, but you'd have thought they were old pals, the way this bird loosened up. Tell 'em what he said, Arthur."

"It merely happened that this Ivan Strogoff was born in a corner of Little Russia where they still speak a language that has a strong mixture of Tatar in it," responded Wellington, "and I happened to know that dialect.

"I spoke to him first in Russian, telling him Gregory Karaviev was dead. The language he used in his exclamations of grief at the news betrayed his nativity, and when I spoke to him in the dialect of his childhood, he was ready to accept me at once as his only friend. But you'd better tell the whole story, Tom; you pieced it all together."

"I was busy at the telephone as soon as Arthur told me the substance of what his friend Ivan had disclosed," said Sheehan, "and before they'd finished their conversation, almost, we had Mr. Michael Sakaroff, alias Paul Lechowski, under arrest. We didn't move any too quickly, either. As it was, the Countess slipped through our fingers."

"Paul Lechowski!" exclaimed Davis. "Why, he used to be chief chemist at the Old Hickory plant, down in Tennessee."

"That's the one thing I didn't know!" cried Sheehan. "We found a couple of thousand ounces of that simon-pure platinum, where Lechowski and his friends had hidden it, but we hadn't been able to find out where it came from. All the munitions plants are so cocksure that nothing's been stolen from them. Wait till I call up the chief and put a bug in his ear. I see where they're going to change their system at Old Hickory."

SHEEHAN went to the telephone, and Wellington sketched rapidly for the benefit of Calverley and Davis the events in which he and Halliday had taken part.

"Now go on with your story," Calverley demanded, when Sheehan returned.

"There isn't much of a story," said Sheehan.

"This fellow Lechowski stole a couple of thousand ounces or more of pure platinum from the powder-plant where he was chemist. Ivan told us that much, but didn't know the name or location of the plant. It was presumably the Old Hickory, in the light of what Davis has just told us. He must have done it very cleverly, since they don't know yet, down there, that it's missing, in spite of having checked up the inventory within the last few days.

"He had outside help, consisting of the Countess Veroneska, a friend of Arthur's here, and her husband, Gregory Karaviev. Karaviev's confidential servant, Ivan Strogoff, helped.

"Lechowski had it all fixed to sell the platinum by melting it down with enough osmium to make it commercially salable without suspicion. There was somewhere around half a million dollars' worth of the stuff, but they did not dare to buy the osmium they needed in the ordinary market, for fear of attracting too much attention to their operations. They thought they could get a simple miner, like Tomlinson of Tasmania, to ship them a lot on consignment; and he would have done it, too, if your Yankee friend, Seth, hadn't interfered.

"Gregory Karaviev was the custodian of the loot. With Ivan's assistance he had it buried away in a place only those two knew of, all but one chunk weighing about a hundred ounces, which he kept locked in a closet in his New York apartment.

"They began to run short of funds, waiting for the osmium they had ordered to come in from Tasmania. The bright idea occurred to them that they might steal something that would be easier to dispose of; so Gregory and the Countess, as nearly as I can figure it out, slipped down to Washington and lifted Davis' crucibles from the Bureau of Standards."

"Whoever took our stuff knew where to look," said Davis. "It was all in the drawers of a desk, not the things we were then using in the laboratory at all."

"We'll find out, some day, how they got to it," Sheehan went on. "At any rate, they got it and apparently intended to dispose of it at once, to raise funds badly needed; but Karaviev was taken ill upon his arrival in New York.

"I have a hunch that he suspected that the relations between his wife and Sakaroff, or Lechowski, were not all that they should have been, also that he knew himself to be more seriously ill than the other imagined. At any rate, he called Ivan Strogoff to his bedside when his wife was out, gave him the package of platinum they had got in Washington, and told him to put it with the rest of the stuff that had come from the powder plant.

"You can fill in for yourself the scene when the Countess and Lechowski discovered that Karaviev was dead and that not only their latest batch of loot was missing but that only Ivan knew where the rest of the plunder was. Undoubtedly Gregory Karaviev was already dead when Ivan returned, for the man tells us he never saw his master after the time when he sent him to hide the Bureau of Standards stuff.

"Ivan was devoted to Karaviev, whom he almost worshiped. He distrusted the Countess, and had more than an inkling of her goings-on with Sakaroff-Lechowski. The Countess, moreover, knew that he would take no orders from her.

"Accordingly, when he returned, she told him his master wanted him to do another errand; he was to take the piece of pure platinum to a Maiden Lane address which she gave him, and bring back the money for it. If anyone questioned him as to where he had got it, he was to speak vaguely of a mine up north. Ivan is not as big a fool as he looks, and it was not so absurd as it sounds on the face of it for her to intrust him with a job that required a bit of acting.

"Of course, her big mistake was in trying to sell platinum that any dealer would recognize as too pure to be a commercial product; then too, the price she placed on it was low enough to excite suspicion. It happened that the dealer Ivan went to was an honest man,—there are such in Maiden Lane,—and what happened to Ivan you know.

"She made no mistake, however, in banking on Ivan's loyalty to his master. So long as he believed Gregory Karaviev was alive, he would spend his own lifetime in prison rather than betray him. Karaviev might be a thief, but that made no difference to Ivan, whose ethics are of quite a primitive type.

"WELL, that's about all there is to it. Lechowski hasn't come clean yet, but he's admitted enough so that we'll have no trouble in putting him across for a term; and Ivan took us to a queer little cabin back in the hills of Putnam County, up the Hudson, where we found all of the stolen platinum buried under the floor. I suspect that Gregory Karaviev had planned to get away with it on his own, once his suspicions about his wife and Lechowski had been verified."

"And you'd never have got to the bottom of it all if it hadn't been for Seth and Arthur here!" exclaimed Davis.

"Leave me out of it, please," said Wellington. "I've been in the Government service long enough to learn that you don't get any thanks for butting in on another department's affairs."

"Righto!" exclaimed Halliday. "Not a word, you fellows, anywhere, to anyone, outside of this club. Let Tom take all the credit, and much good may it do him. I'm a botanist, not a detective."

"Credit?" said Calverley. "Did I hear some one say credit? We all know who'll get the credit, and it wont be anyone here. But it will make a fancy item in some bureau chief's report."

And it did.

"Miss Smith's Bones," an even more interesting exploit of a Buried Alive Club member, will appear in our next issue. Don't miss it.

The Better Man Wins

Here's a thrilling story which deals with the most exciting race of the year—the Decoration Day motor-race at Indianapolis. Mr. Sturm has himself been a professional race-driver and writes with authority.

By WILLIAM F. STURM

"ONE thing sure, Ernie—we're here in plenty of time this year. Never did like the idea of getting here four or five days before the race, like we did last year, and be only half ready when the starter's flag drops." The speaker paused in his work of loosening the upper hose-connection from the radiator, to wipe the perspiration from his forehead as he straightened up from the motor.

"Three weeks ought to give us plenty of time to do it right." Ernie Anson, mechanician for Jimmy O'Malley, wasn't much given to conversation.

The two bent to their tasks once more, working silently, as becomes those who understand thoroughly what they are doing. Curious onlookers passed in front of the long row of garages, pausing now and then as they came to one that contained a racing-car. As the late afternoon sun was touching the top of the building, two men came sauntering along, and were passing the O'Malley garage, when one of them turned his head to look in. Instantly he altered his course, lifted the rope that barred ingress to the garage, and walked over to O'Malley, who looked up.

"Why, hello, Harry!" O'Malley exclaimed. "How you getting along? Read your speedway feature in your last issue—good dope."

Harry Taintor, case-hardened managing editor of the largest motor-publication in America though he was, beamed with pleasure, for praise from *the* O'Malley was praise indeed. "Glad you liked it, Jimmy," was all the comment he made. "Meet Charley Brendil. Charley is a magazine editor, and he came out with me this year to see his first Indianapolis Five Hundred, so he can tell whether some of his sport-story writers *know* what they put into their stories, or just guess at it."

O'Malley's mouth was ready with a reply, but evidently he thought better of it and said nothing.

"Want you to give Charley a little spin when you get going good," the motor editor said. "He's never been over fifty miles an hour."

"All right," O'Malley answered.

"When you going out, Jimmy?"

"We'll be out for a few laps tomorrow, just long enough to see how the board-track steering acts on these bricks."

BRENDIL turned to Taintor as they walked on: "Who is O'Malley, Harry? How many giants has he killed? You'll have to give me a lot of dope on the racing game."

"O'Malley is America's star of the greatest magnitude in the racing firmament. Won the Five Hundred last year, at an average of 94.48 miles an hour—the fastest five hundred miles ever run on this or any other track."

"That kid back there?"

"Kid, nothing! Jimmy's just deceived you by that open Irish face of his. He may look like a kid, but behind that smile of his lies the racing brains of the world—even if that is taking in some territory. Wasn't satisfied to clean up in America, but last year went to France and won the Grand Prix, just to show 'em that an American driver is as good off his native heath as on it. He's the Three-A champion so far this year, and if he wins this race, he has the championship cinched. He has already won four of the big coast races, and he's so far ahead of most of the other drivers that they have to use binoculars to see him—that is, outside of Bill Larrick, the runner-up in the championship. Here's a little more inside dope: The car you saw there did one hundred and twenty miles an hour at Los Angeles before he came here. Brand new, never been raced, built by Meller, the Los Angeles motor wizard. Got everything a perfect race-car ought to have."

THE days that passed were full ones for Jimmy O'Malley. The coming race was his third on the great Hoosier oval, and he knew that the keenest competition in the world would ride with him and strive for the seventy-five-thousand-dollar cash awards that would be distributed between first and tenth places, not to mention the score of trophies, ranging from a huge silver cup down to a small silver brick.

The day after the visit of Taintor and Brendil, O'Malley drove his car out of the garage and down the lane past the other garages to the track, where he waited a moment until the uniformed attendant opened the gate which kept on the infield those with no business on the track. He breezed his O'Malley Special around slowly for a few laps, staying well under seventy miles an hour. Then he opened his throttle wider, and the speed went to eighty, ninety, finally ninety-five. He held this speed for five laps, slowed down, slid slowly past the cement pits on the inside of the track, and turned into the gate beyond them that led back to the garages.

Ernie Anson raised his goggles and looked at his driver inquiringly. He had ridden with O'Malley for three years. If O'Malley was America's premier race-driver, there was no question as to Anson's being America's premier mechanician. Brought up in Detroit, where they live, talk and think automobiles, Anson had early responded to the lure of the speed-bug. And so thorough and uncannily clever was he in his grooming of race-cars, that his driver could never hope to alibi a lost race with a complaint of mechanical imperfection. O'Malley had been quick to notice Anson's ability, and the two had come to an understanding that meant success for both of them. So, when Anson looked inquiringly at his driver, he was really only deferring to the other's position as pilot of the car.

O'Malley smiled. "Our board-track steering wont do for the bricks and the four corners. Glad we brought the old stuff with us. We'll have to change over."

"Can't change to the old steering if we keep eight carburetors on," the mechanician interrupted. "That's one disadvantage of having 'em on the steering side."

"What's the rest?" O'Malley asked, glorying in the knowledge he knew his mechanician possessed.

Anson, in turn, was sure that O'Malley knew the solution of their problem, and his heart warmed toward his driver at the compliment in the question. That was O'Malley, all over. He was a pal of his mechanician's, more than a boss—there was little of master and man here.

"You know the answer," Anson replied. "We wont need eight carburetors on this track. Acceleration is what we need, more than sustained speed, and four will turn the trick. With four out of the way, we'll have plenty of room to get the steering-column angle you need for the old outfit."

"Good boy!" Jimmy O'Malley's exclamation was one of genuine pleasure at the knowledge of his mechanician. "Might as well go to work on it now. We'll have

to do some experimenting before we're ready for the race. We can get the feel of the old steering tomorrow, and dope out the gear; but I think we'll find that we can let that ride where it is, with thirty-three-by-five shoes on the rear."

O'MALLEY and his mechanician worked tirelessly. The problems that confronted them on the Indianapolis track were not the problems of any other speedway. Built back in 1909, by a group of men who owed their fortunes to the motor industry, the track had been so constructed that it tried the stamina of race-cars as well as their speed. Its two and a half miles of brick surface is far from smooth, owing to the action of heat and frost. Its two ends are not true half-circles, as is the case with some tracks. Instead, the track is in reality four-cornered, with a short straightaway on each of the two ends. The track's construction explains why the average speed for the five hundred had never mounted to ninety-five miles. It was not because the cars did not have the speed, but because no car would stand the terrific vibrational stress of the rough going, and the strain put on bearings and chassis when the four corners, with their peculiar banking, were negotiated. Yet in spite of the difficulty of driving, the long grind and the punishment inflicted on both car and driver, the Indianapolis race-track is popular among the racing fraternity. Not one of them would forgo the speed battle which rages at the track once a year—Decoration Day.

The change in the steering brought a ready response in the ease with which O'Malley's car was handled on the corners. The carburetors came in for a series of exhaustive adjustments. O'Malley knew that a faulty carburetor might cut down his speed and thus lose the race for him if the decision were close. So he drove a couple of laps, stopped at the pits, changed carburetor-needles, adjusted here and there, until he was satisfied. The car got away from the pit speedily, and when he came out of the corners onto the straightaways, the motor took all the gas a heavy foot could feed it without giving the least sign of rebellion. The car's gearing was giving him the maximum pick-up out of the corners, and at the same time it was high enough so that he had plenty of speed on the straight stretches.

Two weeks before the race, two-thirds of the garages were filled with racing-cars in all stages of disarray. Some of them held newcomers in the speedway game. Such cars usually bore high-sounding names and were being worked over feverishly by their entrants, youngsters who had made good in dirt-track contests and were anxious to try their luck in the Big League. One might walk down the garages and check off, too, the names of every driver of prominence in America, and of several first-flight pilots of Europe.

A week before the race, O'Malley pronounced his car fit. Then he wheeled it back into the garage and began the work of dismantling it. Piece by piece, what was once a race-car was reduced to a collection of mere parts. The work of dismantling went on until only the bare frame and its accompanying oil- and gas-tanks remained. The motor itself had been taken from the frame and picked to pieces. Then, as carefully as any watchmaker, O'Malley and Anson began the work of reassembly. But before work on the motor was begun, every speck of carbon was diligently removed from the valves and the head. The valves themselves were carefully ground and seated. Bearings got their share of attention. There was no guesswork. During the time the two worked, speedway officials and special friends dropped in for a moment or so; but the loungers, who by now were swarming, got no farther than the rope which hung across the doorway. Getting his car ready was serious business with Jimmy O'Malley.

Auto engineers, tire men, carburetor experts, ignition specialists and all the other accessory representatives of the auto industry were also arriving, to render aid to the drivers, and perhaps to learn something new that might later be applied to their product.

When the O'Malley Special was once more completely assembled, its driver sent it around the track for ten laps, to be sure that it was functioning properly, then drove it back to the garage. "All set," he announced across the hood to his mechanician.

THAT night O'Malley took dinner with Harry Taintor. The strain of preparation was over, and he could enjoy himself.

"You've got a lot of stiff competition, Jimmy," Taintor said, slowly knocking the

ashes from his cigarette, and meanwhile looking at the ash-tray as though he expected to read the future in it. "Larrick is the man you're likely to have to beat—you know that. Funny situation, too: here you are, Three-A champion, and Bill Larrick, the runner-up. If he wins this race, he has a good chance to take the championship away from you; and if you win it, you've got it sewed up for this year—if he won all the other races on the calendar, he couldn't catch up with you, with the thousand points the winner gets out of this race."

"Listen, Harry—you brought up the subject: I'll beat Larrick if it's the last race I ever drive. You can get straight on that." O'Malley's face had undergone a change. "I've outdriven him on every track in the country, and I'll do it here this year. You know, and I know, what my car is. Meller never built a faster, sweeter-running motor. It's balanced to perfection. I don't like a man who tells the world what he is going to do, but you'll understand. We haven't overlooked a single thing. And we're ready today. I'd stake my life that the O'Malley Special wont miss a shot in the whole five hundred miles."

"I was talking to Larrick the other day." The motor editor still toyed with his cigarette. "This is his last race, if he wins. Says the money the winner will get here will make it possible for him to put his boy through Polytechnic. Going to make an engineer out of him. Bill is going to get a job in the town to be with the boy the four years he is in college. If he doesn't win this race, he'll have to go on till he does win a big one. It's the only way he has of getting the boy through. Certainly is a strange situation, Jimmy."

"Let's discuss something pleasant, Harry." All the geniality had gone from O'Malley's voice. "I'm not interested in Bill Larrick or his son. You can understand my feelings in the matter, and I don't care to discuss them any."

WHEN O'Malley reached the Speedway the next morning he saw on the bulletin board the notice that elimination trials would be begun the next day, which was Thursday. The race was on the following Tuesday. He walked out to the track and sat on the pit wall, watching the drivers working out their cars. He saw Bill Larrick's car coming down the lane and onto the track. Larrick reeled off some fast miles, and there was a flutter of excitement among the rail-birds. Jimmy took out his stop-watch and clocked the car for several laps. It was running between ninety-eight and a hundred miles an hour.

"Sure sounds good!" one of the pit-lizards said.

"Yes, and she *is* good!" The voice startled O'Malley. He turned, and though he had never seen Bill Larrick's boy, realized that he was looking straight into his eyes. For a moment the boy held his gaze and then turned away. In that instant Jimmy had seen the eyes, the nose, heard the voice, of Joan Hildreth. His mind leaped back over the gap of seventeen years. He saw Joan as she used to come from the office of the Empire Motors. He saw himself again meeting her and walking down to the street-car line. . . . . Then—Bill Larrick! *He* had stepped in and taken Joan away from him. And a year later she had died in bringing a son into the world. Bill Larrick's son! If Larrick were depending on the present race to enable him to quit, he'd not be able to do so, so far as Jimmy O'Malley was concerned. The red swam before Jimmy's eyes as he turned and walked back to his garage.

SPEEDWAY rules require that each car average not less than eighty miles an hour for four laps in the elimination trials. Only thirty contestants were permitted to enter the race, so that only the thirty fastest were eligible, even if more than thirty qualified at the required speed. Positions in the race line-up depend on qualifying speed, the fastest lap gaining the preferred first-row positions. O'Malley reported to Referee Kendall for his trial early Thursday afternoon. He warmed his car up for three laps; then, as he came down the straightaway toward the starting wire on the fourth lap he held up his hand—the signal to the officials that he was ready for his four-lap trial.

With the track all to himself, he bore down toward the timing wire with the Special wide open. Past the pits he went, into the first corner of the south turn, out into the short straightaway, then into the second corner of the turn, on down the back stretch, into the first corner of the north turn, the short straightaway, the second corner, and out into the front stretch, his motor roaring its pleasure. The

timers bent over their electrical instruments as he flew on.

"Jimmy's going to turn his four laps at a hundred miles is my guess," opined Odis Ricker, guardian of the delicate timing device, which registered speed to the hundredth part of a second.

"Yes," chimed in his assistant, "that boy out there is such a judge of speed that he knows just about as well as we do what his average will be."

The speaker wasn't far wrong. When the O'Malley Special drew up at the judges' stand after making the required four laps, O'Malley and Anson looked at each other. "Right at a hundred," the driver of the car said. "Same here," his mechanician replied.

"O'Malley's four-lap trial was at an average of one hundred and two-hundredths of a mile an hour," the announcer megaphoned to the fifteen thousand people in the grandstand, who were out to watch the trials.

FOUR others qualified after O'Malley that afternoon, and two of these did a fraction more than he. Jimmy began to be uneasy. He could have put at least four miles more on his average, but he had not thought it necessary, and had taken things comparatively easy. Now, if there should be one driver more qualifying faster than he, it would put him in the second row. He looked at his watch, noting that it lacked only five minutes to five, at which time the track would be closed for the day. There were no cars waiting for the trials, and he breathed easier. He was still in the front row.

But at one minute before five Bill Larrick wheeled his blue DeLuxe out on the track and reported for his trial. Instantly Jimmy understood Larrick's strategy: He too had determined to be in the front row, and he had taken the only safe method of being sure of his position—he waited until he knew just what speed he had to beat to put him there. Larrick drove his car two laps, but failed to raise his hand as he showed at the head of the front stretch on his third lap.

"Larrick's mighty particular," Referee Kendall said to Eddie Eden, Three-A representative in charge of the race. "He's going to have her popping just right. Must be figuring on leading the whole field."

As the DeLuxe came into the straightaway on the fourth lap Larrick's hand went into the air, and his car was going at airplane speed as he shot across the starting-wire. The electric timer credited him with better than a hundred miles an hour for his first lap. "Here's where Jimmy goes into the second row," Ricker volunteered to those peering at the instrument, as the second lap showed a speed of one hundred and one miles an hour.

And Jimmy was relegated to the second row—outwitted by a man he disliked above all others. Larrick's average was an even hundred and one miles an hour. Jimmy's mouth tightened as he listened to the announcement. Larrick, in his blue DeLuxe; Harkenrider, in his Sheepshead Special, and Clemens, in his Fisher, had gained the first-row positions; O'Malley had to be content with first place in the second row.

The trials went on Friday and Saturday. Two of the dirt-track racing stars failed to get their cars ready in time, and when the curtain rang down on the trials Saturday evening, twenty-eight cars had qualified. Sunday the cars were weighed, the drivers received their physical examinations and listened with bored expressions to a lecture on how to drive, as though they hadn't been hearing that selfsame lecture every time they had driven a Big Time race. But the Speedway rules are as inexorable as the laws of the Medes and the Persians, and one of the requirements is that all drivers must be lectured on the rules of the track.

INDIANAPOLIS is normally a city of three hundred and thirty-five thousand people. But a gradual inflation began Sunday. The steam roads carried thousands of visitors in. The traction-lines, radiating to the cardinal points of the compass and scores in between, brought more. The cement roads, leading north, south, east and west, seethed with autos and smelled of burned brake-lining, with here and there the pungent castor-oil odor which formerly belonged exclusively to the race-track. All day the crowds came. Monday the steadily flowing stream of devotees of the gasoline goddess changed to a tumbling, turgid, roaring Niagara of race-enthusiasts. From sunny California they came, over the Santa Fe Trail and the Lincoln Highway; from Maine, from Florida, from Texas, from Oregon. The streets became a riot of color, of waving flags and pennants. Standing at the curb,

the license plates of every State in the Union passed before one's eyes.

On the day of the annual race, business in the city is suspended; the townspeople join with the visitors in their pilgrimage to the brick track lying four miles out on the Crawfordsville road.

Even the day before the race, autos began collecting at the entrances to the grounds, their occupants anxious to be the first to enter, in order to get some choice free parking-place in the infield, as well as the honor of having been first in line and being photographed by the newspaper feature writers.

At daylight, the morning of the race, the two thousand Speedway guards combed the grounds, ejecting all those who had endeavored to get in without the formality of a ticket. Then the gates were opened. Streams of autos, two and three abreast, began pouring out toward the Speedway, converging at the gates from a dozen different roads. They passed through the great central gates, while those spectators unlucky enough to be afoot made a rush for the turnstiles. Once in the gayly decorated grounds, the autos took various courses, thousands of them pouring through the tunnel and over the viaduct crossing to the infield, where in reserved and free parking-spaces, their occupants would make merry all day, visiting neighboring cars to gossip, or standing on car hoods to watch the race swirl by.

BY nine o'clock the grandstands, which extended solidly for half the distance round the track, were comfortably filled—and still the crowds kept coming. The race-drivers were bringing their cars out of the garages and placing them in front of their own pits, which stretched along the inside of the track, just beyond the starting wire. Important and self-important officials walked up and down the garages to be sure there were no laggards, and still others went among the cars at the pits, testing gasoline to be sure it had not been doctored.

A thousand-piece band paraded up and down the home stretch, filling the air with melodies peculiar to the nations participating in the race—England, France, Italy and America. Tall masts displayed the national flags to the soft breeze as the band marched and countermarched. The infield crowd, held back from too close contact with the track by a great wire fence fifty feet from the course, poked noses against the wire in an endeavor to see everything.

The band left the track, and the racing cars began lining up at the starting-wire. In rows of three, they extended far down toward the north turn. It was an old story to Jimmy O'Malley, but his heart skipped beats as he wheeled his shining white car into position in the second row. These lithe motorcars were thoroughbreds; and to Jimmy O'Malley they were invested with all the romance in the world—though probably he would have denied any sentiment of the sort if you had asked him.

In a half-moon immediately ahead of the cars were grouped the pilots and their mechanicians, spick and span in their new uniforms, ready for the official photographer. For how many of these daring men was this to be the last photograph—how many would receive their final checkered flag amid grinding steel and bursting flame before the race had passed into history? Knickered and putteed officials busied themselves about the cars. Olive-drab-uniformed guards looked on and kept everyone in his place.

"GIVE me some more dope on this layout, Harry." Brendil and Taintor, safely stowed away in the press-stand, were looking down on the scene. "What's the idea of those bombs bursting in air?"

"That last one was the nine fifty-five bomb. They are different colored—keep the people informed as to the time, and make 'em stretch their necks waiting for the race to get going."

The nine fifty-nine bomb!

In another moment some of the strain of waiting would be over. The more poetic of the spectators could almost see the cars stamp their figurative feet, like high-bred horses in leash, eager to be off. The driver of the pacing-car looked toward the starter. Every driver of a racing-car instinctively tightened his grip on his steering-wheel. To Jimmy O'Malley, veteran though he was, the minute seemed interminably long.

The ten o'clock bomb!

The starter signaled to the driver of the pacing-car. Followed by twenty-eight roaring, snorting monsters of steel, the pacing-car moved away toward the south turn. The cavalcade was in orderly array, each car keeping its appointed place in the row

behind the leader. The cars were greeted with continuous cheering as they moved past the packed stands, separated from the track only by a four-foot cement safety-wall and a heavy wire fence. On the back-stretch the pacing-car increased its speed to seventy miles an hour. The cars still could be seen by the spectators in the stands on the front stretch. Then they passed out of sight behind a grove of trees that occupied the north end of the infield. Binoculars were trained on the north turn, their owners eager to get the first view of the pacing-car as it came into the front stretch.

The spectators in the stands on the north turn started a murmur as they got the first glimpse, and the murmur followed down the straightaway ahead of the cars, changing to a heavy burst of applause as the cars came abreast. The driver of the pacing-car, anxious to get his field away at the highest possible speed, opened his throttle wide, and his speed mounted to eighty miles an hour. The drumming of the race-cars, at first faint as they nosed into the stretch, grew in intensity as they approached the starting-wire. As the pacing-car went under the suspension bridge on which stood the starter, the latter flashed a red flag—and the race was on!

As the cars, all restraint as to position now removed, shot ahead, it seemed that nothing short of a miracle could prevent a catastrophe as they funneled into the first corner, the cloud of castor-laden exhaust-smoke swirling in behind them and hanging like a screen for a moment until the wind took it away. As the smoke lifted, the corner was seen to be clear of cars.

Jimmy O'Malley had planned his battle carefully. He had a fast car; it was in perfect shape, and as Anson said, would run till the cows came home. O'Malley was going to win, and he was going to win by staying bang up with the leader, whoever the leader happened to be, until the last few laps; then he would use that extra speed hidden beneath the hood and take first place. He let his eye rove over the first flight as he went through the corner and came into the short straightaway. Ahead sped the red and purple cars that had euchered him out of a front-line position, and still ahead of them whisked the bright blue of Larrick's DeLuxe. Jimmy was content to let matters ride as they were.

Bill Larrick led the field the first lap, and he was greeted with a round of applause. An Alco stopped at the pits on its first lap to replace a spark plug fouled by the slow speed of the pacing-lap. Jimmy O'Malley was running in fourth position.

"THIS track is two and a half miles around, is called an oval, but it is really four-cornered," Taintor was telling his friend Brendil while the cars were negotiating the back-stretch. "It was built in 1909 by men who had the foresight to see that if they put something into it besides speed, its appeal would be everlasting. So they did it. The four corners call for driving skill. Any driver who tried to go the whole race with his throttle wide open would break his neck or ruin his car long before the end of the race. You'll notice the drivers lift their foot for an instant going past Grandstand A."

"What do you mean? I can notice the drivers lifting their feet?" Brendil interrupted.

"Just what I say. There goes O'Malley. Now, watch and listen. See that heavy blue smoke roll out of his exhaust, and hear his car sputter? He's lifted his foot."

"How long does he lift it?"

"Varies with the nerve of the drivers. Jimmy's traveling something like one hundred and fifty feet a second. He lifts his foot for a half-second or so, his speed drops slightly; and he goes into the first corner. He steps on it again, rides the short straightaway, lifts his foot, and noses into the second corner of the turn. He drops his foot hard—and down the back-stretch he tears. He does it all over again at the north turn. And when these corners get full of oil, watch how the cars act."

WITH the race well under way, tension in the stands relaxed somewhat. In one corner of the press-stand Taintor was still explaining to Brendil: "You can bet that every driver in this race is out to beat the other fellow. And of all the gang out there, no two will try harder than O'Malley and Larrick."

"Any special reason—anything that a man could use as a peg on which to hang some snappy race-fiction?"

"Talking shop again! I'm not interested in fiction, Charley, but I can tell

you something about O'Malley and Larrick that isn't fiction, and that not many folks know. They used to test cars together at Empire Motors. Both sweet on the same girl, Joan Hildreth. That was years ago. Steady Jim was a little too slow. You wouldn't think so with that Irish name, would you?"

"Lots of dreamy Irish—look at me!" Brendil blew a cloud of smoke.

"Jimmy was about ready to ask Joan if he could buy her the ring, when Bill Larrick steps in and beats him to it. Jimmy vowed eternal vengeance against Larrick, and he's been delivering right along. You couldn't exaggerate that rivalry if you tried. But going back: Joan died when little Bill was born, and her death accentuated O'Malley's feeling against Larrick. After a while, both became race-drivers—top-notch pilots. Larrick is runner-up to O'Malley for the Three-A drivers' championship. If he wins today, he'll get the twenty thousand dollars first-place prize offered by the Speedway, and quite a little extra money offered by the accessory manufacturers, not to mention the one-hundred-dollar lap-prize for every lap he is in the lead. Furthermore, he'll go ahead of O'Malley by four hundred points in the championship, even if Jimmy should get second place. Bill told me last week that the game was getting too dangerous for a man with a sixteen-year-old boy to educate, and if he wins, he'll take the money, see the boy through another year of high school, enter him in an engineering school, and stick right in the town with him until he graduates."

"Some incentive for him to step out and— Look at that!" The sentence broke in the middle as an Ajax came hurtling down the front stretch and blew a right front tire just before reaching the press-stand. The driver was a little slow in handling the steering-wheel, and the swerve to the right shot the car straight toward the outside safety-wall. Just as it seemed about to hit the wall, it turned and started back across the track. An Eagle, running closely behind, could not escape the danger directly ahead. It plunged into the first car, locking both of them together momentarily. Then they broke apart, the Ajax to roll over and slide toward the infield, and the Eagle to flounder down the middle of the track, a hopeless wreck, its radiator smashed and two front wheels crumpled. There was a clanging of an ambulance-bell as the hospital squad came at speed through the infield and removed two men who had driven their last race. The driver and the mechanician in the second car were not even scratched.

WITH forty of the two hundred laps gone, the position of the leaders had not changed appreciably. Larrick still led, with the Italian Zucari and an American Alco following in order; running in fourth place came O'Malley, followed by the field, many of which kept on without hope of finishing well up, but confident that if they could keep going, they would come in far enough up to get inside the lucky first ten places.

At fifty laps some of the weaker cars began to yield up the ghost. The English Shield, with its driver new to the punishing speed of the rough bricks, had stopped several times to adjust shock-absorbers. Something went wrong with the Drake's oiling-system, and its driver coasted the car into the graveyard of dead cars, with a connecting-rod tied in a knot. The Dinnaire, with its weight well in the air, ran more like a touring-car than a racing creation, and its stops for tire changes were numerous, in spite of its low speed.

Convinced that his car would stand greater speed without injury, O'Malley opened up another notch. But if he hoped to gain by this move, he was soon undeceived, for those ahead, noting the distance lessening between them, also opened up.

At seventy-five laps there was still no change in the first four places. O'Malley kept close watch on the inexperienced drivers as he passed them, lest they wabble unexpectedly or hit a pool of oil and slide into him. Coming into the first corner of the north turn directly behind No. 7, Jimmy stepped on his accelerator, preparing to get by in the shortest possible time. And at that instant the thing he had been looking for happened. No. 7 was riding in the oil-streak, and without warning the rear end swerved viciously to the outside of the track. The car slid straight ahead, still partly in the heavy coating of oil which had leaked from passing motors.

O'Malley's action was instinctive—he turned his car far up the inclined track. The driver of No. 7 lost all control of his car, and it headed straight for the upper wall. O'Malley had chosen his course, and he could not change it. Spectators

held their breath. But it was all in the day's work for the doughty driver of the O'Malley Special. He gave his car every bit of throttle he had, and responding like a thoroughbred, the Special leaped ahead. O'Malley felt a slight jar as No. 7 swung, twisting and turning, directly behind them. Its fishlike tail smacked against the Special's tail, doing no damage beyond a slight dent. The morbid watchers had been cheated of their thrill, as the threatened smash did not develop, and those interested only in seeing the best man win the race cheered O'Malley as he went ahead. Jimmy acknowledged the cheer by raising his hand. No. 7, by that strange fate that attends race-driving, missed the cement wall by the fraction of an inch, and came to a stop with its radiator pointed directly toward the wall. The driver turned his mount down the track and went on his way.

THE O'Malley Special was in its hundred and twenty-fifth lap when Anson nudged O'Malley and pointed to the right front and right rear tires. On the next lap they saw Larrick also had found it necessary to slow down for a pit-stop. Exultation was in Jimmy O'Malley's heart. His car had scarcely stopped before the pit-crew was under the rear axle with a jack, and in less than twenty seconds they had put on a new rear wheel, with its spanking new tire. Flying to the front of the car, they changed the right tire there in less time than they had the rear one. An efficiency expert would have looked in vain for a single false move. While the crew was busy with the tires, Anson had dumped oil and gas into the tanks and filled the radiator. But even as he was screwing the cap down, there was the roar of a car in low gear, and Larrick swept by as he left his pit. The grandstand cheered the pit-contest between the two drivers, but they were no longer cheering Larrick as the leader, for the Zucari had swept into first place, followed by the Greyhound and the Thor, which had been coming up steadily. But Larrick still led O'Malley.

Jimmy knew he was provisioned to go the rest of the distance without stopping. He settled down to win the race. Lap after lap he flew after the leaders, his tires singing their speed-song as he hurtled past the grandstands at one hundred and fifteen miles an hour, and his gears whining their pæan of victory as he shot into the turns. He increased his speed on the straightaways and held his foot down a little longer as he went into the corners.

Zucari, growing brave because of his first-place position, let his Latin temperament get the better of him—he increased his speed. The American driver in the Greyhound challenged the Italian to a speed-duel. It was a magnificent spectacle, though those in the Italian's pits considered it a foolish one, for they tried to flag the mad driver down to a sane speed. The race was not yet won. But Zucari, the wine of victory to his lips, refused to lower the cup in the slightest degree. The American car pressed him harder. He put on more speed. Still the American car came on. Radiator to radiator, down the front stretch they came—tore into the south turn on even terms, down the back-stretch, through the north turn and into the front stretch.

And then it happened! One of Zucari's exhaust-valves, refusing to stand the intense heat generated by the too rapid flight, warped to such an extent that it refused to close, and immediately the Italian's speed dropped below eighty, his motor popping distressingly as he still went on. The Greyhound swept into the lead, with Larrick second and O'Malley third.

ONE hundred and fifty laps! Only fifty laps remained of the race. To O'Malley the hour had struck. He dropped his foot even lower on his accelerator, and his speed increased proportionately. Within him burned a fierce desire for vengeance. Inch by inch, foot by foot, yard by yard, he cut down the half-mile that separated him from Larrick. If Larrick was quitting after this race, O'Malley had decided it would be without the honor of winning first. . . . . Seventeen years! The past rose before O'Malley as he strained every effort to come up to the blue car. The track was slippery with oil, and it was taking masterly driving to keep out of it on the turns, where most of the danger lay. Ahead of Jimmy, Larrick seemed to pick the safe course with unerring accuracy. . . . .

Twenty-five laps to go! Already the speed gods had cast the unfit into the discard. The Greyhound driver signaled his pit for gas and oil. In its minute stop for fuel, the car dropped from first to third place, so close was the contest, with

Larrick roaring ahead into first place, and Jimmy narrowing the gap that kept him in second place.

The spectators, sensing the duel between the two for first place, cheered the cars alternately as they passed. The O'Malley Special still had some of its wonderful speed in reserve, and the driver began using it. Anson turned a questioning glance to Jimmy, pointing meanwhile at the tachometer, which showed their engine speed had mounted to four thousand revolutions a minute.

O'Malley shook his head, and pointed to the blue car in front.

SPEEDWAY spectators had never before seen such driving. Not one car in a hundred would have stood it. But O'Malley knew what he had under him. And as he flew on, a subtle plan formed itself. He would continue to creep up on Larrick, but would so time his speed as to pass him on the front stretch, where the crowds were greatest.

Into the front stretch they came, Larrick's blue DeLuxe ten yards ahead of the fast-flying white O'Malley Special. The spectators at the tape craned their necks, not sure which car was in front as they came toward the stand almost head on.

"O'Malley's got him!" shrieked a partisan of the driver in question. "He *has* not!" countered an equally vociferous Larrick champion.

O'Malley had not passed Larrick—yet. But the yards were lessening to feet, the feet to inches. Now the two cars were running front wheel to front wheel! The Special began drawing ahead, first the radiator, then the cowl, then the driver, and finally the tail. . . . . The gap widened, the blue exhaust from the Special trailing derisively behind as O'Malley shot into the corner, yards ahead of Larrick. And as Jimmy flew through the turn, he was met by continuous cheering from those who had been watching his fight for first place for the last few laps.

Jimmy looked at Anson. The latter smiled back. Barring something entirely unforeseen, the race was as good as won for them. The absolute dependence they placed on their stout car would not be misplaced; of that they were sure. From now on, it was Anson's business to keep a sharp lookout to the rear, warning his driver when the car in second place should threaten them.

Up in the press stand the various agencies that kept the newspapers of the country informed of the progress of the race shot snappy messages chronicling the fact that O'Malley, in a fierce burst of speed, had gained first place and it looked as if he would keep it. The sporting editor of the *News* ceased his dictation over his private telegraph wire leading into Indianapolis long enough to grab his private phone: "Get ready for a flash, 'O'Malley Wins!' There's nothing can stop him now," he told his hard-working assistant on the other end of the wire.

"FIRST place in the Five Hundred. . . . . The only driver ever to accomplish that feat twice. . . . . Larrick's boy! Going to college, if his father won first place. . . . . Not this year. . . . . Bill Larrick, Jr. . . . . Bill Larrick's boy—and Joan's. . . . . Might have been *his* boy—and Joan's." The thoughts beat on his brain like hammers.

Joan's boy! What would *she* think if she knew? *And she did know!* Jimmy's foot drew away from the accelerator. "Bill's boy, too!" The last thought, like an evil spirit, crowded the other out. Once more his foot sought the accelerator, and so savage was the thrust that even at the speed at which the car was traveling it still had enough reserve power to leap ahead at the lash.

The O'Malley Special flashed down the front stretch, the spectators sweeping by in a long blur. El Kuhn, O'Malley's pit manager in scores of races, held up the blackboard as the car passed. In letters a foot high, Jimmy read: "15 Laps."

Fifteen laps to go! Again Jimmy was living his life at the Empire Motors. . . . . Bill Larrick! Jimmy's jaw clamped. The muscles in the leg that kept his foot hard on the accelerator grew taut. He would crush Bill Larrick in *his* greatest ambition, just as Bill had taken life's dearest thing from him. . . . . But was it *Bill* he was crushing? *The boy looked more like his mother.* . . . . Jimmy's foot responded to the urge of the appeal, and the car slackened its forward rush perceptibly.

BILL LARRICK drew abreast. At the sight of the car out of the corner of his eye, Jimmy once more put all softer thoughts behind. The O'Malley Special

leaped to its task. The blue threat dropped to the rear.

"Something the matter with O'Malley's car. He's having trouble," was the word passed about among the officials and motor experts.

"Can't understand it," said one. "Wonder what it is? Looks to me with those spurts and slow-downs like he's not getting enough gas to his motor all the time. Acts just like my car does when I've got a dirty carburetor screen."

Ten laps to go! The Special, now safely in the lead, no longer ran by fits and starts. The laps went into the discard rapidly. Jimmy had been tabulating them mentally, so that he scarcely noticed Kuhn's message of "5 Laps," as he went by the pits. The following lap, the board was again in the air with the cryptic instructions, "*Hold It—*" which meant that the race was well in hand and that no unnecessary chance of "busting up" should be taken by increasing the speed.

The newspaper photographers and moving-picture men began gravitating toward the Special's pit, waiting for the conquering hero when he should finish the race.

TWO laps more to go! Spectators were on their feet, waiting for the finish.

"Give No. 35 the green flag!" went the summons to the starter. And as the O'Malley Special swung by the flag which told its driver he had only one more lap to go, frenzied shouting burst from the stands.

Jimmy did not hear the tumult. A greater tumult was raging in his soul. Lose the race, when he knew that he had it won. His car—he would have to sacrifice it too, the same little thoroughbred that had never failed *him*, in the Grand Prix, Los Angeles, Uniontown, Tacoma, Fresno, and last year's Five Hundred. Jimmy O'Malley loved his car. And now he had to crucify it!

Less than one circuit of the track remained.

Two-time winner of the International Championship! First place and accessory prizes, a total of thirty-five thousand dollars! His car's reputation! And his own reputation! And Ernie's too! What would he think? Jimmy O'Malley was fighting the biggest battle he had ever faced. His hands grew clammy; his arms were lead.

The O'Malley Special was negotiating the north turn, less than a mile from the finish line. Behind it thundered Bill Larrick's DeLuxe, running wide open, but with no hope of passing the Special. Somehow, Jimmy's mind was adjusting itself to the proper focus. The animus he had always carried for Bill Larrick had not abated in the slightest. He would hold that as long as he lived. But Bill Larrick had faded from the picture, and Jimmy saw only Joan—and Joan's boy. He would have had the opportunity to go to college if he had been *his* boy. . . . . The finish wire was less than a quarter of a mile away. Joan's boy! At the thought, Jimmy raised his foot from the accelerator.

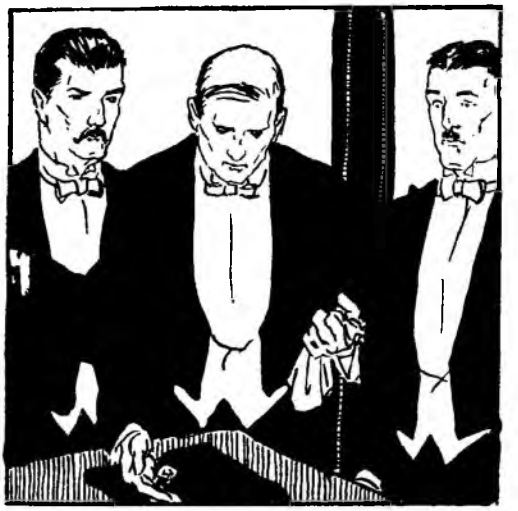
Bill Larrick came on at one hundred and fifteen miles an hour. Jimmy was crawling along at a bare one hundred. It seemed ages to him before the DeLuxe came into the corner of his eye, first as a mere speck, then as the car drew abreast, it filled his whole vision. The DeLuxe was passing the Special! Jimmy's foot shot downward, and then as suddenly moved back upward. He held his car at a hundred-mile speed, every muscle in his body taut.

The checkered flag flashed for the DeLuxe. A second later the same flag flashed for the O'Malley Special. The grandstands shook with cheers for the victor.

O'MALLEY and Anson pushed their car into the garage, with spectators standing around six deep. "Didn't have the stuff. Beaten by a better car and a better driver. That's what happened." The judgment came from some one in the crowd. And Jimmy heard no voice raised to deny the assertion.

His heart was strangely light. He smiled at the crowd. Then, turning to his loyal mechanician, he put his arm around his shoulder: "You get your thirty-five hundred, just the same as though we had come across first," he said.

"Whatever you say, Jimmy," Anson answered as he tugged at a refractory racing-hood fastening under his chin.



The Blue Lightning

Dramatic, swift-moving, unusual in plot, this remarkable story holds the reader enthralled from the first page to the last.

By CHARLES KING VAN RIPER

JEROME CRAIG had come across the continent to pay Wingfield forty thousand dollars with interest for five years. The amount represented losses at cards. He might have made the settlement by mail, as with his other debts; but this was the last item in a total of nearly one hundred and twenty thousand dollars; and Craig, who five years before had been that much worse than penniless, had his reasons for traveling three thousand miles to pay in person. In less than two hours, now, the train would reach Grand Central, and he would be on his way to meet Wingfield.

Before Craig left New York, there had been between Wingfield and him the question of Cynthia Cope. Craig, at least ten years younger than the other, had been bitterly jealous of his rival. Wingfield had the face of a gentleman and of a gambler—at their best identical, masking a man's emotions, things neither the gentleman nor the gambler are supposed to have. In Wingfield's eyes was more power than warmth. Once Craig saw something almost satanic in Wingfield's face.

Perhaps that quality had impressed Craig subconsciously from the first, but he did not identify it until the night of the Rossiter dinner-party, the affair arranged in order that Raoul Fezzoa, the Brazilian gem-connoisseur, might see Franklin Rossiter's famous Blue Lightning diamond. Five years had passed since that night, but Craig still experienced a terrified tightening and numbness of his scalp at the recollection. For five years Craig had lived with the memory of what happened that night at the Rossiters'. Every detail of it was distinct. A hundred times those scenes had been herded through his mind as he was speeding East on the train. This was the story:

ILL-STARRED speculations in the stock-market were responsible for a serious accumulation of debts, disastrous in that they forced Jerome Craig to defer indefinitely asking Cynthia Cope the question that he was determined to ask her. To

the unfortunate market-ventures were added exceedingly costly experiences at cards, culminating in a particularly heavy reverse. At daybreak on the date of the Rossiter dinner-party Craig had risen from a card-table at his club a fifteen-thousand-dollar loser overnight.

Even in that extremity Craig was inclined to believe that none suspected that the last of old Commodore Craig's fortune was gone. How stupid people were! For several days there had been talk around the club about Wingfield's being hard hit. Why, it was to Wingfield that Craig gave a note to cover the fifteen thousand dollars he had lost. And Craig happened to know that into the waistcoat pocket in which the scrap of paper was being tucked, there had on recent evenings gone other acknowledgments of indebtedness signed *"Jerome Craig."* In all he owed the man some forty thousand dollars.

Wingfield, immaculate and fresh as when he sat down the evening before, took his winnings without a trace of excitement. The man was a marvel of self-possession. Craig had seen him lose staggering amounts, and had not perceived the slightest sign that he felt differently than in this moment of favorable fortune. But Craig knew that no man could either win or lose without reacting to the result, and as Wingfield seemingly was not affected it showed how completely he was master of himself, what tremendous will-power he must have had. Craig, at twenty-five, admired—and envied him. He tried to carry off his loss with the same superb indifference.

"I'll see you at the Rossiters' tonight." Craig intended the tone to be casual. Instead it was tense, jerky, breathless, a pitiful parade of his inexperience. And with the same desperate hope that the others wouldn't guess how shaken he was, he added the pathetic lie: "Guess I'll go up and get some sleep."

Craig, who was living at the club, went to his rooms. But instead of sleep there was a checking-up of accounts that reached a total surprisingly higher than he had feared. It was astounding, the way his bad luck had kept up. And by the same token it was inevitable that he would win soon. Then Craig found himself staring at a calendar.

There was no mistake. A note for fifty-four hundred dollars he had given Wingfield was due that day. Craig laughed uneasily. Fifty-four hundred! There was no way to meet it, and with the note unpaid, there could be no more play, no chance to beat his way back. Fortune might be waiting the very next venture. He could not make the venture.

CRAIG was late in reaching the Rossiters' that night—the last arrival, in fact. He was presented to the distinguished Brazilian visitor, then contrived as soon as he gracefully could to single out Cynthia Cope. She had been talking to Wingfield, who after greeting Craig, conveniently turned to engage Dorothy Rossiter in conversation. That was an irritating thing about Wingfield—he was so confoundedly confident! Not another of Cynthia's admirers would have given ground for an instant. Cynthia, with her honey-colored hair arranged in fascinating simplicity, and wearing a dinner-dress of dull blue velvet, was wonderful. Craig told her so.

Cynthia was serious as she looked at him. "You're not feeling well," she suggested, and there was the shadow of anxiety in her eyes.

"It's nothing," Craig protested; then, smiling faintly: "Nothing of any account."

"You'd say that if you were dying," the girl scolded. Then Charley Morton's wife joined them. There was time for only a few words before dinner was announced. Craig was seated between Cynthia and Elsa Morton. Across the table, Dick Prince and Wingfield flanked Dorothy Rossiter. Charley Morton, Evelyn Prince, the Brazilian and Franklin Rossiter himself completed the company. What happened afterward made the dinner itself quite inconsequential.

It was understood that Rossiter's remarkable Blue Lightning would be discussed and shown. But Señor Fezzoa, for whom the evening had been arranged, was amusingly fidgety in his anticipation. He was fairly bursting with impatience to see the celebrated stone, but in some miraculous way kept from mentioning it. The guests had finished their coffee and after-dinner cigarettes in the south room when Wingfield, who had been enjoying the Brazilian's uneasiness, came to his rescue.

"I understand," he observed to Elsa Morton in a voice so modulated that it could hardly have been suspected it was intended for all, "that Mr. Rossiter is to show Blue Lightning to Señor Fezzoa."

"Really!" she exclaimed, not that it was

news, but because she said "Really!" with a charming inflection. The Brazilian, at the mention of the diamond, abruptly broke off the desultory conversation he had been carrying on with Mrs. Prince. He glanced over at Mrs. Morton and Wingfield, then turned toward Franklin Rossiter, beaming in expectation.

"Are you really going to let us look at Blue Lightning?" Elsa displayed a becoming eagerness.

FRANKLIN ROSSITER'S aristocratic face, like old ivory under his silver hair, lighted up. He smiled his appreciation of the interest in the diamond, as he replied in that gentle, soft-spoken way of his: "I thought our friend from the other America might like to see it."

Beyond speech, the Brazilian gurgled with pleasure. He was supremely delighted.

"So I thought!" Wingfield remarked quietly. Then Craig, at Wingfield's left, gave a nervous start as the other addressed him. "The stone is supposed to be worth two hundred thousand dollars," observed Wingfield, looking at him steadily. That was the instant in which Craig saw the man as the devil of temptation. It plunged him into confusion that the other could not but notice.

"You're looking ragged, Craig," said Wingfield concernedly. "Don't let that note of mine worry you." It was a slap in the face. Craig stiffened, and the color left his cheeks.

Meanwhile Franklin Rossiter had produced a little chamois bag and drawn out the diamond to exhibit it. The stone was laid on top of a teakwood smoking-table close to a long lattice window that overlooked the lawn. No wonder it had been named Blue Lightning! Lying there, it might have been a crystallized spark from some vivid flash, a whole heaven-tearing burst of electricity in a concentrated explosion of light. The guests, nine in number, were gathered around the taboret, breathless before this dazzling mote of meteor-dust.

"Two hundred thousand!" reflected Craig. "There—only an arm's-length away!" And instantly he was appalled at the monstrosity of the thought.

The others were talking—talking about Blue Lightning in awed whispers.

"Two hundred thousand!" Craig repeated under his breath. Then he could have screamed in his horror and rage. What was he thinking of! This was Wingfield's work, damn him! Wingfield, with his fiendish suggestion! Well, he wouldn't touch it. What about Cynthia? He'd lost her, anyway, lost her with the bright-colored cards that were never good enough to beat the other hands. But this—he'd be a fool to try! There wasn't a chance. In God's name, what was he, Jerome Craig, arguing the thing this way for? He wouldn't touch it! Why was he even considering—

"I've been offered two hundred thousand for it," Franklin Rossiter was explaining.

Craig wanted to stop his ears. Again that insane desire to scream swept over him. If something didn't happen—

There came the roar of a revolver shot from the room across the hall. A tray of dishes and silver crashed to the floor. The house rang with a riot of noise.

"What's that?" old Rossiter cried shrilly.

One of the servants, white-faced with terror, appeared in the doorway. "Sir—sir," he gasped, "some one pushed a pistol in through the dining-room window and—"

There was an inarticulate cry from the Brazilian. As the others turned toward him, he shouted hoarsely: "The diamond's gone!"

CRAIG'S knees were knocking together. Had they seen him take it? Was it a diamond or a burning coal he had slipped into his pocket? Couldn't they see it there? What was cloth to conceal the thing? Craig wondered if he had really put it into his pocket. An exploring forefinger was stealthily inserted and withdrawn. Yes, it was there. Craig could feel the sweat starting out on his face. He was suffocating, tugged at his collar, coughed nervously to clear his throat, but the chokiness was still there. Why didn't some one speak?

Wingfield was the first to recover. "I can't believe it," he stammered.

"It's gone!" muttered the Brazilian dazedly.

Old Rossiter moaned as his daughter helped him into his chair. "This is terrible," she sobbed; and Cynthia Cope, standing beside her friend, put an arm around the other's shoulder.

"Let's have the police in!" blurted Dick Prince, and would have started to telephone the alarm if Wingfield hadn't held

him back. "Not in a case of this kind," he objected. "They'd bungle the thing."

"We can't lose any time!" put in Charley Morton, to whose side Elsa had fled. "The important thing is to start while the trail is fresh."

Craig glanced around at them all: the frightened women, the excited men. He felt a certain sense of superiority. How futile they all were—all except Cynthia Cope in her little part, and she was splendid! Then there was Wingfield, of course. But the others! There he was, standing right among them, with the diamond in the pocket of his waistcoat; and they—

"It was an outside job," asserted Prince. "The shot—"

"Of course the servants couldn't have planned it." Wingfield's sarcasm was mild but silencing.

Craig had noticed something. "I agree with Prince," he broke in. "That window wasn't open before." What a coincidence! With a two-hundred-thousand-dollar diamond in his pocket, Craig could point to an opened window and let the others infer that a hand had reached through it and snatched the gem while the revolver-shot drew their attention to the other room. A question thudded into Craig's mind. What *was* the explanation of the shot?

THE servant reappeared in the doorway, this time with a burly man beside him. The servant's glance, searching for the master of the house, was baffled at the sight of him huddled in the chair. Wingfield stepped up.

"This—this man, sir, is a detective," was the flustered explanation. "He says—"

"I'm from headquarters, sir," interrupted the heavy-set man, apparently unwilling to trust the servant's statement of the case. "Just a minute ago I was chasing a pickpocket along the avenue. It looked as if he turned into the shadows by the house." For some reason Craig was not impressed with the sense of additional danger from the policeman.

"Any of us answer the description of your pickpocket?" asked Wingfield easily.

The other was discomfitted for a moment. Then he reminded Wingfield in an injured tone. "I came in line of duty, sir. This fellow"—he jerked a thumb at the distressed-looking serving-man— "started to say something, and then he remembered he'd better 'ask the master' before he talked."

Wingfield's attitude changed. "The truth is, Officer," he admitted, "there was—" Wingfield broke off, then suggested tentatively: "We had hoped to avoid publicity—"

"I understand," nodded the detective, already mollified. "I think that can be arranged."

"Thank you," said Wingfield; then he told of the incident of the shot, without, however, a word about the diamond or its disappearance.

"So he pushed the gun through the windowpane?" demanded the detective as he turned on the forlorn servant.

"Yes, si—yes," the other corrected himself, snatching the respectful "sir" from the enunciation.

"And you saw him do it?" continued the officer.

The serving-man sought safety in a nod.

"You were expecting it?" The detective's tone was scathing, almost a sneer.

The servant reddened. "I was clearing the table," he replied rather sharply.

"And as you worked," bullied the plain-clothes man, "you kept watching for a man to push a revolver through the glass and pull the trigger?"

"Er—no—" stammered the heckled man.

"Then, if you weren't looking, how did you see it?" the detective asked triumphantly.

No answer.

"You didn't see it, did you?" demanded the policeman.

"The minute I heard the shot—" began the servant desperately.

"But you said he pushed the gun in first, then fired," the other corrected him. "In that case, the breaking glass—and now you're talking about hearing the shot!" The detective turned disgustedly from the servant to address Wingfield.

"It's easy to see, sir, he doesn't know what happened," was his comment. "And maybe I can explain it. When the man I was after swung in toward the house here, I fired at him—fired high, you know, and maybe—"

CRAIG exulted inwardly. He had been right about his luck changing! It was just sheer chance that the detective's wild shot had sent a bullet into the Rossiter dining-room—given Craig his opportunity.

Wingfield was smiling at the policeman's clumsy confession. "Then if your

bullet was to blame," he began, "we can probably rely on it being kept out of print."

"And off the blotter," the man assured him. "Good night, sir."

"Oh—ah—" said Wingfield, his hand in his pocket.

"No, thank you, sir," began the detective; but Wingfield pressed a bill into his palm.

Prince was gesticulating frantically, but Wingfield dismissed the detective with a nod. "You should have told him!" declared Prince as the door closed behind the departing policeman.

The servant was hovering in the doorway, waiting for a chance to speak.

"On the contrary," Wingfield replied to Prince, "there couldn't have been a better demonstration of the wisdom of not calling the police. There isn't a shadow of a doubt that Rossiter's man is right."

"I'll swear the shot was fired right in the other room," declared Morton—at which the servant, vindicated without appeal, withdrew.

Wingfield, nodding assent to what Morton had said, continued: "Besides, being somewhat better informed than the detective" (there was a tinge of scorn), "we happen to know the shot didn't have anything to do with his poor marksmanship but was part of a well-worked-out plan to get the Blue Lightning."

Craig, for one, didn't know anything of the kind. He knew that the policeman *was* right, and that Wingfield, in scoffing at him, was wrong. It was simply a coincidence, a miraculous coincidence—such a coincidence as could be expected when luck as bad as Craig's had been swung the other way. Of course, he'd gone in pretty deep—but Lord, how things were turning out!

"Wingfield's right," asserted Morton. "Of course that wasn't any stray shot."

"Certainly not," agreed Craig. This fiction of an outside job was his salvation.

Prince was not convinced. "The man he fired at stole the stone," he argued stubbornly.

"That's impossible," broke in Cynthia, who had quieted her friend. "If it hadn't been for the distraction of the shot, the thief wouldn't have had his chance."

"You are right, Miss Cope," echoed the Brazilian, only now sufficiently recovered for speech. And as Wingfield and Craig added their assent, Morton suggested: "We'd be a bigger help by clearing out than in cluttering up the house."

Craig was walking on air. A few minutes more, and the crisis would be passed. The Blue Lightning, resting in the right-hand pocket of his waistcoat, would be his.

"I think you're right," Wingfield sanctioned Morton's proposal. "But before we go, there must be a search."

SEARCH! Craig started violently. He must have betrayed himself but for the centering of attention on Franklin Rossiter, to whom Wingfield had turned in making the suggestion. The victim of the theft lifted a trembling hand in protest against such a proceeding as the searching of his guests.

"Let there be a search!" urged Señor Fezzoa. "It is our privilege."

"I'll not listen to such a thing," declared old Rossiter.

Was it possible, Craig wondered, that they couldn't tell just by looking at him that he was the thief? His nerves were jumping, the flesh on his face twitching.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Rossiter," apologized Wingfield, "but whether you wish it or not, it is best for everyone concerned that there be a search." He stepped toward Fezzoa. "Perhaps you will search me?"

The Brazilian hesitated.

"Do," urged Wingfield.

Señor Fezzoa in considerable embarrassment began the examination of Wingfield's pockets. It was brief and unproductive, ending with the Brazilian's anxious: "And if you will return the favor, sir."

Craig was suffocating. He pretended to watch Wingfield's search of the South American. A few minutes, and it would be over. He could make no explanation: there was no explanation to be made. He was doomed.

It was Prince's turn. He impatiently shifted his weight from one foot to the other as Wingfield went through his pockets. Now Wingfield was finished with Prince. Craig saw it was Morton or himself.

Escape! Craig would have dashed blindly through any way that was open, the window. But here was Wingfield stepping up to him, smiling. His approach was paralyzing. Things seemed to fog up in front of Craig. This was the ordeal. Wingfield's searching fingers were in the breast pocket of his dress coat. The waist-

coat would be next. Now they were in the left-hand pocket. The next move—

Wingfield carried the search to the right-hand waistcoat pocket, the pocket that held the Blue Lightning. Craig's lips quivered with a cry—a cry that was never uttered. Wingfield was looking him straight in the eyes, and in that cold gray glance there was something stronger than the forces that fought in Craig. The instant their eyes met, Craig stifled his hysteria.

Wingfield left no doubt that he had found the stone, for Craig felt a significant pressure against his flesh. But so swiftly did all this happen that it was without any perceptible pause that Wingfield passed on to Craig's other pockets and then to the examination of Morton.

Craig could scarcely believe that he had been spared. Of course, he was in as deep as ever, but the delay gave him a chance to hope that some way, somehow, things could be straightened out. Wingfield? The thing was incomprehensible. What was his reason?

Craig's reflections ended with the words that Wingfield addressed to him. "Cynthia Cope came over alone early in the afternoon," he explained. "I had intended asking if I might see her home, but under the circumstances—"

There was no need of saying anything further. Craig understood.

"And later?" prompted Wingfield.

"I'll be at your apartment," Craig assured him in a dry-throated whisper.

CRAIG parted from Cynthia as if it were a casual leave-taking. By ten o'clock he was at Wingfield's apartment on Central Park West. The Japanese who opened the door withdrew silently after ushering Craig to the room where Wingfield, in slippers and smoking jacket, was meditating over a fragrant panetella. The older man neither spoke nor rose, the only thing in the nature of a greeting being a gesture for Craig to seat himself. Wingfield was in an armchair drawn up under the table-lamp. Craig dropped down on the divan facing him. The silence continued, Wingfield studying the long white ash on his cigar. It was Craig who spoke first.

"Why didn't you take the thing out of my pocket?" he asked nervously.

"You wanted it, or you would not have sto—taken it," Wingfield corrected himself, watching Craig steadily.

"What do you intend to do?"

Wingfield looked at him with lifted eyebrows. "Wouldn't your plans be more interesting?" he inquired.

"Aren't you going to take me over to Rossiter?" Craig demanded in surprise.

"Let's see—" mused Wingfield. "He said the Blue Lightning was worth two hundred thousand. . . . . "

Craig gave an explosive gasp. "You don't mean, Wingfield—" He was leaning toward the other. "You don't —er—I happen to have heard you're in a bad way financially—

Wingfield turned on Craig a glance of smoldering anger that silenced him. "I have no intention of demanding a share," he said crisply. "What I was about to say is that I can't see how I could sacrifice a man, any man, even for two hundred thousand dollars."

Craig was puzzled. "What do you mean by that?" he asked in a hushed voice.

"I mean that if the truth comes out, it's an end to you, Craig," said Wingfield slowly.

Craig gulped and nodded. "Then—then you're not going to turn me over?" he stammered.

Wingfield shook his head.

Craig sat there staring dazedly at the other. Suddenly he sprang to his feet. "What's the matter with me, Wingfield?" he cried, pressing his hands to his head. "I don't know what ever made me do a thing like this. And why, *why* am I here planning to hide it? Wingfield, I've got to take the diamond back!"

THE older man scowled at the ash on his cigar.

"You come with me," Craig rushed on. "We'll explain—"

"What *can* you explain?" asked Wingfield quickly. "Besides, after I passed over the diamond in your pocket, you put me in a questionable position."

"You can come with me," Craig continued heedlessly. "You can explain that—how you wanted to keep it as quiet as possible. Rossiter, you and I—"

Wingfield was shaking his head.

"You wont even have to come," burst out Craig, getting unsteadily to his feet. "*I* can go. I can tell them you missed it in my pocket—"

"Can you tell them how it got into your pocket?" asked Wingfield, his eyes narrowing.

"What does it matter?" stormed Craig. Wingfield shrugged his shoulders as Craig protested: "I hardly know how it got there myself. It wasn't me—I hadn't any idea of such a thing—"

"Don't you suppose," observed Wingfield, "that Rossiter can find how deeply in debt you are?"

Craig recoiled at the words; then he cried frantically: "That hadn't anything to do with it! I didn't intend to take that—that—"

"But you did take it," said Wingfield. "Keep your head, Craig. There's only one chance for you."

Craig stopped and stood dizzily in front of Wingfield's chair. He burned with fever. Wingfield repeated slowly: "Just one chance!"

Craig had to clear his throat before he could speak. "What's that?" he asked thickly.

"It's the possibility that Rossiter's detectives wont clear up the disappearance of the Blue Lightning," was the answer.

"But there'll be nothing to clear up," said Craig. "I'm going to take it back. I *am!*" He started for the door. Wingfield was out of his chair and holding Craig's arm. "Don't be a fool!" he exploded.

Unable to resist, Craig felt himself being forced backward and down on the divan. Wingfield slid his chair up and swung into it, close to Craig.

"Now, listen to me," he said, as if those thin lips of his were knife-edges cutting off his words. "You've made a mess of things. But turning around now wont help. Bad as it is, you've got to go through with it and hope for your chance—one chance in a thousand."

"I'm going to take it back," muttered Craig.

"And mark yourself as a thief?"

"I *am* a thief."

AS Wingfield's hand descended on his shoulder, Craig looked up into the man's steady gray eyes. Wingfield was speaking softly: "I believe you, Craig, when you say you don't know what made you do it. And down in your heart, you know you're not a thief. You've got your life ahead of you—"

Craig laughed bitterly.

"Many a man's left worse things than this behind him," Wingfield went on. "You've got to fight it—fight hard. Perhaps, after a time, when it wouldn't be significant in connection with the Blue Lightning incident, you might go away—off somewhere for a fresh start."

A suspicion flamed up in Craig's mind. With a quick blow he knocked Wingfield's hand from his shoulder. "That's your game!" he panted. "You want to get me out of the way so things will be clear for you so far as Cynthia Cope is concerned!"

Wingfield was silent, smiling.

"You do!" Craig cried in accusation. Then he saw there was pity in the other's smile.

"I think," said Wingfield quietly, "that your plan would settle that even more quickly. Go to Rossiter. Give him the diamond, tell him you stole it. See what Cynthia says." Wingfield rose; and Craig, sensing the end of the conversation, also got to his feet.

"Of course," remarked Wingfield, "it's up to you to decide. My advice is given for what it's worth. All I wanted you to know is that if you care to go through with it, you can rely on my not telling what I know."

Wingfield did not advance his hand, and Craig was glad he didn't. Somehow it made what he said seem all the more sincere. Craig turned on his heel and without a word lurched to the door.

SUCH was the story of that night five years before. And the story of the years that intervened holds as much of excitement, romance, good luck and ill: but it is not the story of the Blue Lightning.

Before the dawn, Craig had decided that Wingfield was right, that to return the stone would be folly—folly and the way of weakness as well. The way of strength lay in facing the struggle to live down the crime. And another phase of it was that to surrender himself to Rossiter would be forever to be prevented from paying the debt he owed, one hundred and twenty thousand dollars, almost as much again as the Blue Lightning was worth. That very night he decided he must first meet those obligations, then give the Blue Lightning to Franklin Rossiter and himself to the law and the consequences. And from the time he made his decision, Craig never deviated from his purpose.

What Craig did in those five years is what many another man has accomplished, some in a longer, others in even a shorter time. He started with nothing and won

a place for himself. From the old Commodore who two generations before had founded the Craig fortune, Jerome Craig came by more than a depleted inheritance. In his blood was a genius for business that needed only a chance to prove itself.

When Craig began to win success, it galled him to think that but for the insane act of that night at the Rossiters he could have claimed it in his own name instead of the hated "Robert Blaine" he had adopted when he went West a rather injudiciously short time after the Blue Lightning episode. For the first two years he had lost himself in a corner of the country where he was completely out of touch with what was happening back in New York. Of course, in his assumed identity, there could be no correspondence. And the occasional papers he saw in his first place of exile told him nothing of those he knew.

In the last three years, however, he had kept rather vaguely informed by regular purchases of five-day-old Sunday editions of the *Times* and now and then buying week-day papers of the metropolis from the news-venders' stands. His first reward was in finding in an illustrated section a picture of Elsa and Charley Morton with their two children. Next it was an account of Dick Prince's polo-playing. In the fifth year he had found Cynthia's picture.

Cynthia was shown as maid of honor at Dorothy Rossiter's wedding. As Craig studied the brown tones of the print, the wonderful color came into her hair, her lips seemed to move. He closed his eyes and heard her whisper: "Jerry!" And she was still "Miss Cynthia Cope." Wingfield hadn't—Craig never found any mention of Wingfield.

THE picture of Cynthia upset him as nothing else could have done. In an irresponsible moment one night he let himself into his office and with Cynthia's picture propped up in front of him, wrote to her, wrote not a word about himself, but about her. Without signing it he folded the letter into an envelope and addressed it to her at the old house in Sixty-first Street. But when he lifted the mail-slot lid, Craig changed his mind. He had no right to send Cynthia any word, no more right at this time than when they said their casual good-by that night after the disappearance of the diamond at the Rossiters. The letter was stuffed into his pocket. Next morning Craig was called from bed by an urgent summons to the office. It was three hours later when he remembered the letter in the pocket of the suit he had worn the night before. He had meant to tear it up.

The China boy answered his telephone-call.

"Sing," said Craig, "there's a letter in—"

"Yes, Mliste' Claig," lisped the China boy, greatly pleased with himself, "I find letteh, put him in post-box."

So the note went to Cynthia.

It was about this time that Craig got to the point where he could begin paying off his debts. There were three large accounts besides Wingfield's, and a half-dozen smaller ones. In each case he arranged it by inclosing a post-office money-order under a fictitious name, with an anonymous request that the remittance be applied to the account of Jerome Craig. One of these he mailed from as far east as Buffalo. Another, to the club at which he had lived, went from Atlanta: and yet another time he made an excursion to Salt Lake City to forward the money. There was never anything to identify "Robert Blaine" as the missing Jerome Craig.

Through it all, Craig was never able to explain why he had ever taken the Blue Lightning. Looking at it sanely, the problem of disposing of it would have been beyond him. Craig realized that most of the criminals who are caught betray themselves by a slip after they have seemingly gotten away clean. Getting rid of a two-hundred-thousand-dollar diamond, turning it into funds, would have been an impossibility for him—of that Craig was sure. That he had never been traced was due, Craig believed, to the fact that instead of trying to dispose of the stone, he had held onto it. He had the Blue Lightning with him now, five years later, in the pocket of the clothes that the porter began to brush as the train was rolling through the outskirts of the city toward Grand Central. And now the brakes were bringing the express to a stop.

AT Columbus Circle, Craig dismissed the cab he had hailed in Forty-second Street. He was close now to the great crisis. First there must come the settlement with Wingfield, and after that he had to face Rossiter with his confession. He wanted a clear head, and the walk in

the cool of the evening would be bracing. Wingfield's was not far.

Craig felt safe from recognition. His glass told him how little he looked like the Jerome Craig New York had known—and forgotten. Craig did not regret the lines and the gray hairs, for they stood for something. In spite of his errand, he tingled with the magic of the city, his city. The park with the lighted buildings around it was wonderful: a valley of soft shadow under cliffs of light. Wingfield had a pleasant place, the corner window looking out to where the Plaza shone in the distance like a crystal cascade. It was rather early in the season, and Craig, as he reached the apartment-house, wondered if Wingfield was in town. Which was Wingfield's floor? It was on a south corner. Craig consulted the index and received a surprise: Wingfield's name was not on it.

The hall-boy, a young negro, confirmed the fact that no such person was living there.

"Do you know where he moved to?" Craig inquired.

"No sir," was the reply. "Are you sure this is the place?"

Craig was sure, and the hall-boy then asked how long ago "the party" had lived there. When Craig said it must have been four or five years, the boy explained that he had been working there less than a year.

They would know at the club, reasoned Craig, and asked for the telephone. The result was startling.

"Wingfield? Wingfield?" repeated the man at the other end of the wire, then snapped curtly, "He dropped some time ago!" and slammed the receiver on the hook. Obviously more time would be needed to trace his man, but Craig wanted to get things over with. He decided to reverse his plan and go to the Rossiters' at once. There again he was disappointed. The house was boarded up.

As the baffled Craig stood staring up at it, a gray-uniformed watchman eyed him from the shadows, taking pains to let the other know he was under observation.

"I'm not planning to break in," laughed Craig, stepping over toward the man.

"I seen that, sir," he was assured by the gray-clad one, who evidently approved his appearance of respectability. "But there's been no end of hold-ups and robberies lately, and we aint taking no chances."

Craig, with a kind of grim humor, wondered what the watchman would have done if he suddenly found out he was talking to the man who stole Franklin Rossiter's Blue Lightning from the very house he was guarding, that the diamond itself was at that instant within arm's-length, in a pocket of his clothing. Craig inquired where the Rossiters were, and learned that they had not returned to town from their place at Pride's Corners. That meant more delay—and no help for it.

Craig said good night to the watchman and started back along the avenue. At the corner of Sixty-first Street he stopped. The house on the other side of the street, just beyond the light of the street lamp, was where Cynthia Cope lived. As he looked, a closed automobile passed him and swung into Sixty-first Street. It drew up to the curb almost in front of the Cope place. Calling for some one who had taken dinner with the Copes, reflected Craig. Undoubtedly Cynthia would come to the door when they left, and if he— Craig impulsively crossed the street and turned off the avenue.

His heart pounding furiously, Craig approached the house. There were no lights in the front. He passed under the illumination of the street-lamp and into the darkness beyond. Past the steps he went—the steps he had so often climbed with Cynthia. . . . . Suddenly there was a burst of light like the blowing out of a giant fuse. Craig felt his knees giving way and fought to keep from falling. His head seemed enormous and ached until it seemed it would fly apart. He was dimly conscious of being pulled from his feet, of hands poking him here and there—then there was the sensation of being lifted, of floating in the air, of falling—and blackness.

WHY wouldn't his eyes open? Craig couldn't understand what was wrong. The lids seemed so heavy. They were opening now. Who was that—not—not—It *was* Cynthia.

"Cynthia!" he whispered, so low it sounded like a sigh.

"He's coming around," said a deep voice; then Craig saw there was a policeman standing beside her. They'd got him at last. After five years, they'd got him—here—at Cynthia's. Craig closed his eyes as the burly man bent over him.

"He'll be all right, lady," said the po-

liceman, straightening up. "You were saying you didn't know him?"

"No," said Cynthia. Craig was content to lie there with his eyes closed, just listening to her voice. There was nothing surprising in her not knowing him. Those five years had written their record relentlessly. As the man had changed, so his appearance.

"We found him in the areaway," Cynthia was explaining. "He was unconscious, and there was blood on his face."

"You said, ma'am, that you found him when you came home?"

"As I got out of the automobile, I saw someone lying inside the rail. Jules, my chauffeur, saw it at the same time. We carried him into the house; then Jules went out and got you."

Craig, his eyes half-open now, could see the policeman scowling. "It's one of them automobile gangs," he declared. "Pull up to the curb, wait for a likely-looking one, slug him as he passes, then make a quick get-away in the car. They pitched this fellow into the area after—"

Cold fear froze Craig. The vague notion about arrest for the theft had passed, and he had heard enough to know that he had been the victim of thugs. And their booty? The funds with which he was to pay Wingfield were in non-negotiable form; he had perhaps one hundred and fifty dollars in cash: and he had—the Blue Lightning. If that was gone—!

Craig started to lift his hand to the pocket in which he had placed it. But he checked the move abruptly. That wouldn't do, either, if the policeman were to find out. The officer was, however, even eliminating himself with the remark: "I'll step outside, lady, and look over the ground."

As Cynthia turned to follow the policeman toward the door, Craig's hand slipped into the pocket, fumbled fast, and faster—then was convulsively withdrawn. The Blue Lightning was gone!

CRAIG gave an almost inaudible sobbing cry. Beaten! The Blue Lightning gone—and with it everything! His five years of fighting was wasted; the bitter grinding drive had been for nothing. He had climbed back from the pit to find the mouth was sealed. All those later successes—useless, his frail hopes swept away!

Craig had gotten dizzily to his feet. Beaten, just at the moment he believed he had won! What a ghastly jest! How much more must he stuff into the maw of Fate before it would be satisfied! But he was forgetting; now not even that would suffice. Money, remorse: mere sops before the insatiable. The Blue Lightning, and that alone was the price—and the Blue Lightning was gone. Craig bowed his head. . . . .

A consciousness that some one was looking at him made Craig lift his eyes. In the doorway stood Cynthia, pale, startled. She was motionless for a moment, then took an uncertain step forward. *"Jerry!"* breathed the girl as she advanced.

Craig gripped himself. "Yes, Cynthia," he said quietly.

"Why, Jerry," she cried, "I didn't know you—you've changed so. What happened—where have you been?" Cynthia was smiling, radiantly happy.

Craig could not believe his senses. Where was the appalled surprise with which she should have looked at the man who stole the Blue Lightning? Where was the horror in her voice? To have her greet him this way was staggering. He lowered his eyes in confusion.

Cynthia's hand touched his sleeve. Craig shuddered and drew back. If in that instant he could only have taken her in his arms!

"Oh, Jerry," she cried happily. "It's so good to see you. It's been *such* a long time. . . . ."

"Don't!" he gulped desperately. "We can't forget—"

"That letter, Jerry," she exclaimed heedlessly. "I knew it was from you." Craig's stiffness, silence, stopped her. She drew back and looked at him, puzzled, anxious. Then her lips softened in a smile.

"Cynthia," he said in a shaky voice, "you're—you're not forgetting the night at the Rossiters'."

And Cynthia *laughed!*

Craig stood there stupefied.

"There was some talk, Jerry," she said. "It was awfully foolish of you to go off when you did, and the way you did. But I knew it couldn't be you, and—"

Craig didn't let her finish. "It was me," he broke in.

"Why—ah—" she stammered.

"I took the Blue Lightning," said Craig, and now that he started, the story came with a rush.

"But Jerry—" she tried to interrupt.

Craig did not pause. He swiftly carried

the narrative up to that night, his attempt to pay Wingfield, his effort to surrender the Blue Lightning to Franklin Rossiter, and then the attack of the thugs and the loss of the diamond out there on the sidewalk.

The moment he had finished, Cynthia asked excitedly: "Do you know why you didn't find Wingfield?"

Craig shook his head.

"Because," said the girl, "Wingfield is in Sing Sing."

"Sing Sing!" echoed Craig. It seemed as if the room lurched and started reeling round him.

"Serving a sentence for stealing the Blue Lightning," Cynthia continued.

A sickening weakness came over Craig. "Wingfield—went—to prison," he asked in a halting, horrified voice, "for—what—I—did?" He stood trembling, his breathing uneven, labored.

Cynthia was speaking. He did not hear her. She caught hold of his arm, but Craig, with a great, heart-breaking sob, wrenched himself free and rushed out into the night.

CRAIG was dazed by the double blow that had been dealt him. For five years he had fought his way back, at first with a thin, uncertain hope, latterly with a confidence that he was going to win. If Franklin Rossiter had been home, the Blue Lightning would even now be safe instead of being the booty of a band of thieves. How cruelly he had been tricked!

And then the second shock that had come so swiftly after the loss of the Blue Lightning—the discovery that Wingfield, an innocent man, was paying the penalty for what he, Jerome Craig, had done. What a blind believer in luck he had been to suppose that after crimsoning himself with the stain of crime, he could atone by settling it as if it were an honest debt—a mere matter of money. But Craig had no illusions now.

Restoration of the great diamond itself was the only thing, aside from the moral wrong involved, that could right the physical loss he had inflicted by the theft. That condition alone made the situation hopeless, but even the business of the Blue Lightning was dwarfed by his sin against Wingfield. What coin is there can pay for hours spent in a tomb of stone and steel for another man's crime? Craig owed his first duty to Wingfield.

There was no sign of surprise in Wingfield's face when he entered the visitor's room at the penitentiary and saw Craig. It made Craig even more uncomfortable. Why, he wondered, had this man kept silent at the cost of his own liberty? What could be the explanation of it? He who had stolen the stone went free, while Wingfield who had done nothing more than pass over the presence of the Blue Lightning in that pocket, paid the price. It was an awkward moment.

"I only just found out," said Craig quietly.

Wingfield smiled faintly. "I hope you'll forgive me," he said. There was something about the tone that puzzled Craig.

"In the shortest possible time," continued Craig in a low, steady voice, "we will change places. I don't know how it happened, but I'll tell you, Wingfield, it's a horrible sensation to learn that a man has been put in prison for something—"

For the first time, Craig saw Wingfield's emotions unmasked. His face was stamped with astonishment. It was just for a flash; then the old inscrutable expression returned.

But Craig's wonder at the brief revelation was less than the strength of the purpose that had brought him to the prison. "I can never make up to you," he went on, "the years you've already spent here for what I did."

"There's some mistake," broke in Wingfield.

"A fearful mistake—" Craig began, but the other interrupted again. "I mean," he said, "that you can't understand all the circumstances. To begin with, I'm here because I stole the Blue Lightning—"

"You!" gasped Craig.

Wingfield nodded.

"But I—" Craig was silenced as much by bewilderment as by the hand Wingfield lifted to check him. Wingfield was speaking.

"*I* took the Blue Lightning," he repeated. "Five years ago I was head over heels in debt. I knew of Rossiter's diamond, and—well, I planned to make a try for it. You remember that night?"

Craig nodded dazedly.

"I'll explain the thing as it happened," continued Wingfield. "I had an accomplice. My signal to him was the opening of the lattice window. That was easily done, because everyone's attention was on the diamond. At the signal, my man pushed his pistol through the window of the room across the hall—"

"And I took the Blue Lightning," interrupted Craig in a breathless undertone.

WINGFIELD smiled and shook his head. "To carry the thing through," he explained, "I had provided myself with a replica of the Blue Lightning, exact in measurements and with identical facets. Remember, I was expecting the shot, and had several seconds the best of—well, of you, Craig. I snatched the real stone and substituted my imitation before you reached out your hand."

Craig was stunned, groping in a maze of emotions.

"I saw you take the duplicate," Wingfield went on.

Craig found his tongue. "But your confederate," he faltered, "how did he get away when the detective was so close to the house?"

"He *was* the 'detective,'" explained Wingfield.

Craig gasped. Wingfield must have had nerves of ice to carry out such a thing.

"Don't you remember," Wingfield was saying, "that I passed him a bill as he was leaving? The Blue Lightning was wrapped up in that bank-note."

"Then I," faltered Craig, "I stole a—a piece of paste?"

Wingfield nodded. "I couldn't tell you so, or you would have known it was I who had taken Rossiter's diamond. What's more, although it rattled me for a moment, it turned out to be a stroke of luck. I expected, after our talk, that you would do just what you did—disappear. And I knew it increased the chances of my not being caught, for with every move you made, you were leaving a blind trail."

Craig moistened his lips. "How *did* they catch you?" he asked.

Bitterness came into Wingfield's eyes; they were gray as slate. "From the minute I got the stone," said Wingfield slowly, "I began to play in the most amazing luck. Everything I touched turned out right. The emergency I wanted the price of the Blue Lightning to help me through was met in another way. I realized that the greatest danger of discovery would be in trying to dispose of the diamond. So I kept it. I was a big winner in everything—except, I don't mind telling you now, with Cynthia Cope. There never was a chance for me. She loved you, Craig." Wingfield paused.

"I had almost forgotten the Blue Lightning," he resumed more rapidly, "when the break came. The man who worked with me the night at the Rossiters' wasn't satisfied with the share I had given him. He knew it hadn't come from the price of the Blue Lightning. He knew I had the diamond. And he tried to get it. The police caught the fellow as he was leaving my place. . . . . That's why I'm here."

Craig realized vaguely that the miracle had happened, that he had come into the light at last. There was only one question.

"How," he asked, "did you explain the disappearance of the imitation?"

"Wingfield smiled faintly. "I didn't," he said. "The game was over so far as I was concerned. I'd used you rather badly, Craig, and the least I could do was to leave you out of it. Only you and I know there ever was a duplicate of the diamond."

The keeper approached to remind Craig his time was up.

"AND he said," concluded Craig in repeating Wingfield's story to Cynthia Cope, "that only he and I know there ever was an imitation of the Blue Lightning."

"You've told me—" said Cynthia softly.

"Because I want you to know the whole story," Craig began swiftly, "I want—" He caught himself up short. He was on dangerous ground—forgetting. There could be no evasion.

"After all," he said resolutely, "the big thing isn't whether it was the Blue Lightning or a piece of glass. All this time I've thought it was a diamond worth a fortune. It's not a question of what I stole. The fact is that I am a thief."

What Cynthia said came as a surprise. It was spoken decisively, without hesitation or any hint of doubt.

"It took a lot to wake you up, Jerry Craig," she said impulsively, "and it was a strange way of starting. But taking the —whatever it was—did more than make a thief of you; it made a man of you. You were wrong in the beginning, but for five years you've fought to make good for it. You *have* made good, Jerry, and that's the big thing!"

Craig swallowed hard. "Do you think so, Cynthia?" he asked awkwardly.

Craig found his answer in Cynthia's eyes —eyes that were bright with hope and misty with memory. And as she settled in his arms like a tired child, Craig's cheeks were wet with his own tears.

The Masked One

A delightful story of the forest and its folk by the man who wrote "The Noseless One," "Done in Oregon" and many other stories you will recall with pleasure.

By CHARLES ALEXANDER

ALL around him within the dark, hollow tree-trunk were rustlings and scuttlings as he stretched and peered into the dim hole leading up through the heart of the tree. He joined again in the play of his brothers and sisters, the eternal play that went on all the warm afternoon—the game of passing a smooth-worn, gleaming mussel-shell back and forth among little black hands, around fat, soft, furry bodies, and in and out of all manner of hiding-places in the den. When some one of them had hidden a plaything extraordinarily well, when the one other who plunged for it could not find it, there was a general mêlée of bodies, as all piled up in an impatient digging, prying mess.

From one such monkey-pile Blackfoot, the masked one, erupted, holding the smooth shell aloft in triumph. His brothers and sisters were masked too, each with a band of black circling each eye and crossing each nose, like a pair of huge goggles. The masked one's goggles were a shade blacker, his body-fur richer, the silver showing in it with a more emphatic glint. He was larger than they. Holding the shell high, he kept it out of reach of the black hands that opened and closed and stretched to seize it. The other young 'coons swirled around him.

He let it fall, and waded out of them. Their play went on. The masked one paused with a paw on the tree-trunk, looking upward again. It was into that mysterious tunnel overhead that his mother disappeared each afternoon, and from it that she always reappeared, swaying backward down it, looking now down this side, now down that, her eyes glowing, to get reassuring glimpses of her little family. Down that tunnel she brought loads of frogs and of brown timber-pheasants. And while his fellows played their nursery games, Blackfoot looked aloft, tried his claws on the rotting wood and whined.

The first step was hardest. . . . . Halfway up the hollow tree, where the tunnel narrowed, he laid his ears down in fright and pell-mell scrambled upward.

He burst into daylight. It struck him like a blow. Yellow sunlight blinded him; he had a sense of falling. He had a sense of illimitable space, too, though he could not yet see and measure the endless world of the treetops about him. Very tightly he clung to his perch. This was his first vision of the great world.

And there, perhaps, he might have clung all afternoon, flat and tight where the hollow of the tree opened, sensing, feeling, wondering at a thousand sights and sounds and smells, eyes round, nose twitching, little ears pricked. His mother, toward evening, might have found him there, cuffed him and sent him scuttling back inside the comfortable tree. But his mother never came back from her frogging at all, and that afternoon was the last on which his brothers and sisters played with a shiny shell toy.

THE world was an eyeful. The masked one lay still, the sun's warmth striking into his ribs, his eyes adjusting themselves to the wonder of the shining world. For on Dead River the world is a thing of wonder.

Blackfoot's eyes at length could make out a bright gray gravel-bar flanking the Willamette at the mouth of Dead River. On the part of the millions of leaves of the balm-trees on that bar, there was a decided tendency to dance in the sunlight. They, and the timid young willows, had the bar all to themselves; and their territory ran, too, across all the heaped-up white rocks through which Dead River emptied, back to the five-acre drift of bleached criss-cross logs piled on top of the river. Behind that drift, along the dark, sluggish stream, there were no water-trees like balm and willow.

Quite a way back, where the river was as mysterious as it was dark and dead, the forest was in keeping with the river—silent and brooding. The sun never succeeded in reaching the brown moss-carpet that swarmed on the littered earth. There was a crowd of big firs with their heads together, like so many prophets worrying over the lax morals of the community. Sometimes they sighed. One old grandpa fir, fifteen feet in circumference, would start it. All his neighbors would sigh in sympathy. A sapling, about as thick as a man, which had fallen into the arms of the grandpa, would rub against him, a hundred feet up, croaking "Amen."

They cast sufficient gloom over things; but there were lighter-hearted trees—a pair of flippant young ash, on the river-brink, thickets of rowdy vine-maple, and thorny and ferocious Oregon grape. Also there were warm-hearted old maples. They wore heavy brown moss on their northern sides, in which licorice-ferns grew; and with all their might, they pushed back the gloomy firs in every direction and let a little light into their own midst.

It was out of a hole in one of these, where the veteran maple had lost a limb in some stormy encounter, that Blackfoot had popped; and there, on the stub of the limb, that he lay blinking. He heard a pine-squirrel scolding, but he did not look up. Nor did he see the pack-rat across the way, who took a long look at the young 'coon, then slipped within his monstrous nest and hurriedly counted over his treasure of carnelian agates and of collar buttons he had gathered from picnic-grounds. Blackfoot's eyes were all for an amazing figure perched on a long limb of his own maple.

This fellow, a fat silver squirrel, fixed Blackfoot with an unblinking stare, while his throat swelled with a low stream of chirruped oaths. His coat gleamed like armor. Abruptly he fell to his forefeet and ran. He and his plume-like tail rippled along the limb. At the point closest to Blackfoot, the squirrel hauled up and sent a venomous torrent of profanity toward the young 'coon.

BLACKFOOT did not misunderstand the squirrel's tone of voice. He lay staring back, and then and there registered a life-long hatred for silver squirrels, their kith and their kin through whatsoever generations they might descend. But he saw beyond the squirrel, saw a tall snag that one moment was only an innocent snag against the sky, and the next moment was something else.

He saw a pair of wings spread from the snag, a body leap out into the air. He did not know, except out of natural knowledge, that they were wings, or that the Blue Dart taking flight was a hawk. But he crouched flatter on his limb.

The rest of the forest knew the Blue Dart, and the silver squirrel perhaps knew him best of all. The squirrel knew of the Blue Dart's speed—knew, in effect, that the Blue Dart is three zips faster than a regulation zip of forked lightning, that

the Blue Dart passes through the air like nothing so much as something which resembles nothing at all. But the squirrel's back was to the snag. He jeered the masked one, and jerked about importantly, nearly bursting with anger.

Blackfoot crouched lower. He saw what appeared to be a hole in the air. The jeering stopped. Dodging in fright, Blackfoot fell. He let loose all holds, and fell like a piece of meat. A few silvery hairs floated down. Far over the tree-tops the Blue Dart sailed, his ice-hook talons sunk in a suggestive-looking burden.

QUITE unhurt and very wide awake, Blackfoot righted himself and took a few steps on the cool earth—the first earth he had touched. He did not see two sharp eyes examining him, through a pair of goggles like his own, only larger. He did see the grizzled old freebooter, though, as he came sagging backward down a tree. Here was one of his kind. Blackfoot wanted to go with him. He hurried forward.

But the old one thought differently. He had business of his own on hand, and he gave Blackfoot a straight look out of his gleaming little eyes. Abashed, the young one fell behind, contenting himself with examining the other's tracks. And he followed them. He suddenly wanted to be a regular fellow, to be like the other, to do the things out in the alluring world that this other 'coon did. Within his little heart was an heritage, he knew not what of; but the promise of romance and adventure and full, crowding life he did know,—an impulse as hazy as fog, as engulfing and as tidal. His home, the sunlit maple tree, he left behind.

The old 'coon was the best of guides. No deviltry was afoot that summer afternoon but he was into it, and usually at the bottom of it. First was the case of the Blue Dart. Blackfoot watched, amazed, while the old 'coon swung his way up the high snag, becoming a speck slowly crawling above the forest tops. He stopped, once, to ram an arm to the elbow into a flicker's hole, but he found neither eggs nor nestlings and continued. And when the Blue Dart appeared from nowhere, dropping screaming out of the sky, Blackfoot ran for hiding.

Not so the old 'coon. There was a neat crotch, with a platform of twigs wedged in it—the Blue Dart's nest. And with his back in the crotch and his teeth and claws disposed to good advantage, the old robber invited the Blue Dart to do more than plunge to within a foot of him and then wheel aside. The wind of the hawk's wings fanned the 'coon's fur. Once the hawk struck. A pair of his own feathers peacefully floated down.

Blackfoot was in a frenzy. This huge old fellow was his kind, a creature of his own breed, limb for limb an exact copy of himself. And the old fellow was defying the Blue Dart—more, had stormed the Blue Dart's very castle, was despoiling it, helping himself to the unsavory nestlings, with delightful nerve.

The masked one broke from cover and ran to the snag. He was ten feet up it, scrambling with all his claws when the old fellow came swaying down. His hind feet came into Blackfoot's face, and Blackfoot loosed holds, fell, gathered himself on his feet and scampered.

AS twilight crept over things, and the young 'coon found himself prowling the banks of Dead River, the full mystery of life (or so he then thought) seized on him. They had gone on a curious, circuitous route about the woods, the old 'coon loafing in a great circle, with side-trips to every hollow tree in eighty acres. To each hollow tree, too, Blackfoot went, crawling inside, nosing and crawling out—so that ever after, he never passed a hollow tree without investigating, and ever after, when storms or stray dogs threatened, he had half a dozen hollow trees handy to disappear into and sleep, while the world howled outside his walls.

The old fellow chased a blue heron out of the first bit of Dead River he came to, and helped himself to the abundant frogs. Down to the dark brink Blackfoot crept. There was a slight roil of the water, a roil running around and around the pool as though a tiny submarine cruised there. And a submarine creature did—a creature of oily fur and slender, steely body, and swifter than the fish he drove to shore by circling in the center of the pool. A series of bubbles rose in his wake to break with tinkles like afar-off bells—for when this creature dived, air clung in his hair and was brushed off as he doubled and twisted under water.

He bobbed up in front of Blackfoot—a long, strong neck, a flat, wicked little head with beady eyes. His murderous teeth

were clamped on a trout. Blackfoot traded a long, hard stare with him. The otter turned and slid across the river.

Next a wide V spread silently on the oily dead water. At its apex came a little whiskered face; it too stopped abruptly to stare at Blackfoot to float without a movement, staring, while the ripple wholly died out—finally to dive, with a *plop* of flat tail, and disappear.

There were lapping noises of gaunt creatures drinking, or flappings, as night-birds dipped toward the pool; and now and again a sobbing dirge, when a breath of wind wandered through the trees. And Blackfoot, studying a fat frog forgot himself and leaped. He clipped off the head. Well satisfied then, ambling along the shore, he discovered that the old 'coon had vanished—he and his trail had vanished into the river.

Blackfoot remembered the den and his mother. His back-trail was long and wandering. But he hurried along it, for it led to her. A new intention filled him. He would come back into the den, come down the chimney-like hollow tree as he had seen his mother come from the great outer world. And as she always brought food, so he would bring food—his morsel of frog, which he proudly carried in his gleaming teeth.

BLACKFOOT dropped his frog. A fire blazed, lighting up the group of maples. On a log before it sat two men, occasionally trading a flask of smoking white liquor and exchanging mutual breaths. Beside them gleamed guns. At their feet sat a dog.

At that instant, too, the dog ran halfway into the shadows. Silent, the men stared. Blackfoot saw it all. The dog ran to the side of the fire opposite the young 'coon, yelped once, and was away. Blackfoot had seen shining eyes, and they reminded him of the old 'coon's eyes.

The hair of his back was up, his tail raised. Men and dogs were strange to him. But he knew, in every angry bit of him, that his friend was in danger. The men had disappeared after their dog. Skirting the firelight, Blackfoot followed.

He came out on the river above them, heard the dog splash into the water, heard the men shouting. One of them ran down the bank.

"Come out of it," he shouted. "Shep, Shep! Hey, Shep, here!"

"Let 'im go," urged the other. "They'll cross."

"Yes, they will," snorted the first. "Here, Shep, that's a good dog! Now, you stay out of that river. Any time I let a dog of mine get in the water with a 'coon, I don't."

He snapped a chain on Shep; the party stumbled back to the fire, past it and on. Voices floated back: "We ought to 've brought lanterns. . . . . Done pretty well as it was, though."

And gazing with round eyes at the fire, until the last coal of it blinked out and gray light filtered into the forest, Blackfoot passed the place and came to the old maple. It lay prostrate, its branches bent and broken under its own weight, like broken legs and arms. Fresh ax-chips littered the stump. Blackfoot climbed up on it, dropped into the little hollow left within. In his black, hairless hands he fingered the shining, pearly shell. Clutching the shell tightly, he climbed out, swayed, dropped the shell and reached both paws to the rim. The eyes that glittered from his black mask were a trifle squinted now, and very cold. He disappeared under the firs, and after he had gone, they set up a low, subdued gossiping.

RAPID and thorough was Blackfoot's education. He began the day by turning aside at the chirruping of a silver squirrel—the sort of profane chirruping that had thrown a quivering fright into him the day before. The squirrel stood on his doorstep—a knothole—and made it his business to announce to the world that Blackfoot, a very great thief, criminal and murderer, was passing. Whereat Blackfoot clawed his way up the tree and waited outside the doorstep. Subsequently he pulled the squirrel's head.

His spirits rising, he spent a while frogging, soused his catches thoroughly in water before eating them (though why he did this, as all 'coons do, he did not bother to think upon), found a hollow tree near the river and slept the day away. In the late afternoon he wandered out to where the Willamette flowed wide and swift, and stared a moment at a great steel structure crossing the river two miles down. It was here that he ran into the heronry, attracted by the ceaseless noise of it—here that he proved his mettle to his friend the old 'coon.

Blackfoot saw him puddling in the

shallows of the bar. From time to time the old one carried out mussels. This was of great interest to Blackfoot; but when he saw his countryman covertly watching him, he went on to the heronry. Blackfoot felt his youth. He was clannish, but the old one would not clan with him. Blackfoot scratched his way up a tall fir bearing a huge heron-nest near its top, as though he had often climbed fir trees and pillaged heron's nests. The old one had shown him how to deal with the frightful Blue Dart; he would show the old one that the lesson had not passed unlearned.

The branches were littered with odds and ends of rubbish overflown from the nest. Through it Blackfoot made his way, knowing that the eyes of the old raccoon were on him. Reaching the nest, he hauled himself over its edge.

It was a platform of sticks. Two gawky young herons, with immense beaks and half-feathered, inadequate necks, raised a raucous uproar at the appearance of the little prowler. Blackfoot rushed them. One stabbed at him and fell off the nest—and he would die, for when a young heron falls off the nest, he goes to feed those skulking things which hang about heronries awaiting eventualities. The other heron Blackfoot had down, his teeth clamped in its neck, its big body flapping, when a parent heron sailed into view.

Its long spear of a beak was poised for action. It planted its stilts on the edge of the platform, drew a great wing before it like a gladiator's shield, and like lightning struck.

Its blow was a fearful thing. The long body bent forward; the longer neck uncoiled; the spear-beak flashed across the whole width of the platform. The beak aimed for the eye. True, the beak missed, because Blackfoot was so small, but it left a red streak across his head.

While the heron coiled his neck again, Blackfoot rushed, threw himself high toward the heron's breast. The 'coon was very young, very fresh from his mother's den. He slid off the heron's wing with a quill in his paws and nothing at all in his snarling teeth.

But he crowded the heron off the platform. The bird toppled, set sail, circled and drove back to the nest. This time Blackfoot, panting and hot, reared on the edge and kept the heron from landing. He met the great bird at every attempt, and kept his long legs from landing.

When the heron discovered this, after many trials, he took up a position on a distant snag, where he looked so much like the tree proper that Blackfoot could not recognize him. And before the little 'coon was well-launched on his journey down the tree, the heron was on him, sailing by and jabbing Blackfoot as he sailed. The raccoon's hold was none too good. He was obliged to tumble.

The long fall did not hurt him. He was built like a rubber ball. Every fiber of him was loose; not a joint of him was rigid. When he had got to his feet, he found what was left of the young heron.

The old raccoon had helped himself, and left his tracks in the mud. Blackfoot was discomfited. What he wanted of the heron he carried to the river and thoughtfully soused, like the true "wash-bear" he was; afterward he put in a busy night.

But he whined to himself occasionally, for he had made a bad appearance on the heron's nest. He got no relief from the two feelings that worried him. He hated dogs, and he ardently longed to be a 'coon, a proper 'coon among big, proper 'coons. He wanted to make good with the huge old freebooter.

THE summer saw him established with the old one. He learned his lessons, fought his fights with relish and credit, and found himself running with a gang of old males headed by the freebooter. Much of his knowledge came from within him, as though he had always known: to wash his food, to seize the throat, to roll an egg up the inside of a woodpecker's nest. There were certain tricks with water, certain ways of trails and 'coon-stations scattered in the woods, that came to him with the coming of the need, out of what knowledge he knew and cared not.

If he did not know to give credit for his wisdom to all raccoons that had lived and thrived before him, or died before rifles and under the fangs of dogs or great cats, he nevertheless gave indirect credit to his dead by his fierce loyalty to his living kind. From the day that he had seen the world and another 'coon in it, he had fought to stand by that 'coon's side. He was racial, aware of race with a strong awareness that flowed through and through him. He was only a raccoon, true, with a Foxy-Grandpa pair of spectacles on his nose, but every beat of his pulse was a beat of the pulse of a 'coon. As he saw

it, the world was his oyster, made especially for the delight of himself and other raccoons, and for the confusion, particularly, of stray dogs.

He was the youngest 'coon in the gang; he was, in truth, the only young 'coon they allowed to follow them. He followed, glad to bring up at their heels. They were testy old males, who denned alone and drew together for special exploits because of their special prowess. All were scarred. They were a tough, shrewd crew.

As fall drew on, their depredations verged on madness. Nightly they raided farmyards and hen-roosts—tore down corn that they no more than tasted, pried open pumpkins to sample the seeds. The nearest house, where lived two bachelors with bottles of white mule on their shelves, was their favorite rendezvous. Here too lived Shep, the only dog by that name who did not deserve it.

SHEP it was that Blackfoot, waking from an afternoon's nap, oftentimes saw running madly in the forest, nose down. Shep was a marauder, untrained to any duty, chasing all creatures he came upon and killing those he caught.

The 'coons stole from under Shep's nose, because the men kept him chained of nights to give warning of visitors other than customers. The 'coons dug out three yards of earth, one November night, while Shep howled at his leash, and got into the men's cellar.

What happened to the rest of the gang Blackfoot never knew. In the cellar were tubs and vats and a stenchy odor—this much Blackfoot had learned before he and his old leader slipped away. The others never came back. And it was the next night that the men and the dog invaded the woods again.

Shep was close before they heard him. The old 'coon was three trees away from Blackfoot, patiently cornering a mouse in its burrow. The young 'coon kept near his leader this night; only the two were left. Both started for Dead River.

The river was near. Shep was nearer. Blackfoot saw the old one climb a small fir. He rushed for the same fir, to be beside his leader, to fight his fights. Then came Shep.

Blackfoot saw it all. Shep yelped about the tree until the men came. They had a lantern, which they held up while they walked about and about, trying to "shine" the old 'coon's eyes. And one man finally climbed the tree, carrying the light; and high up spotted the blazing little eyes of the battle-scarred leader.

It was the end. With a long stick the man pushed the 'coon out; when he hit the ground, Shep was on him. He backed against the tree and fought, fiercely, coolly.

Shep withdrew, nursing a crushed paw. His master set down the light and found a pole, pushed the 'coon against the tree, held him down. Shep rushed. While the old one was wriggling from under the pole, Shep got in his work.

But the 'coon got to his feet. Shep grew respectful, waiting for the pole. And as the pole approached, the old 'coon called.

It was the rarest call of the 'coon, a call to his kind for help. Blackfoot did not hesitate. He answered it. He came out of the darkness above and landed in the midst of things, barking a general defiance at men and dog.

The old leader was going fast, unable now to get on his feet. Blackfoot did not wait for the pole to pin him down. He made a flying leap at Shep. Dodging, Shep upset the lantern.

They were off, threshing among the bushes. Blackfoot shook free enough times to reach the river. And this was near the old stump, now filled with fall leaves which hid the little shell Blackfoot's happy brothers had played games with. Shep plunged in after Blackfoot, swam swiftly toward him.

Blackfoot knew what to do. Never had he done it, but as he waited in the water, he knew—knew, further, that the trick was old and tried, knew that Shep was his.

As the dog came on him, swimming hard, Blackfoot whirled, climbed on Shep's head, clamped his four paws about that head and rode the dog down. Whirling, pawing, the marauder tried to free himself. He frantically tried to rise out of the water. He succeeded in sinking under it.

Moments passed. Came the sound of men on the bank. Silently Blackfoot swam to the opposite shore. He barked triumphantly before rustling away into the woods.

"Hear that?" cried the owner of Shep. "He's on the other side, an' Shep aint. Hey, Shep! Where's that damn' dog?"

His partner presented a consoling flask. "I got an idee," he said, "you'll find your dog floatin' around in the crick in the mornin'. He never would learn nothin', anyway."

The Ruby of Red Betrayal

The man who wrote "A Thunderin' Thriller" here contributes another even more thrillsome story of wildest Chinatown.

By LEMUEL L. DE BRA

"I REMEMBER it was on just such a night as this that I killed him—a cold, melancholy rain drumming on tin and gravel roofs, the wind howling its dismal dirge through these crooked Chinatown alleys. For as long as it takes to roll and smoke a cigarette I stood up there on Powell Street and looked down on the scene.

"It was long past midnight. Back of me lay San Francisco, its stone hills dripping, the low streets choked with flood water, the good people asleep. Below me, its yellow lights gleaming through the rain like a handful of tawdry jewels on black velvet, lay Chinatown, yawning like a sleepy tiger, rubbing the tag ends of drug-dreams from its eyes, awakening to another night of purple sin and yellow deviltry."

The speaker clipped off the last word with a sharp intake of breath. Overhead, some one passed hurriedly along the sidewalk—sharp heels rang boldly on the cement, followed by the stealthy shuffle of wet slippers. The two white men crouching beneath the walk were facing the basement of a burned building, one of the remaining scars of the earthquake and fire. Across this litter of bricks and twisted steel they could see two dim shadows flit swiftly as the men on the walk passed by the street-lamp. Then again it was dark and silent—only the rain drumming on tin and gravel roofs, the wind chanting its weird requiem through Chinatown's crooked alleys.

"And that night,"—the speaker lowered his voice,—"that night I killed old Fang, fought my way out of his den and escaped; but I left behind me the thing for which I had risked my life, the thing that has lured many an adventurous spirit to a swift and horrible death. I left behind me the Ruby of Red Betrayal."

The man from Toledo got out his cigarettes. A match was struck; trembling hands guarded it; eager faces bent over the tiny flame.

"I gotta lay low awhile, y'un'erstan'; but I'm strong for this ruby business. Put me hep!"

There was a moment's silence while each man seemed to study the other in the faint glow of his cigarette; then the first speaker went on, a queer rumble in his eager voice:

TO look at me, you'd take me for a Chinatown bum; but I'm not. I'm like a lot of others you see in this hell-spot—dicks in plain clothes, wise guys like yourself keeping under cover, Government men sniffing around after hop. I—for years I've been outside buyer for the biggest gem-dealer in New York. I go to strange, out-of-the-way places all over the world to find precious stones for my firm. I was in London on an assignment that had taken me clear across Asia and back when I first got on the trail of this ruby.

I had gone into the Gobi in search of an ancient Egyptian dagger, a queer thing that interested me because set in the handle of engraved gold was a huge, flaming black opal. I had arrived in the Gobi just after some one had stolen this dagger. The natives were in an uproar. I was accused of being in the conspiracy, and I had to shoot one of the temple priests who tried to choke me into confessing. I fled that night and made such good time that I got on the trail of the man who had the stolen dagger.

He was a young chap named Armante. When we reached London, I trailed him to Limehouse and struck up an acquaintance; and one night I mentioned the Egyptian knife. I found him willing to sell. We quickly concluded the deal and were having a round of drinks when four Chinese glided noiselessly into our booth. They hesitated for an instant as though to make sure of our identity; and in that instant I recognized them as priests from that Gobi temple—then they sprang at us.

I remember how swiftly Armante dashed his glass into the face of the nearest, and leaped upon the table. "Get out of here quick!" he shouted at me.

I hated to leave him, but I knew he was right. We were outnumbered, and in the enemy's territory. I shoved the knife into my pocket. I made a leap for the top of the partition, caught it, and drew myself up just as one of those long, crooked-bladed Malay knives went ringing through the wood beneath me. Had I been a second slower, I would have been pinned to the wall by the force of that blow.

Out of that booth and out of that den I fled, heeding not the spiteful crack of a pistol, the wild scream of a wounded Chinaman. I breathed a prayer for poor Armante, whom I never expected to see alive again, and shook the dust of Limehouse off my shoes.

Instead of going direct to the cheap rooming-house where I was staying while in my Chinatown disguise, I went uptown and filed a cablegram to my firm telling them that I had the ancient knife with the opal. Then I went to my room. I was still nervous from the thrilling experiences of the night. The hall was crowded with vague shadows hovering around a single flickering gaslight. I had not bothered to lock my door. Now I opened it, and stepped across the threshold. I put out a hand to grope for the gas-jet.

Out of the dark flashed another hand, a slim white hand that closed gently but firmly about my wrist. I caught the scent of some heady, Oriental perfume; silken lips brushed my ear like a caress.

"Pa lok!" the girl whispered in strangely accented Cantonese. "Stop! Close the door! I must tell you all—before they come!"

I closed the door. The girl, still holding me by the wrist, began leading me across the room. She paused by the window; and here, in the faint gleam of a street-lamp, I tried to see her face, but she stepped quickly to one side as though she divined my purpose.

"Oh, you coward!" she flung out at me with sudden bitterness. "You contemptible coward, to run away and leave my poor brother to face them alone!"

AMAZED, I stared at the girl without speaking; and presently she went on more calmly:

"I am Avis Armante. My brother Tom, from whom you bought the Egyptian knife, is at our rooms, dying. Those four priests were after the ruby. When they found Tom didn't have it, they supposed you did. They have been watching you ever since you arrived at Limehouse. They suppose, of course, that tonight you bought both the ruby and the Egyptian knife. They will be here any minute. They will stop at nothing to recover the Ruby of Red Betrayal."

"But I haven't it!"

"Certainly not! Neither has Tom. Listen, and let me tell you. Tom did not go into the Gobi just for that knife; he went to get this ruby. There he made the acquaintance of the chief priest, Cha Lee Fang. Fang, for a price, agreed to help Tom steal the ruby. He gave Tom the Egyptian knife, telling him to consider it an evidence of good faith; then he set a cunning trap and betrayed my brother.

"Cha Lee Fang stole the Ruby of Red Betrayal for himself; then he started the report that the white man had stolen both the ruby and the knife. Tom was warned, and he fled. While those four priests were chasing you and my brother from the Gobi to London, old Cha Lee Fang slipped quietly away with the gem. Yesterday Tom and I saw him in Limehouse and followed him. He is now on board a steamer that leaves at dawn for New York.

"Much as I wanted to be with my brother, he urged me to see you at once, to warn you of your danger, and to ask you to help me get the ruby from Cha Lee Fang. The gem does not belong to the priests. It has been stolen so many times in the past two thousand years that it now belongs to anyone who can get it and keep it. My brother's death, for which you are partly responsible, leaves me alone in the world and penniless. I want that ruby; and I want you to help me get it."

I did not know what to say. I had heard of the ruby, of course. It is the oldest, the largest, the most beautiful ruby the world has ever known. For hundreds of years this Ruby of Red Betrayal has been the most eagerly sought and the most closely guarded of all the treasures that lie buried in the sullen black heart of Asia.

To obtain possession of this priceless relic for my firm would be the greatest triumph ever scored by any collector. It was my duty to use every fair means, to spare neither labor nor expense, to get this ruby for them. And yet, my debt to the girl's brother, common chivalry to the girl herself, made me eager to help her. What should I do?

ABSORBED in this new problem, I was utterly unprepared for what happened as I stood there in the darkened room face to face with Avis Armante. I remember that in my abstraction I had turned slightly and was gazing out the open window. I recall noting a wisp of London fog drifting lazily by the street-lamp. Then I heard an angry hiss; and out of the dark, over the window-sill into my room, a ball of flame shot like a comet and fell between me and the girl.

It was midafternoon of the following day when I awoke. I was in an emergency hospital. I learned afterward that I had not responded to any means of treatment known to the hospital physicians; they had given me up and were surprised when I suddenly recovered consciousness.

My first inquiry, you may be sure, was regarding Avis. I remember how they looked at me with pity, how they urged me to sleep and forget. But how could I forget? I became violent. Finally they sent for the night-clerk of the lodging-house, and the two firemen who had rescued me.

The night-clerk had heard a commotion in my room. He ran upstairs to investigate, saw what he took to be a fire, and sent in an alarm. He swore that when he saw me I was alone, lying on the floor unconscious. The others confirmed this. No one had seen the girl. No one had seen any Chinese.

Then, slowly, remembrance came to me. I breathed again that nauseous, stinging vapor, saw again that weird and lurid glow that lit the room; and in that glow I saw the girl for the first time. Even in that moment of peril I had been struck by the exquisite beauty and purity of her face. And then, as the girl looked at me, I saw with dismay a slight obliqueness to her otherwise beautiful eyes, a peculiar diffuseness in the dark pupils. *I knew what that meant!*

All this I saw and understood in that instant that I looked at Avis Armante and saw her clasp her throat and collapse at my feet; and then I saw something else. I saw at the window, framed in the white vapor that writhed about the open sash, the face of one of the priests; and I realized then that now they knew the truth. While Avis was telling me about Cha Lee Fang stealing that ruby and being on board that steamer, one of the priests had crouched beneath my window and heard everything. Now they would go after Fang; but first, they were making sure that I would not follow. I remembered the grin of triumph that came to the

priest's lips; then, as I tried to draw my revolver, everything went black and I began falling—falling.

And now they were telling me that there had been no girl, no Chinese!

I could not believe that Avis had betrayed me or deserted me. I felt certain that I knew the truth. They had carried her away. They had taken the Egyptian knife, had left me for dead, and taken the girl.

WITHIN the hour I was closeted with Inspector Morton of New Scotland Yard. I told him as much as he needed to know. He lost not a moment sending his best men to comb every den in Limehouse, to watch every railway station and steamship wharf for the girl and the four Chinese priests.

That done, I hastened to call on my old buddy Lieutenant Woodward of the Royal Air Force; and by nightfall the lieutenant and I, in one of their fastest 'planes, were watching the lights of London drop away, were mounting high above the incoming fog, heading out over the Atlantic in the wake of the steamer that had left that morning with Cha Lee Fang and the Ruby of Red Betrayal.

We wirelessed the steamer, got her position, and just before dawn sighted the ship, a tiny dot of light far below on the black waste of waters. After some maneuvering, we made a safe landing. I watched Woodward take off again, then hastened to secure a stateroom, for I wanted my arrival on board to remain a secret from the other passengers.

Within ten minutes I was comfortably located in an outside stateroom, sipping the welcome hot coffee the steward had sent me, when a surprising thing happened. Some one shoved a folded bit of paper beneath my door.

I sprang up, jerked the door open. Quick as I was, there was no one in sight. It was uncanny. Mystified, I picked up the paper, unfolded it, and read:

"Thank heaven you have come! I am a prisoner in Stateroom Seven. Two of the Gobi priests are here guarding me. Just now they are stupid with opium. Come at once. —Avis."

Ah, with what joy I girded myself for that battle! I removed my shoes that I might go silently, my coat that I might strike swiftly. A moment later I forced the lock of Stateroom Seven, slipped in, and closed the door behind me. I turned on the light.

Avis was not there. The two priests were waiting for me. I had walked right into their trap.

I knew I faced death. I knew, as the two priests sprang upon me, that this was no time for squeamishness. Without the slightest compunction I brained one of the Chinese and choked the other to death, carried the bodies to the rail and flung them overboard.

Then I went back to search further for Avis. I found her concealed in the upper berth. She was bound hand and foot and wrapped in a deathlike opium stupor.

I freed her, bathed her face and wrists. Her eyes were just fluttering open when I heard a slight noise behind me, and swung around. There, standing with his back to the closed door, a sullen menace in his long, slant eyes, was the chief priest, Cha Lee Fang.

"*To tse,*" breathed Fang in silken Cantonese. "Many thanks. You fell into the trap neatly, have served my purpose well. Now while the maiden rests a moment, let us go to my room and discuss business."

"Business!" I echoed. "Do you mean that you want to sell that ruby?"

"Certainly!" grinned Fang, dropping into crisp English. "Do you suppose I swiped the confounded thing to throw at the birds?"

I patted the hand of Avis reassuringly, and followed Fang to his room. He set out a jar of *ng ka py* and glasses; then he showed me the ruby.

THAT Ruby of Red Betrayal surpassed my wildest imagination. I had heard it described so often that I had seen it many times in my dreams; but the sheerest flights of fancy could never picture the beauty, the grandeur of that marvelous blood-red gem. I tried hard to conceal my eager interest, but I'm afraid Fang read my heart and that I made a bad bargain. Anyway, I paid his price.

I remember Fang was wrapping the ruby in fine sheets of rice-paper when the door behind me was flung open. I looked around. Avis stood there, pale and frightened.

"The two other priests!" she panted. "They are on the boat! They have been watching you!"

"Don't be alarmed, my love," I told her. "Everything is all right now."

"But it is best to be careful," cautioned Fang as he handed me the package. *"Ho hang la!"*

That's a phrase from the Mandarin that means, "I hope you have a safe walk!" Usually there's no particular significance attached to it; but something in Fang's tone gave me a queer feeling of alarm. I stared at him a moment, but his face was a blank. "Good-by," I said, and accompanied Avis back to her stateroom.

There, to my surprise, the girl handed me the Egyptian knife that the priests had taken while I lay unconscious in my room. Evidently it had fallen from the pocket of one of the priests during the fight, for Avis had found it on the floor.

The sight of that knife brought back disturbing remembrance. With my firm's money I had purchased the Ruby of Red Betrayal for them. I had completely forgotten, for the moment, that Avis expected me to get the ruby for her. Now that I had it, and she knew that I had it, what could I do?

Then Avis stepped close to me, put her hands on my shoulders, looked into my eyes.

"You have done nobly," she said. "That you risked your life for me, expecting no reward, more than redeems you in my eyes. Now I ask one more favor. I do not want that ruby; I should be afraid to have it around. Keep it in remembrance of me.

"Then,"—and now she lowered her eyes, drew away from me,—"then you—you must never see me again, must try to forget. Let me be as a pleasant dream that leaves its impression but cannot be recalled. *Tsau kom lok.*"

With that, Avis Armante sprang across the threshold into her stateroom, closed the door and locked it.

Like a fool I stood there, the ancient Egyptian knife in one hand, the ruby in the other, staring at the stateroom door. In my happiest hour, victory had suddenly turned bitter in my mouth. I had the ruby; but I had lost something that to me had become infinitely more precious.

I went back to my stateroom, hid the knife and the ruby beneath my pillow, and lay down to think. After what I had gone through, it was no wonder that I fell asleep. I should have been more careful, of course; but for once I was off my guard. So I slept—and awoke to find one of the priests bending over me, the point of his long knife at my throat.

Then the other priest stepped forward, ran his long, clawlike hand beneath my pillow and drew out the package wrapped in rice-tissue. Both cried aloud with joy as they saw it. They began tearing off the wrapping. Then, in a flash, the three of us were staring—not at the Ruby of Red Betrayal, but at a very ordinary piece of coal!

I remember how those priests glared at me as I broke out laughing. "Cha Lee Fang did that!" I cried. "He sold me the ruby, switched the packages when I turned to speak to Avis. Cha Lee Fang still has the Ruby of Red Betrayal. Go to him if you want it. Or go to the devil, just as you please!" And with that, I turned over and went back to sleep.

I awoke at eight bells. I made a leisurely toilet, lingered over the splendid breakfast served in my room. A plan was taking shape in my mind, a mad plan that I dreaded to carry out, yet realized was the only solution of my problem. I was going to kill Cha Lee Fang.

Ten minutes after I had taken the Egyptian knife, which the priests had overlooked, and had gone out in search of Cha Lee Fang, I was with the captain in his cabin.

"Of course you can't find them!" he boomed at me. "Man, you missed a sight! At about six bells, one of the fastest submarines in the Chinese navy ran alongside. Five minutes later it had vanished again; and with it went Cha Lee Fang and the girl. Good riddance, I say. What?"

THE month that followed is like a nightmare in my memory. I never lost the trail, but always I was just too late. I had no chance to communicate with my firm, no opportunity to send them the Egyptian knife. And only today I learned a most dismaying thing. My firm has heard that I bought the knife and the ruby; they think I have disposed of them at a profit and embezzled the whole proceeds. All day I have been hounded by detectives sent after me by my employers.

My employers do not know that I have worked day and night trying to get that ruby for them, that I have faced death a dozen times in my devotion to their interests. They do not know how one night, through the chance remark of a Chinese gunman, I located Cha Lee Fang and Avis down here in this yellow quagmire called Chinatown. Well, I did. They were

running a fashionable gambling-den over there in the Alley of Descending Night.

Aided by my knowledge of Cantonese and by my Chinese disguise, I got past the guards one night when the gambling-rooms were all cleared, and stood before Cha Lee Fang and the girl I loved. Fang was counting a huge stack of gold coin. I remember how he looked up at me with surprise that changed slowly to amused insolence. I saw his hooded eyes shift quickly to the girl's face as though for an instant he suspected her of treachery; then he looked down at something on his desk.

I followed his gaze—and gasped. There, within my reach, lay the Ruby of Red Betrayal. With the sagacity of the Oriental, Cha Lee Fang was using that priceless gem as a worthless paperweight!

Then, while I stared speechless at that ruby, I felt more than saw Fang move his left foot; and instantly, in some distant room, a gong began sounding its sinister alarm. Slippered feet glided rapidly down the halls; guttural voices called back and forth. In a breath the whole house was alarmed.

With my left hand I snatched up the ruby; with my right I whipped out my pistol and covered Fang. But once more he was too quick for me. He seized Avis by the wrist, pressed the point of his long, crimson-corded knife against her bosom.

"Pardon me," the yellow tiger purred softly. "I suggest that you put that trifle back on my desk, lay your weapon beside it and walk your way out of my house."

I was blind with rage, but I knew better than to disregard those cool orders. I flung the ruby and my gun on the desk, turned to go.

Then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw Cha Lee Fang release Avis, saw him turn toward me. I know, as well as I know you sit here by me, that Fang had murder in his heart. In another instant his long knife would have been between my shoulders.

But in that instant I struck. Swift as a panther, I whirled and leaped upon him. I paid no heed to the scream that poured from the lips of Avis, ignored the cries of Fang's men, who were rushing at me from all sides. From the sheath where I carried it, I tore that Egyptian knife, buried it deep in Fang's chest. I saw a convulsive shudder run through him; then he was on the floor at my feet, and I was fighting for my life in a tangle of flying arms and long glittering blades.

THE white man paused at the stained board table where the Chinese keeper doled out smoking-opium to his patrons. Grinning, he picked up a cheap red porcelain figure that lay on Charley Fang's stack of opium cards.

"Charley," said Hophead Pete, "I've been having awful dreams 'bout this lately. Told one of 'em tonight to a crook from Toledo and worked him for a dollar. He's two blocks down the street right now, waitin' for me to come out of Lee Hop's fan-tan joint. Well, here's the dollar. Gimme a card, quick!"

THE man from Toledo rapped a signal on the door of a certain room on the outskirts of Chinatown. The door was opened, and closed quickly.

"Poor devil!" breathed the man from Toledo. "Isn't it awful what that damnable stuff does to them?"

"Then you found him?"

"Sure! It's all right. I filled in with Hophead Pete, listened to his crazy pipe-dream, then tailed him. He tried to ditch me at Lee Hop's place, but I kept him in sight until he went into Charley Fang's. Pete probably has his pipe by now, and old Fang has my marked dollar. Come on, boys; let's go!"

And that night the Federal "dope" squad, led by Special Agent Oyder, the man from Toledo, made one of their biggest catches.

Adrift

A thrilling story of high-air adventure by the gifted author of that well-remembered Blue Book Magazine success "Sand."

By REX VANCIL BIXBY

CAPTAIN KENNETH T. LEWIS, identified to all and sundry as "Whistle," sighted accurately between the heels of his polished cordovan boots, resting restlessly (if such can be) on the sill of the wide-open east window. Post adjutants' rooms are small; the one at the Ardmore, California, Balloon School was smaller than the average, and the very construction of the walls seemed to multiply the burning heat, caught and held by the thin corrugated iron roof.

The blistering sun, seeming almost to beat its way across the mesa, was past the zenith. Through the south window the first touches of the afternoon breeze from the ocean could be heard faintly rustling the fronds of the one palm tree on the "reservation."

Whistle Lewis was no stereotype. A cheery, buoyant, sunny-dispositioned son of the Nebraska prairies, he had a grin for every emergency and a whistle for every extremity. Not the darkest hour in Flanders, not the most hopeless of the dread days before Papa Joffre turned back the Hun menace from the very shadows of Notre Dame, could halt the lilting optimism of the lad or hush his thrilling melodies.

Today, however, the post adjutant's whistle was not in evidence. He wanted quiet; he craved seclusion; he yearned for privacy. The members of the official family, with the exception of Whistle and the colonel commanding (the latter dined in his own tiny vine-covered bungalow, as is the policy, privilege and practice of colonels commanding) were enjoying their postprandial cigars and chess-battles in the clubroom of the officers' mess-hall.

WHEN a young post adjutant forsakes his brother-officers for brooding, there is but one explanation. Whistle's case was no exception. He was in love—very much so, painfully so; for matters were following the traditional course of the genuine article. Hence the restless rest of the Lewis heels.

Florence Bowker, a native, fair and lovely daughter of Los Angeles, had his heart in safe-keeping; she had, in turn, given him an indeterminate lease on her own affections. Thus far, so good; but the thorn in Whistle's rose of contentment was

her refusal to take him seriously or to consider his earnest appeals for the welding together of their mutual affections. Whistle wanted to *own* Paradise; Florence seemed satisfied with an option on the place.

Not to work an injustice on her, it is only fair to say that she was deeply in love with Whistle, but thought him too easy-going; the latter fact hurt her while it piqued her. If only, she thought, he would take life seriously and accept it for the battle it is, her cup of happiness would be full. Her confidence in his ability was unbounded; her patience with his constant, unruffled geniality was rather more closely confined.

To gratify the desire of his mother, in whose eyes the memory of a line of military forebears bulked large, Lewis had stayed in the Army. The exigencies of the situation had compelled him to substitute fighting on the West Front for theories at West Point, and while he was the better soldier because of that experience, he knew that so far as promotion was concerned, his mere medal for bravery in action would stack up small against the diplomas of others for brilliance in academics. The ambition and initiative of hundreds of men have been stultified under such circumstances. Not so with Whistle.

Goaded to near desperation by the humdrum routine and lack of opportunity of his position, and fired by a longing to achieve bigger things and prove his caliber to the-girl-who-would-not-take-him-seriously, he was in a mood to resign his commission and paddle out into the uncharted seas of business.

Whistle felt the indictment of Florence to be unjust, but he admired her sincerity, and the cavalier in him ran his introspections to heights of conquest and deeds of daring far removed from the confines of his tiny administrative office.

IT was at the point where the thoughts of the post adjutant compassed a white palfrey with one Sir Whistle Lewis aboard, dashing gallantly in the lists for the favor of good Queen Florence, that an orderly entered, saluted and handed him a folded message from the telegraph-room.

The Captain hitched his heels to a position on the desk, lighted a fresh cigar and slowly opened the paper.

The orderly, gazing impersonally out of the window, snapped to "attention" like a spring suddenly released as the boots of the post adjutant hit the floor with a bang and the Lewis voice was raised in accents loud and verbiage emphatic. A heavy hand smote him on his properly respectful back, and the slip of yellow paper was thrust into his hand.

"Read that, you reveille-chasing defender of Columbia's dignity," shouted Whistle, stooping to salvage the remains of his cigar, which had suffered violent decapitation in his first exuberance of spirit. As he puffed it quickly back to activity, the thoroughly startled orderly looked feelingly at the paper. The message ran:

Los Angeles, Cal., 12:15 P. M.

Captain K. T. Lewis, Adjutant,
Ardmore Balloon School,
Ardmore, California.

Greetings and affectionate maledictions. The prodigal is returning. Trot out the fatted calf and the humidor. The honeymoon special will land at your caravansary at three o'clock. Bringing Miss Bowker and little nephew and niece visiting her. Helen and Mrs. C. O. will have to fly patrol on them. I want you to myself for the afternoon.

Adhesively your old right bower,
JIM.

"My son," wheezed Lewis, dropping into a chair and mopping hard at his dripping forehead, "do you get the bally drift of that billy-doo? That's Jim Brierly! He and his red-haired brother won that cock-eyed war back in seventeen and eighteen.

"He's the boy that made every editor between the big ponds dig up his extra-size scare-head type about eight months ago by going out with a broken leg, changing ships in the worst blizzard of the winter, saving the lives of his brother and the original 'Fighting Swede,' and incidentally saving a three-million-dollar shipment of gold for the Trans-American A. P. and E. Company. Outside of those incidental trifles and winning the daughter of the president of the Trans-American (they're on an airplane honeymoon now), that chap's never done a thing except save my life once and put me forever in his debt. It was just after the first skirmish around the Marne and—but hell's hot-plates, boy, that's another kettle of fish! The next seven miles include turning out the guard and getting this old post wound up to give him a twenty-one-gun welcome. Here"—scribbling a short note—"take this to the Colonel, and if you value your week-end liberty, you make two jumps grow where but one grew before."

By Rex Vancil Bixby

JIM BRIERLY and Whistle Lewis had been pals in France, such pals as only those who, as pilot and observer, have been through enemy fire together, who have lain on adjoining hospital cots for months, can be. There's no stronger tie between men.

As the door slammed behind the orderly, Whistle jumped for the telephone and proceeded to draw heavily upon the authority which was his. The Colonel came, his close-cropped gray mustache fairly bristling with eagerness to do fitting homage to the man who had caused more extra editions than the Bolshevists—the Colonel's pet aversion. Authority rode high for the next hour, and the whole post was aquiver with excitement and anticipation. Every balloon was run out and tethered at an elevation of five hundred feet, and the airplanes from the other end of the field were run out to the "flying line."

Whistle, not a "kewee" adjutant, as were so many, demanded the honor of leading a welcoming formation of twelve 'planes to escort the newcomers to the field. At his orders his own pet ship had been run from the hangar at the end of the field. Among the 'planes at the field were a few of the light training JN4's, a number of the speedy but erratic scout ships of the SE5 type, and fifteen of the large De Havilands. It was twelve of the latter which were to make up the formation.

The majority of the De H ships were equipped with the twelve-cylinder Liberty motors; but Whistle, in memory of the old days, had had a special 350 Hispano-Suiza motor installed in his ship. At two-fifteen, arrangements being well in hand, he took his mohair helmet and goggles from the headquarters locker and went out to oversee the warming up of the big engine, a task which he would permit no one else to undertake. The mechanics had the other eleven motors started and idling smoothly.

SEATING himself in the rear cockpit—the front one not being safe for formation work, owing to the obstruction of the view by the upper wing,—Whistle lost himself in the task of getting the big motor ready. At his snappy call, "Switch off! Gas on!" his mechanic swung the blade of the great twelve-foot stick—slowly, and then with a swift snap past compression, so as to suck full charges of gas into the cylinder. Three full turns he gave it; and then, leaving it poised on compression, he stepped back.

Lewis threw over his spark-connection, pushed the throttle to the idling position, and whirled the handle of his buzzer. With a throaty roar and a great belch of dense smoke, the Hisso awoke to throbbing life. Whistle eased the throttle back so that the indicator showed four hundred and fifty revolutions per minute. There he permitted her to idle for several minutes while the mechanic tightened a connection to stop a miss in the left bank of cylinders; then, as the motor became warmer, the throttle was pushed forward and the finer adjustments of carburetor and spark-control made, the thrash of the big stick straining the ship forward against the wooden blocks under the landing-wheels.

Satisfied, Whistle glanced at his watch. Two-thirty! Time to get formed on the field! Glancing down the line, he saw the other eleven pilots ready in their cockpits, their propellers swinging smoothly and evenly. Giving the signal, he snapped his safety-belt tightly in place, nodded for the blocks to be dragged from beneath the wheels, and taxied out to the starting "T." He was surprised to see that the "T" was headed toward the east. Ordinarily the wind was inshore at this time of the day, and this placing of the "T" showed that it had suddenly veered and was blowing straight offshore.

Just a detail, you say. True, but details are what your air-voyager *must* notice. Life and death to him are often hinged upon such details as wind-direction and the atmospheric changes which it prophesies. There have been a good many flyers who disregarded mere details. Nearly all have had military funerals; the rest have had private obsequies.

WHISTLE knew that each of the other eleven pilots would notice and wonder at the wind-change. There were but eighteen flyers at the field, the major interest being the balloon work, but all of them were seasoned veterans. About half of them had seen foreign service; the rest had been instructors in the government aviation schools during the war. All knew the technique of intricate formation-flying, and the points of finesse were almost second nature to them. He had selected the eleven senior pilots for the formation.

Lewis glanced back from his seat at the eleven other throbbing big 'planes. Like

great greyhounds of the air they seemed, panting and tugging at the leash, eager for the freedom of the billowy air-lanes. Satisfied, he pushed his throttle-lever forward. The answering roar of the big Hisso and the rush of the air-stream brought a light to his eyes and the ever-ready whistle to his lips. He was going out to meet his Jim pal.

The powerful surge of the big ship, as he pulled her from the ground and into a steep-banked turn to circle the field, thrilled his every nerve. Thousands of times he had done the same sort of thing, but this business of leading a gang of good fellows out to welcome the very prince of them all, brought back the days when he and Brierly together had climbed to the sunrise through the murk and chill of northern France, and he fairly ached for the grip of the other's hand.

Three turns around the field gave the others time to take off and follow him in a climb for altitude. He had planned to take the formation out at an elevation of three thousand feet, but at that altitude he found the conflicting air-currents due to the change in wind-direction too strong for safety. Ordinarily the air-currents rising from the sun-baked mesa were so erratic in the middle of the day that flying was, in the vernacular of the flyers, "bumpy." The ascending currents of different velocity above different ground-formations would buffet the ships about much as a skiff is lifted and tossed on small waves.

Whistle knew that his picked men could navigate the ordinary conditions with safety, but the heavy tossing of the changing wind-currents made it expedient to go to a higher level. At four thousand feet the air was much calmer, and he leveled off and throttled down to permit the other pilots to maneuver into position.

It was no ordinary "V" formation with which Brierly was to be met. The twelve ships quickly formed into four "V"s of three ships each. At a rolling signal from Whistle, the two groups nearest the three leading planes made a stalling climb to an elevation a step higher, while the last group maneuvered still a step higher and back and between the other two. The result was a flying diamond with each of the four points made by a group formation of three ships.

It is one of the hardest formations to get properly formed, and amazingly difficult to maintain properly. Whistle had selected his men with an eye to the work in hand, however, and the placing of the big ships was quickly accomplished. There would be no opportunity to communicate with Brierly before they should meet, but Lewis felt sure that Jim would sense the spirit of the plan and fall in with it. Men who have flown together seem instinctively to understand and even anticipate the mental processes of each other. The psychology of the flyers will some day receive the special investigation it merits and needs; the results will open a new chapter in mental research. With nothing to do but hold his position and head directly southwest, Whistle looked out over a panorama which never failed to thrill him.

Directly ahead lay the spreading tentacles of Los Angeles with their uneven fringe of suburban villages; to the north and east were the bulwarks of the mountains and foothills, with hundreds of tiny houses nestled securely in their shadows; back of them, the towering, snow-capped monarchs of the coast range.

Covering the valleys and the mesas to the east were stretches and reaches of green—thousands upon thousands of acres of citrus fruits and walnut orchards and vineyards, line upon line, phalanx upon phalanx—the legions of prosperity. Through it all twisted and wound a darker green cut by the silvery threads of the Santa Ana and San Gabriel rivers, whose harnessed waters had worked the whole verdant miracle.

To the southeast and south were the oil-fields! Dotting the rolling hills, the wild-cat derricks, striking evidence of pioneering courage.

Whistle turned his eyes toward the west. There, seventeen miles distant and from that elevation clearly visible, lay the restless Pacific. Ordinarily in this season and at this time of day it was comparatively calm and tranquil, but today Whistle's eye was caught by an intangible unrest, rather more felt than seen. Without knowing why, he shivered.

RECALLING the program for the afternoon, he glanced back, saw his formation intact, and straightened out for the Los Angeles destination. Hardly had the field been left behind in a sweeping turn toward the south, when Whistle made out a tiny black spot against the blue Pacific haze. It grew with such speed that he

recognized the approach of something new to his flying experience.

It seemed but a moment till the outlines of a great monoplane, bright red and beautifully proportioned as a swallow, were to be distinguished. The course of the other 'plane was to their left, but it suddenly banked over steeply and headed straight for the formation. Just for a moment Whistle looked, and then, realizing that it was the honeymoon ship, the ship in which Brierly had made his spectacular trip during the blizzard, and that in it was Jim himself, he gave the universal greeting of the airman by rolling his ship, first to the right and then to the left. He shouted from sheer happiness as the big red ship answered with a terrific roll to either side.

The diamond shape of the formation giving him his cue, Brierly maneuvered to the rear, and side-slipping to a position directly in the center and just beneath his escort, he eased his giant ship (fully double the size of the big De H's) into a slow climb which soon placed him on a line between the four points of the diamond.

In a wide circle Whistle led the ships back and over the field. Then, after a short series of maneuvers for the benefit of those below, he gave the signal to land. The big red ship went first, Brierly side-slipping down over the hangars and then reversing his rudder for a landing directly in front of the headquarters building. Whistle, intent on being the first to greet him, had to come down part way with his power on, winding up with a heavy skid into the wind to "kill" his speed.

EVEN before his 'plane had stopped rolling, Whistle was out of the cockpit and headed for Jim's ship. It was neck and neck between him and the Colonel, but it was the Lewis hand which half dragged the laughing, eager and wind-tanned Brierly from the open cabin door of the big red monoplane. Their handclasp was the signal for a broadside of good-natured raillery, both endeavoring to talk at once, while the crowd pushed closer for better views of Jim. Whistle's run had hampered his wind and it was Brierly who gained the first vocal advantage.

"Whistle, child of my heart, you look as natural as a last summer's Panama," he boomed. "What about this celebration stunt? For a nickel I'd administer the spanking you deserve for putting all this frosting on the fires of friendship, these ruffles on the raiment of remembrance. How come? I'm no comic-opera monarch. I'm a limping and thirsty citizen that craves cigars, cracked ice and conversation—"

"Whoozis, Auntie Florence—whoozis?" piped a small but eager voice, and a little auburn-haired girl of six jumped from the cabin steps and ran up to Whistle Lewis, as though sensing in his wholesome, ruddy face that spirit of camaraderie which always attracts children. The interruption brought Jim and Whistle back to a realization of the situation.

With evident pride which flushed her face with sheer happiness, Jim introduced Helen to the Colonel and his wife. Whistle, who had met her in Chicago two years previous, noted the absolute happiness and contentment in their eyes; again and again he looked at his affianced but really unwon Florence, his heart in his boots but his determination high. He would—

The little girl and her twin brother, Bonnie Mae and Tommy respectively, who had come with their Aunt Florence, swarming about him with eager questions, brought him from his reflections, and the repeated, "Whoozis, Auntie—Whoozis!" brought a prompt explanation from Florence, who was both delighted and slightly embarrassed by their attraction to Whistle.

The amenities of the situation having been properly attended to by all present, the Colonel and his wife took the two girls and the youngsters under their wings, and escorted by practically the entire personnel of the field, began an inspection of varied sights of interest to the visitors. As for Whistle and Jim, they locked themselves in the adjutant's room and set to work on a depletion of the former's humidored stock, and a conversation which took no thought of time.

FOR the next two hours they were unmindful of anything but tales of their little French C. O., the achievements of the old Squadron and an exchange of news concerning their old flight-mates. Whistle could not get enough of the story of the big red ship, the beauty and performance of which appealed to his every air instinct, and of the previous winter's adventure in which it had figured so largely. After laughingly asserting for the seventh time that it was "a heap more luck than management," Brierly suddenly turned serious.

"Whistle, I don't know how you're hooked up here. I do know that you're hiding your light under the w.k. bushel by sticking at this routine. It's slowed you up, old settler, and by the six sacred sunshades of Solomon, another year of it will fossilize you completely. You're just drifting along!

"Down at your neighboring city of movie-scandals, hung juries and *tong* wars, this company of ours needs an assistant divisional superintendent. By authority from the head of the official family, my man-size daddy-in-law, I'm hunting the new incumbent. You fit the specifications like the gold paint fits the courthouse dome. Kidding aside, you're a good man, and for the sake of the Company I want the mantle of authority to settle on your shoulders. But for *your* sake, I'm insisting that you accept it; and, you leather-legged, silver-barred sacrifice on the altar of a mistakenly militant-minded country, I wont take no for an answer.

"Look out that south window and see what inspiration there is in that vista for a red-blooded man to tie to. A scraggly palm, a handful of flowers holding to their existence by the grace of a kind-hearted Deity and the aqueous ministrations of the Colonel's wife, and acres of dusty flying-field dedicated to the dawdlings of a decadent War Department—not a thing to break the monotony of eats or events. Why you—say, boy, take a look at that sky!"

WHISTLE looked hurriedly, his thoughts all on the opportunity which had just been thrown into his arms by Brierly. His first glance startled him, however. As far as the eye could see, the sky was heavily overcast with a heavy, blue, bronze-tinged mass of scudding clouds, driving westward like tumbled hosts of refugees before a rapidly rising gale which was already flapping the heavy wind pennant on the field signal house to tatters. A haze of dust, swept from the field, threw about the whole scene an eerie, almost ominous effect of melancholy. Indeed, the wind-change he had noticed was already bearing fruit.

Both men drew back and resumed their chairs, their faces sobered by the sullen brooding of the gathering storm. Only for a moment, however, and the thought that there would be no patrol to fly, no sortie to make, no swift, eagle flight over shell-torn trenches to attend to in that storm, brought them back to their previous talk. Jim was the first to break the silence.

"Well, what say, old campaigner? It's yours for the asking, and I'm urging you—Ouch!" A well-worn copy of Army Regulations, propelled by the laughing Whistle, had caught him squarely amidships.

"Now sit quiet for a minute and give me a chance to get my acceptance on record," howled the exuberant Lewis. "Will I say yes? Oh, boy! Santa Claus has came! Just put it down and sign it, Jim—"

SCREAMS and hoarsely bellowed commands, followed by a babel of voices which seemed almost to shake the light headquarters building, billowed through the open windows and brought the two men sharply to their feet. Through the window facing the field could be seen a swaying, pushing crowd of khaki-clad men. White faces, all turned upward and to the west, mirroring the horror and dread anticipation, were more eloquent than words of some appalling and unexpected happening.

The locked door delaying them for but a moment, Whistle and Jim rushed out, their eyes following the gaze of the crowd. At an elevation of probably two thousand feet and rapidly rising, billowing and pitching in the thrashing air-currents which were bearing it straight for the ocean, was one of the training balloons. Ordinarily held captive by a steel cable attached to a heavy automobile truck on the ground, it now drove like a derelict before the gale, the long cable-end trailing below the basket bearing mute testimony to the force which had torn it from its moorings. A runaway balloon! Adrift in that gathering storm!

Surely the fact that a balloon was loose, even should it be lost eventually in the Pacific, could not account for the apprehension in the faces about them. Lewis and Brierly instantly saw that the explanation lay deeper, and glanced swiftly around the field. A small and excited knot of people near the No. 3 Balloon Hangar showed them another and almost certainly related emergency, and as they rushed to the spot, both drove their startled brains to discover the explanation of the whole situation.

Reaching the agitated group, they saw Helen and Mrs. Hall bending over the prostrate figure of Florence Bowker. Both men, moved by the sight, but sensing a more urgent element in the situation,

turned to Colonel Hall, who stood near the three women, his face working with suppressed emotion, his hands nervously plucking at the buttons of his snugly fitting whipcord coat, the center of a group of five men.

The executive heads of the field's forces huddled about their leader. The Colonel stood mute, his military authority for once unable to cope with a problem in his administration.

The others drew back as Lewis and Brierly turned to the older man. In a hoarse and choked voice, the grim old warrior, his broken tones bespeaking the tenderness beneath his rugged exterior, swiftly outlined the facts.

"Captain Lewis, the impossible must be done. Mr. Brierly, your presence is a vast comfort. Together and as individuals you two men have in the past done seemingly impossible things. God grant that you may assist us in this tragic affair." He turned his dimmed eyes toward the balloon hurtling into the sunset before the steadily rising wind; then he continued: "The little shavers wanted a ride in one of the balloons. They begged so hard I couldn't deny them. Because of the wind, all the bags had been pulled in and housed, but damn my tender heart, I wanted to please the little folks, so I had Number 3 run out. You know, Captain,"—turning to Lewis,—"it's the only one of the old-model bags left—smaller and with friction brake control. I thought it would be easier to handle in this wind than one of the bigger Model E's. The youngsters were tickled all over—"

Here the Colonel snatched a handkerchief of generous proportions from his pocket and wiped some very real tears from his wrinkled face. Then, the man of authority again asserting himself, he barked out the rest of the details.

"It went well for the first few feet—the wind's not bad on this ground-level; then Miss Bowker wanted to try the brake control. I let her have it. I knew better. I deserve to lose my commission, and probably shall, for permitting her to touch it." The Colonel choked. Then he continued:

"It worked well for several feet; then in looking up to wave to the children, her hand slipped from the brake. She fainted dead away with the shock. Before any of us could snatch the controls, the wind had the big bag twisting so that the brake was useless. We couldn't block the drum for fear the cable would be torn loose from the balloon fastenings with such a force as to overturn the basket. When the end of the cable was reached, the fastening, being old and somewhat rusted, gave way and—and there the little tikes go, this hell-twister of a storm getting worse every minute, and only God's providence to keep them from Eternity." The sheer suffering of the old man was evident in every tone of his voice as he added brokenly: "Nothing would do but they must go alone in the basket, and I felt sure that nothing could happen in a little fifty-foot trip. I fastened both safety-belts."

THE storm, momentarily more ominous, was filling the air with its intangible unrest; the driving banks of nimbus clouds, the low-hanging, twisting wraiths of mist, the sweeping waves of dust lifted across the dun expanse of the landing-field, gave to the scene a weird effect as though of silently shifting scene settings in a pageant of giant proportions; the glint of the last slanting rays of the afternoon sun seemed as the thrusts of a golden rapier, now visible, now withdrawn, a silent menace to their play, as though foretelling the tragedy which would come with the night.

The emotions mirrored in the set faces of the little group as the Colonel finished his story showed plainly the almost helpless terror which was felt by every man. Then:

"Fat's in the fire, old man!" said Lewis suddenly in the crisp voice Jim knew so well, "but there's a chance that we can put out the fire. Come a-running, and I'll outline it while we're getting the Bluebird ready."

A glance showed that Helen, the flight-surgeon and Mrs. Hall had Miss Bowker on a stretcher and were taking her to the hospital at the end of the field. With a beckoning nod to the Colonel and the rest of the group, the two men started on a run toward the sturdy ship, staked down on the line where he had left it; the big blue 'plane was never run in, excepting at Whistle's orders.

"Stanton, get me two hundred feet of that inch-and-a-quarter hemp cable from the garage, will you!" snapped Lewis as they reached the ship. Comparative authority forgotten, he snapped out his instructions to all without thought of rank. Brierly swung the big propeller for him, and the Hisso took up its even hum. Re-

linquishing to other hands for the first time the delicate task of warming the throbbing engine, Whistle drew the other men around him and sketched his plan.

"We all know what a dragging cable means on a balloon ordinarily," he said, "but thank God for this one. It's our one hope. Providence must have been with me when I had that two-hundred-horse-power Hisso pulled and the big three-fifty installed. The smaller one would never do what we've *got* to do. This one may not, but—it's *got* to!

"This rope will go around the fuselage in front of the left wings and just above the landing gear. When we snare the big bag, we'll have to overcome the drive of the wind on her by crabbing hard to the left on the inshore pull. It may pull the heart right out of this blue beauty, but I think she'll hold. Here, Jackson, get this rope hitched around her the way I said, and stow the knotted end in the front cockpit. Monty, you attend to the oil and gas; Frank, get me two steel-cable clamps; and you, Colonel, pull enough wires to get a sub-chaser from San Pedro to help us with a searchlight if need be."

AS the men jumped to their allotted tasks, Lewis turned to Brierly. "Jim, old boy, there's about one chance in five of pulling this thing off."

"You know me, Whistle," the heavy tones of Brierly cut in while his hands gripped the shoulders of the other. "Helen comes first now, of course, but she'd be the first to want me to go. Shake along, lad; this storm is getting no better fast, and every minute of daylight is worth a heap to us."

Snatching helmets and goggles from the orderly whom the Colonel had dispatched for them, the two gave a swift inspection to the fastenings of the heavy rope, and climbed to their places. Jim, knowing that his job would be to pilot the ship, took the rear seat while Whistle, concerned only with the details of snaring the big bag once they should reach it, took the front and busied himself with the clamps and wrenches.

As Jim snapped his safety-belt, he looked eagerly toward the hospital end of the field. Even as he looked, Helen stepped from the door of the main building, and he saw her stop and stand, her hands clasped over her heart. A swiftly blown kiss between them, and Jim called to Whistle, whose eyes were also turned anxiously toward the hospital: "Ready, boy?"

At the tense but cheery "Give 'er the gun," the throttle was shot forward. The roar of the great motor all but drowning the chorus of good-luck shouts from the little knot of men, the blue ship hurtled forward, her nose dipping slightly as she gathered momentum.

The take-off was directly cross-wind, a thing which in that storm would have wrecked any but a highly skilled pilot; but Brierly, veteran of several thousand hours in the air, easily held the rushing ship in hand. Two hundred feet of the wind-tortured field swept under them; then with a flip of the stick he pulled the big 'plane into a terrific "zoom," and with a reverse of his ailerons and a sharp kick of the rudder, snapped her into a steep, climbing turn to the west.

Involuntary gasps broke from the little group below while Whistle, the nervous strain lightened in an appreciation of such hair-raising air-work, turned and grinned. The great motor seemed to thrill at the spirit of the undertaking and to roar defiance to the eddying near-hurricane. A lighter motor or less skillful handling would have meant death to both men. The big ship quivered, then took the controls and bored into the murk of the gathering dusk, the thrashing propeller seeming veritably to hurl the distance behind them.

STRAINING their eyes, the two men could see, probably thirty miles distant and at an elevation of some six thousand feet, the tiny speck of the balloon with its precious freight. The ship held to its maximum climbing angle, both men gave themselves over to preparations for the crisis which the next few minutes would certainly bring. Jim's task was to keep that speck in sight and overhaul it without wasting a single whirl of the mighty air-screw. Whistle, hunched down in the forward cockpit, wrestled with the details of his plan.

No definite procedure was clear in the mind of Lewis. It would be necessary to catch the dragging cable of the balloon and fasten it securely to the hempen girdle of the 'plane. That much was clear, but myriad difficulties presented themselves. In still air it would be difficult enough to volplane down and then stall abruptly so that a man on the extreme end of the wing

could catch the trailing end of the steel rope; in this driving storm, it savored of the impossible. That thought, however, was instantly dismissed. It *had to be done*, and Whistle knew that Jim Brierly could, if any man were capable of it, handle the necessary maneuver of the ship. If it were only possible for him to catch the cable from a position between the ends of the upper and lower wings, the bracing of the outer strut and the taut flying- and landing-wires would make the task infinitely easier. If that were done, however, and the connection with the rope made from that position, he knew that the turning of the ship back toward shore for the long pull against the wind would bring the cable against the entering edge of the right wings; should that occur, the instant the battle between the giant motor and the wind-driven balloon should begin, the swift tightening of the ropes would shear the wings from the 'plane as though by the stroke of a mighty broad-ax. No! The pull must come between the right wings and the right-hand side of the fuselage.

The face of the genial Lewis set with a grimness such as only elemental stress can inspire. It *had* to be done in *some* way! There was no alternative! Life was sweet in the realization of the larger happiness soon to be his and—and yet it was unthinkable if he should permit the shadow of failure in this test to hang over the future of the girl who was depending on him. His capable jaw set with a snap and he turned to an examination of methods for making the connection with the racing balloon.

He would have to catch the cable from a position on top of the right wing; of that he was certain. Hastily he pulled the map-board down in front of him and scratched a short note to Brierly, outlining his plan and sketching a diagram of the proposed haul back to land. Pushing it back to Jim, Whistle peered intently into the semi-darkness.

Directly ahead and not over ten miles distant, on a slightly higher level, was the object of their chase. Above, the tossing cloud-billows, now feathery as the seventy-mile-an-hour gale whipped them to nothingness, now a sullen roof of brooding blackness above the violence of the storm.

GLANCING down into the heaving maelstrom of water five thousand feet below, Lewis shivered at their thundering menace. With a living hatred he hated them—tumbling, rising in towering waves as though to draw the flyers down to their dark breasts, then, foiled again and again, lashing themselves into seething foam-crests. The roar as they spent their fury against the impregnable faces of the San Pedro breakwater was as the deep diapason of a Niagara of infinite proportions.

The Colonel had succeeded in getting three sub-chasers from the submarine base, and these, tossing like corks in a millrace, were beating down-wind, their tiny deck-lights forming a background for the slashing beams of their powerful searchlights, like the gleam of tiny satellites framing the brilliance of great meteors. Looking ahead, Lewis saw the beam from the leader pick up the outlines of the racing balloon, and his heart jumped with relief. Now, darkness or no darkness, they would be able to proceed with their plan.

A glance over his shoulder showed him that Jim understood the plan. Bending in his cockpit, Whistle unfastened and removed his boots. They would menace the controls if left in the ship; so with an involuntary sigh (for your army man loves his boots as a cowpuncher loves his saddle) he tossed them far out over the side. Motioning to Brierly that he was ready, he loosened his safety-belt, rose and snapped it in place behind him. A swift lift over the back of the cockpit, a tight grip on the center section of the upper wing, and Whistle pulled himself up and forward to the entering edge.

He knew that it would be useless to try to connect the rope with the cable from his precarious position on the wing, as almost surely the release of the connected pull-rope would entangle either the right aileron or the tail controls. Hence, unencumbered by the clamps or wrenches which he had first planned to carry with him, he worked himself slowly outward, being careful to avoid fouling the control-wires running along the front of the top wing.

By this time Jim, almost under the balloon, was throttling the big motor to minimum flying speed and maneuvering so as to place the dangling end of the cable, now clearly visible in the cross-beams of the searchlights, directly in front of Whistle. In still air it would have been difficult and dangerous; in this riot of the elements, it made a steady demand upon the best of his flying training and experience.

If a sudden gust should veer him to the right, and the cable should catch in the propeller, it would be but a matter of seconds until the Pacific should engulf them and the ship. Had the gale been full of squalls, the difficulties would have been still greater, for any one of them might have whipped the cable end into them before the ship could be skidded out of danger. The steady rush of the offshore wind, however, held it almost quiescent, training along at an even angle below the big bag.

Carefully easing himself to a position on the front edge of the wing and directly over the outer strut, Whistle felt with his stockinged feet until he found the comforting big spruce upright. Quickly he braced both feet about the sturdy timber and braced himself against the twanging cross-brace-wire at its top. It was not the stinging chill of the night air alone which made him shiver inside his khaki service shirt.

IN response to Jim's skillful maneuvering, the big 'plane was slowly creeping up on the shining thread of metal in which lay all their hopes for success. Nerves tense with the strain, Lewis leaned forward slightly; the cable hung just twenty feet dead ahead—his hands twitched with suppressed nervous energy—his feet tightened and retightened about the big strut. . . . . There! right before him, waiting to be seized, hung the cable—his hands reached out and clutched convulsively. But just as he reached, the ship, stalled to the point of danger, trembled like a stricken thing and fell sharply to the left in the start of a power tail-spin.

An involuntary gasp of pain was driven through his tight-set lips as the jerk of the ship wedged his foot tightly into the angle between the brace-wire and the strut, and he grasped the edge of the wing to steady himself. The swishing of the big ship as her nose swung off in the spin was not the best tonic for overstrung nerves, but the complete confidence felt by Lewis in the proven flyer at the controls steadied him; he glanced toward Jim's cockpit, a forced grin lighting his features.

"Good old Jim!" he thought. He would have been happy indeed could he have heard the, "Damn nervy little rooster. The same old Whistle," growled by Brierly as he reversed his controls and brought the ship in an even turn to the old position.

AGAIN the maneuver of the preceding moments was repeated. This time an air-pocket under their right wing upset their plans when they were still several feet from the cable. But the third time brought them the success they had earned, and Lewis felt the cold, hard cable lying tightly in his clenched grip.

As his hands closed, Jim had advanced the throttle slightly and pulled the big 'plane into a gradual climb so as to give Whistle some slack to work with. Slowly, and with infinite caution, so as to avoid any entanglement of the cable with the propeller, Whistle drew in the end of the steel rope and coiled some fifty feet of it beside him; that much would be necessary to make sure a sudden lurch of the ship would not take it all from them. Other men, as strong as Whistle, have since tried to coil the cable as he did that night; they have had the advantages of solid ground upon which to work and plenty of time for the experiment; all of them have failed to bend it to their will. Whistle completed the coil swiftly, while perched perilously on the edge of the wing, with nothing but a trembling thing of linen and light wood between him and the sea five thousand feet below. Let our psycho-analysts explain it if they can; the fact remains that unsuspected power is given those who, in emergencies, show themselves capable of using it.

Resting for a moment, Lewis glanced up at the balloon just in time to see one of the searchlight-beams cut through the scudding clouds and focus squarely on the basket. Could his imagination, reacting from the strain, be playing him false, or were those indeed tiny arms which he saw waving piteously from the sides of the basket! At any rate the suggestion was strong enough to make Lewis' collar feel suddenly too tight.

CAREFULLY Whistle took stock of the situation. It would be necessary, owing to the weight of the cable, to pull it back to the fuselage in such a way that it would not cut through the linen wing-covering or break any of the light spruce ribs. With painstaking care, Jim assisting by holding the head of the 'plane so that the slack of the cable was away from the controls, Whistle eased himself back to the center of the wing, the coil of cable dragged carefully behind him. Forgotten was the pain in his ankle. Slipping swiftly

into his cockpit, and leaning over the right side, he signaled to Brierly. At a touch from the throttle and stick, the big ship nosed easily into a steeper climb and slightly ahead of the racing gas-bag. Whistle quickly paid out the slack of the cable, allowing it to pass through the slot-opening between the lower wing and fuselage; thus, confined by the wing-bolts, it paid out in a long sweep below, much as a ship's radio aërial is carried.

At an elevation which showed but about two hundred feet of the cable still between them and the balloon, Whistle nodded to Jim, and the latter cut the throttle until they were just holding their own with the speed of the big bag hovering over them. In the momentary lull of the Hisso's roar, the former could not resist giving vent to an exultant shout of success. "She's our oyster, Jim boy!" he shouted with a swift smile which was just visible in the vagrant radiance of the searchlights. The strained nerves of the big blond pilot relaxed for a moment, and an answering grin lighted his features.

The situation called for air-work of a degree of finesse beside which the delicacy of handling during the past minutes was as but straight flying. The crucial moment was at hand—the fastening of the cables while a hundred-and-seventy-mile-an-hour 'plane, tossed by the swirling wind, was throttled, stalled and held on an even keel at a speed equal to and no greater than that of a big balloon driven before a seventy-mile-an-hour wind. Shades of Stinson and Orville Wright! Ask any flyer what it means! It means a rabbit's foot in each pocket, every break in the luck, and a benevolent Providence riding on each wing.

Knowing that Jim could do it if it could be done at all, Whistle gave no thought to the matter but swiftly pulled a doubled length of the cable through the knotted opening in the end of the hemp girdle of the 'plane, and snapped his two clamps into place. Despite the best that Jim could do, the strain on Lewis' arms was almost beyond human endurance, and as the last bolt was drawn to its seat in the body of the clamp, he all but collapsed. His shoulders ached, and his nerves felt as though they had been frayed at the ends with a fine-tooth comb.

Brierly, seeing that all was in readiness, moved the 'plane ahead swiftly until gliding headway was afforded, and then stalled the ship easily. The drive of the wind on the larger surface of the bag drove it quickly past them, and as Lewis paid out the short length of rope which had been tucked in the cockpit, the difference in the speed of the two cruisers of the air drew both the cable and its hempen anchoring taut. Easing the pull the merest trifle, Brierly threw the ship into a steep but natural skid turn which left them headed parallel to the twinkling lights of the beach some forty miles to the east.

As the strain grew to the maximum, the great 'plane seemed to groan aloud in the very travail of the burden. The fuselage frame creaked as though ready momentarily to collapse, while the moaning of the now cross-wind in the straining wires of the wings seemed a sympathetic accompaniment, a half-hearted appreciation from a vanquished foe none too graceful in defeat.

Slowly Brierly skidded the ship in a sweeping circle toward the shore. A banked turn was impossible because of the twisting strain it would throw upon the frame of the fuselage. Skidding would ordinarily have been much worse, but in this case nothing else was possible.

The slight shiftings of the wind having drifted them some forty miles south of their starting-point, the ship, after what seemed an hour of struggle to complete their turn, was pointed directly for the lights of Long Beach, its precious balloon-load of human freight securely towed by the straining cables. It was now a contest between the brute force of their great thrashing propeller and the driving, roaring, throbbing Hisso, against the force of the tempest beating and buffeting them.

Below, the dipping of the searchlights and the faintly audible bellow of the combined whistles of the sub-chasers showed that their success was recognized and that the occasion was thought worthy of genuine celebration. When the minions of Uncle Sam acclaim an accomplishment, it *is* worthy of the doffed hat and the keys-to-the-city celebration. The spirits of both men ran high. Both felt that it would be a matter of but an hour or so before they would land safely. By such lengths do mortals underestimate the forces of nature!

MINUTE after minute they watched their indicators for the verdict of the battle. Slight gusts and cross-currents, heretofore unnoticed in the 'plane, were

buffeting the balloon, each responding lunge of the big bag causing the laboring ship to shiver and cringe with the strain; then, the heavy drag eased for a moment, it seemed to roar out its defiance to the storm and throw itself forward, all a-tremble with the spirit of the fight.

The noise of the exhaust and the shrieking wind, directly into the teeth of which they were driving, made conversation, even at the tops of their voices, impossible. Eyes strained to the indicators which showed their "ground-speed," in breathless suspense they watched for the tide of battle to swing definitely. Jim alone was taking his eyes from the little needle in his cockpit as it wavered and twitched over its dimly glowing dial. His was the task of holding steady the relative position between the 'plane and the big bag, and to drive the giant Hisso to the very limit of her power.

To Whistle, his whole body tense with the strain and the chill of the California night, it seemed ages that he watched. First a little advantage would be theirs; then the wind, with a ribald screech, would snatch it from them. Why was it that Providence must now flaunt the fury of the storm in their faces? Had they not done their part? Funny thing about that indicator—the "air-speed" dial showed 164 miles an hour, and the darned "ground-speed" indicator showed nothing at all, or a bare movement ahead. That meant—what *did* it mean?

WITH a snap he sat erect, cold and fatigue forgotten. Their task had just begun! There they were, five thousand feet above the ocean, poised stationary forty miles from land, with their maximum power insufficient to overcome the pull of the big gas-bag and the direct force of the wind on its broad expanse of surface! By good air-work it would be possible to hold the position without much loss of altitude. He had seen Pat Dougherty do it one day in a strong north wind at the old training-field; ticklish, it was, but Jim could do it.

On the other hand, they could not remain there all night. The one hope lay in lightening that pull. The wind might go down, but Whistle knew enough of the non-seasonal storms of that region to realize the futility of expecting any hope in that quarter. The wind would probably continue unabated until morning. He thanked Heaven fervently and somewhat expressively for the chill and dampness of the night; while it was most uncomfortable for them, it also acted to condense the gas in the big bag and lessen her buoyancy. Without that in their favor, the superior pull of the balloon would quickly have overcome their very slight advantage and almost certainly have wrecked them. He knew that, even as conditions were, very real dangers lay on every side, for the big 'plane, held to barely flying speed by the drag of the balloon, was steadily shaking with that mysterious vibration which to the airman always means the imminent danger of a tail-spin. Once they should begin to spin, the complication of the heavy cable would make it impossible for Jim to recover control of the ship, and their little lines in the tragedy of the night would be finished.

A QUICK glance at the other instruments before him brought a sharp exclamation from Whistle. His right hand, bruised and bleeding from the fastening of the cable, clutched one side of the cockpit with a convulsive grip; and his eyes, bloodshot from the strain, stared and stared again at the tiny dial at the top of the instrument-board. Tight-lipped, unable to speak even had it been possible for Brierly to hear him, he turned to Jim. The small, cupped lights on the two instrument-boards threw their faces into weird relief, and the flashing of the roaring exhausts from both banks of cylinders—like the night-firing of twin-mounted machine guns of giant size—gave to the scene a flaming border which revealed clearly the white cheeks, the hard, set features and the tense figures of the men. They were not afraid of death as such—they'd been through dangers together too often for that; *but,* they wanted a fighting chance for the babies they were trying to save and for those whose happiness depended upon the success of their fight.

A single look showed each man that the other understood the situation. *Their gasoline supply was over one-fourth gone!* It would hold out but a bare three hours longer, at best! There seemed no hope but that the end of three hours would find them still holding their stationary position—three hours of tortured, helpless waiting for the end, a last gasping breath from the big Hisso, and then—

Whistle, a nervous twitching of his shoulder alone bespeaking the tension

under which he labored, reached calmly for the map-board and wrote quickly and firmly for a few minutes. The note he passed back to Brierly. Jim held it forward under his little dash-light. As he read it, his eyes lighted with admiration and his teeth bit hard into his close-gripped lower lip. Again he read it, an involuntary gasp breaking from him as the meaning of the note became clearer and clearer. The note ran:

"Jimmy:

I'd rather go out and meet it than wait for it to come and get me. I'm going up that cable and release enough gas from that bag so that you can make the pull to shore before our gasoline is gone." And, irrepressible boy that he was, he wound up: "I reckon, Jim, we'll have had the initiation by the time we get back; if they'll just give us the password, seems to me we ought to belong. Pull the old left ear for me and signal me when I've let out enough.

WHISTLE."

Jim knew that it would be a thing beyond the strength of most men to travel a two-hundred-foot piece of steel cable, hand over hand, even with it in an even, horizontal position, without jerking-strains of any sort, and with hands in good condition. Yet here Whistle Lewis,—good, easy-going old Whistle,—his hands and arms bruised and aching from the struggle with the cable, proposed going up that shining rope of steel hung at an angle of thirty to forty-five degrees and constantly swayed and jerked by the lunging forces on either end, his only illumination the slashing cuts of the searchlight-beams severing and re-severing the heavy pall of darkness; the cable slippery with the heavy fog's condensed vapors; the hungry, thrashing unrest of the Pacific thousands of feet below, ready to engulf and bury forever him who thus accepted the gage of battle, should the slightest slip occur!

JIM had seen Whistle laugh and continue to whistle with merry unconcern as a German "Archie" took away half the lower left wing from their twin-seated battle-'plane, he thought he had plumbed the depths of the Lewis soul, but it was with a new and infinitely deeper respect that he now looked up at the figure of his old chum who, with a swift wave of farewell and a parting grin, dropped over the side of the fuselage on the start of his long climb.

Just the tops of his hands where they closed over the rope were visible to Brierly, and he watched them with a sort of fascination until slowly they one after the other disappeared from sight. *His* collar, too, seemed to have suddenly shrunk distressingly, and a mysterious lump in his throat obstinately refused to be swallowed. Jim gripped his stick with new determination. He would help all he could by lessening the angle of the cable as much as safety to the children in the balloon-basket would permit. The maneuver would call for his every attention. Slowly, easily and cautiously, he flipped the elevators up the barest trifle, his eyes strained to that taut line of glistening steel.

Turning for an instant to get the angle correctly, he saw, silhouetted for an instant against the gleam of a searchlight, the figure of Whistle, clinging to the cable, the laboring lurch of his shoulders and body as his hands fought for the inches ahead, only too visible in the weird illumination.

The beam of light swung to the north. With a whispered prayer for his pal, Brierly turned back to his controls, and satisfied with the new angle of the cable, set himself to hold it despite the buffetings of the storm.

AS Whistle waved at Jim, he glanced aloft at the towering bulk of the balloon. He had been nervous; any man would have been, and any man honest with himself would have admitted it. The sight of the big bag and the swift realization of what the basket contained and what success would mean, steadied his nerves. Smarting hands and aching arms forgotten, he grasped the upper strands of the heavy hemp close to the fuselage and swung himself off into the darkness.

The ten feet to the steel cable-clamps passed easily and quickly, but as he grasped the glinting hardness of the steel strands, Whistle realized what lay before him. Slippery with dampness and constantly agitated by the struggle between the 'plane and the wind against the bag, the climbing of that thread of steel seemed more than man should attempt. To make it worse, the semi-rolling motion of the balloon was slowly twisting it. At any minute, while he was moving one hand to a fresh hold, a sudden roll of the cable might break the grip of his other hand.

Anyone who has had a bar of wood or iron slowly twisted from his grip will realize what that handicap meant. The strain would be no less upon his nerves than upon his physical powers—that, Whistle realized.

With infinite caution he moved himself along, hand over hand and inch by inch. Jim's changing of the angle of the rope was a big help to him, and the easing of the strain turned his thoughts for a moment to an appreciation of Brierly's clear thinking and able air-work. He'd simply *have* to make the grade if for no other reason than to justify Jim's faith in him.

THE first hundred and fifty feet crept under his straining hands, the aching in his arms becoming almost unbearable, and a peculiar numbness setting in in his hands as the twisting cable tore at the lacerations and ground the bruises of the earlier hour. Perspiration trickled down his strained and lined cheeks. The dead ache in his shoulders as he stopped for a moment warned him that his journey, if successful, must end shortly.

Gritting his teeth, he started on the last fifty-foot climb. Every movement caused a cringing shudder to pass through his suffering arms, shoulders and body. Feeling was almost gone from his hands, but jerks of his body and the twisting of the rope racked his every joint and muscle. White-hot stabs of pain shot through his back-muscles and flashed up the quivering nerves of his tortured arms, only to dissolve into welcome but deadly coolness in hands and wrists.

Just fifty feet more—shucks, he'd done nearly half that much in the broad jump at the field athletic contest! What were a mere fifty feet? Funny about those hands, now—he could see them tight around the cable, but he couldn't feel the cable—hands must have gotten tired of the strain and gone to sleep. The thought brought a queer smile to his twisted face. Gad, but it would be great to just let go of that cable and float off on one of those queer clouds of mist that kept rushing back and forth before his eyes—sort of a magic-carpet stunt. Guess he'd have to tell Jim about it, and they'd do it together. . . . . No, by thunder, he and Florence would take their honeymoon that way. With a start he caught himself, threw off the lethargy which had all but claimed him, and faced the business at hand.

AFTER what seemed an eternity to him, Whistle looked up again. Surely he must be near the basket. A sudden sob drove through his dry lips—just a bare ten feet traveled in all that time! Forty feet yet to go! With a hoarse laugh he pulled his right hand from the cable and shook it, clenched, into the teeth of the wind which seemed now to shriek with a new fury as though it sensed in him an almost certain victim.

Inch by inch, foot by foot, yard by yard, the twisting serpent of cable crept under his laboring hands, till but seven feet remained. Every change of his hands had now become a separate fight in itself; wholly devoid of feeling, his flayed fingers seemed encumbrances to him; his breath came in hard gasps through his parched throat; hands, arms and face bore sanguinary testimonial to the tearing, cutting pull of the cable.

The last seven feet seemed leagues long. He had long since drained the resources of his physical strength and endurance. The thought of the new sweetness which life would now mean to him had carried him for a few tortured feet, but it was now the one thought of the girl whose happiness and peace of mind depended upon him, and the babies in the basket just ahead, which sustained him and drove him to the steady fight for the elusive and pain-bought inches.

He was fascinated by the erratic but upward march of those strange things clutching the cable; somehow they seemed connected with his progress toward the basket, but only in an impersonal way—he watched them as boys watch the hinges of the barn door on which they are swinging. Funny-looking things they were—sort of resembled hands—more like the hands of a chap he'd seen once after he had been pulled back out of the timing gears of an old OX5 Curtiss motor at school. No feeling in them—guess they couldn't be his, or he could feel with them. Still, as long as they were helping him along, he'd better keep using 'em—could return 'em to their owner later. The way they hitched along, jerkily and one before the other, reminded him of the stuttering progress of an Airedale puppy he had once trained to climb a ladder—nice dogs, Airedales, but too messed up with hair.

A convulsive shudder passed through him as nature removed for a moment her merciful anesthetic of shock from his torn hands, and the stabbing pain shot through

his swinging body. Shades of amputations—he'd have to have those bleeding things cut off if they kept that up! A man could only stand so much, you know, and that sort of pain's a bit too lively to endure for long. If it wasn't for showing the confounded storm he was the best fighter, he'd be tempted to—no, by the Lord, he wouldn't, either: those babies and Florence's happiness depended upon his grinning and bearing it. Wonderful girl, Florence! He'd been a damned quitter for sticking there at the field and letting his future get such a start on him; now he'd make it up to her—he'd take that position Jim offered and make a whirlwind of a success of it for her sake.

The torture of the crashing bolts of agony trying, it seemed, to tear his very joints apart, held him breathless for a moment. God in heaven, could he stand it?

Every man had a limit—but he had to make that grade before he reached his! He closed his eyes to shut out, as he thought, the flashes of pain which seemed to sear his very eyeballs; as he did so, there arose before him a vision of a girl he had left behind at the hospital; her arm was about a little girl, a little girl with shining auburn hair, a little girl who pulled at his coat and called: "Whoozis, Auntie Florence? Whoozis?"

It seemed that they were speaking to him—he could see their lips move and form the words. He reached out his right hand to touch the vision—God! Could it be real? Surely this was solid substance his hand was touching, yet different from the cold steel of the cable up which he had been climbing for months—weary months. It was *different!*

WITH a supreme effort he tore his eyes open. A hoarse cry of thanksgiving burst from his cracked lips, and he beat for a moment on the taut, springy surface his hand had touched. *It was the end of the cable* where it was fastened to the net covering of the balloon! He was there! He had made the grade!

Whistle has never been able to tell just how he made the climb from the end of the cable, up the light, flimsy meshes of the net, and to the basket-edge. Only the guiding hand of Providence, trying to expiate in a degree the tortures through which it had just forced him, could explain it. Let it suffice that two huddled little tots, whimpering with cold and terror, heard a wild cry from just below them; a moment later they looked up to see an unexpected shadow appear suddenly over the side of the basket, a shadow which pulled itself slowly over the edge, and with a wild, laughing cry, "Here's Whoozis!" fell in an unconscious heap beside them.

Frightened by this new addition to the terrors of the night, but seeming to sense comfort and companionship in his presence, the two tots, with rare presence of mind—or it may have been instinct—pulled and tugged at the unresisting figure of Whistle Lewis. The chill of the wind quickly cooled his sweat-soaked garments and roused his mind to the realization that his work was not finished.

With reassuring words to the children, he pulled himself upright, then reaching for the release cord, he gave it a swift pull. Almost instantly the effect was felt as the gas poured from the escape-vent. Buoyancy lessened; the big balloon yielded itself to the pull of the driving ship, and Lewis felt that intangible but certain feeling which senses rather than sees that "ground-speed" is being made. Sobbing with very relief, he held his grip on the cord until from the dimly lighted cockpit of the De H he saw the waving arm of Brierly, telling him that all was well and the success of their efforts certain. He tried to wave back, but his head dropped forward, the release-cord slipped from his hand, and with a strained gasp of complete exhaustion, Whistle Lewis slumped to the bottom of the basket.

"JIMMY man," called Helen Brierly to her husband, standing tie in hand and looking thoughtfully from the north window of their suite in the Alexandria Hotel, "unless you get that bow knotted in a hurry, we'll delay that ceremony. I'm ready now."

His hand carefully stroking his chin in a typical Brierly gesture, Jim roused himself from his revery. "Eh—what's that? Oh, yes. Righto, Helen. I guess Whistle would hold the performance for us, but we'll not keep him waiting. Be with you in two shakes."

As he struggled with his tie and called down maledictions, man-fashion, upon the imps which made his white bow stand at an angle dangerous to the Brierly left ear, Helen came from the other room. Jim enlisted her aid.

"Sticks up like that cable Whistle climbed night before last," he good-naturedly growled, the while he lifted his well-dimensioned chin so as not to impede operations. Then, to himself: "Damn nervy little rooster!"

Overhearing, as model wives will, a happy laugh rippled from Helen's lips, and planting a kiss just above the center of the now tractable tie, she gently remonstrated with him.

"Remember, Jim, it's a cigar penalty every time you say a swear-word. Better be careful, or your part of the celebration tonight will be smokeless."

Jim, as happy husbands should, acquiesced and was duly penitent. In another moment, however, he had forgotten his penitence and started to launch forth again in the same emphatic fashion.

"Don't worry," admonished Helen. "He's heard it some millions of times already from Florence, though not in your same words. And Jim boy, remember that from tonight on, we're going to be pretty small potatoes to Whistle Lewis. Don't you remember what he said when he recovered consciousness and found Florence's arms around him?"

LIKE a true philosopher, Jim, realizing that the enthroned friendship of real man-pals sooner or later becomes a thing of secondary importance when the one man meets the one woman, smiled whimsically down into her eager face, as Helen continued:

"Of course it was fine, but *you* were just as fine with your single-handed, two-hour fight back to shore against those cross-winds that finally carried you north to Redondo Beach. Colonel Hall told me that he didn't know of another man who could have done it, and made that landing on the beach sand. You staggered around there until Whistle and the babies were on their way to the hospital; then you tumbled down in a heap on the sand yourself."

"Nix on the heroics," laughed Jim. "My head was never meant for a halo. Nope, young lady, that was Whistle's party—"

A QUICK knock at their door interrupted him; the interruption was made permanent by the immediate and precipitate entry of the subject of their conversation. He was formally bedecked and laughing, while to his arm clung a blushing and starry-eyed Florence. Whistle seemed little the worse for his experience except that his hands were heavily bandaged, and his face still bore some of the lines of strain. His first words gave evidence of the state of his feelings.

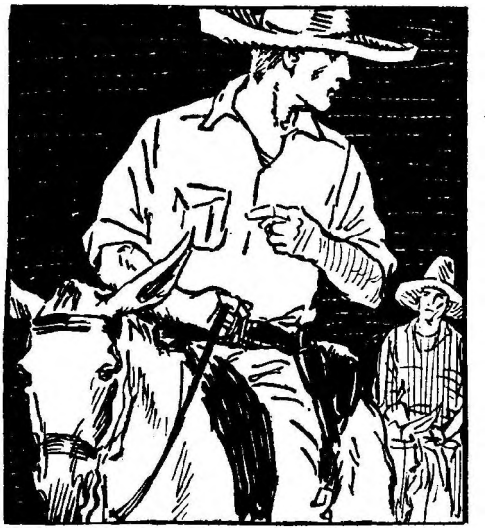
"Mitt me, old campaigner. Resignation accepted, Colonel exonerated, and everything's lovely. Wire from Washington this afternoon. A month with the little car up through the redwoods, and we'll be back here for keeps. Take it from me, the local destinies of the Trans-American are going to be hand-raised from that day on. . . . .

"And say! The darned newspapers have been playing that little shindy of ours up, Jim, until the house got to looking like a National Convention of the Reporters' Association. We've had enough excitement and publicity to last a good many moons, so we slipped out the back way while the rest of the good folks stalled off the newshounds. It's the little church parsonage for us, with just you two for witnesses. Car's below. Let's travel! And—oh say—the youngsters are getting along fine. Two days more, the doctor says, and they'll be ready for another trip. Not *me*, however! Balloons and folks that simply drift along are trouble-makers! I *know!* From now on I'm a staid, sedate, *settled* citizen!"

As the elevator lamps lighted their faces for a moment, the four looked at each other with the swift, understanding glances of those whose interests and happiness are mutually understood.

"Watch your step, please," said the elevator-man.

"Good advice," replied Jim.



Shifty Heels

Wherein Lucky Elkins, adventurer at large, runs into one of his most exciting experiences—by the author of "The Rough-and-Tumblers" and "The Fugitive."

By ROBERT S. LEMMON

"VIEJO" SHAEFER, general superintendent and beloved autocrat of the Guayas & Maranon Railroad, sat at his desk in the company building at Chimbay and swore with vehemence, originality and deadly precision. Every expression of profanity and blasphemy known to two languages flowed from him in a relentless tide crested here and there with oral waves and whitecaps that were unique in his own repertory, developed by years of practice in a land where cursing was king. The headquarters staff, all five of them, bowed before its flood, hunched and dumb like sparrows in the rain. Only the monotonous tootling of the ground-doves in the cactus scrub across the track dared offer response, filling in the silences as the old man paused for breath.

"Jimmy!" The word cut through the tirade like the crack of a whip. "Get Bowers. Tell him I want Elkins. Give him a clear track. Lemme know."

A dreamy-eyed young man with a cigarette drooping from his lips sighed and reached for the telegraph-key before him. His wrist flexed with the speed and ease of the trained dispatcher as he ticked out the message.

"All right, sir," he called across the room presently. "He's leavin' right away on a wildcat. Ought to be here in two hours, the way the line is this mornin'."

Shaefer growled unintelligibly. His outburst was over. From now on he would be the man of action and few words, schooled to meet emergencies pointedly and without evasion.

"Tell Bowers to crowd that wildcat," he directed. "Hold her wide open; make it in an hour and a half. Then gimme one o' them cigarettes o' yours."

Again the nonchalant Jimmy's finger sought his instrument, and the intermittent tapping of the key clicked through the room. A pause, and then the incoming wire took up the story while Jimmy, fumbling in a pocket for his cigarettes, listened casually.

"Just pullin' out," he reported, when the key grew silent. "Lucky's drivin' him-

self, and Manuel's givin' her the steam. I told 'em to take the curves on two wheels."

He rose and crossed the room to his superior's desk, where he shook out a half-dozen cigarettes convenient to Shaefer's hand and laid a box of matches beside them. Long association had trained him in gauging the superintendent's craving for tobacco by the gravity of the situation to be faced. Ordinary emergencies, like washouts and wrecks, called for only one or two of the little brown cylinders. But this catastrophe—

THE first hoot of the wildcat echoing distantly among the mountains coincided with the lighting of the last of Jimmy's pacifiers, and by the time the lone engine wheezed to a halt on the Chimbay siding, Viejo was himself again. With a jerk of his head he motioned Elkins to follow him to a loading-platform well out of earshot from the office and station.

"Them plans of the Rio Rico coal-fields branch have been stolen," he began abruptly. "All three sets of 'em! We've got to get 'em back—in good condition."

"Any idea who took 'em?" asked Lucky.

"Yep. That Dutchman Van Zandt, the two-headed draftsman, ye know. Guess the Carerra crowd must've got to him with money. He skipped sometime last night, and God knows which way he went!"

Elkins' gaze ranged to the mountains hedging the narrow valley in a stupendous maze of peaks, endless plateaus and ragged, impenetrable ravines.

"If he's as foxy as I reckon he is, he's took to them, sir," he commented, indicating the hills. "Give a man a fair start in there, and it'd likely take a right smart while to round him up. Why don't you have the plans drawed over again from the surveyors' notes?"

"There aint time!" Shaefer snapped. "Our concession from the Gov'ment calls for 'em to be handed in at the *palacio* two weeks from tomorrow. If we don't meet that date, our option goes blooie, and Carerra and his gang get a chance to put through their line over the Sayambe route, branchin' off from ours three miles in. It'd take a solid month to work out them field-notes again, even if I had a man to put on 'em. Van Zandt is the only real draftsman in the country, damn him!"

Lucky smiled wryly.

"Then I reckon it's up to me to corral this feller—eh?" he said.

The superintendent nodded vehemently.

"It is—*and get those blueprints.* Use your own judgment, only get 'em!"

ELKINS considered, one hand thoughtfully rubbing the back of his hair below his disreputable felt hat.

"All right, sir, here's the idea," he said finally. "You give it out that Joe Mallon and me's throwed our jobs and took to the bush, huntin' gold or anythin' else you feel like; it'll look more natural for two of us to be goin' pardners than if I went alone. I'll scout round first till I pick up the trail, and then we'll beat it. We ought to be on our way in a couple o' days, anyhow."

"Ye're sure o' this Mallon boy?" Shaefer asked. "He's only a kid."

"Sure he is, but he's there in a pinch. He's worked with me more'n a year now, collectin' tickets, and I know him inside out. He's come a long ways since he first landed in this hyar country, broke and touchin' me for the price of a meal. Dead game, that boy, sir."

"All right, then, go to it. Double pay if ye win. Take this wad o' bills for expenses. An' if ye can, bring that Dutchman back in good enough shape so he wont curl up the first crack I hit him!"

With a great show of argument and anger for the benefit of those who might be watching, the superintendent returned to his office, leaving Elkins there with an exasperated: "Well, quit if ye want to! I aint got time to talk to a man who don't want to work. Ye're fired!"

And Lucky, accepting the fake dismissal with a shrug of his angular shoulders, left his engine standing on the siding and trudged away in the direction of the village of Rigua, three miles down the line.

EL GRAN HOTEL RIGUA, hard by the tank where wheezing locomotives halted to replenish with sparkling mountain water the supply which their struggles to climb the grades of those same mountains had depleted, was typical of its class among Andean hostelries. A row of eucalyptus trees, straight, slim and branchless for a dozen yards above the ground, raised a leafy awning along its front. Scrub agaves dotted the baked, hard earth beneath them,

forming a sort of entrance walk—for in seeking to avoid their bayonet leaves, you came willy-nilly to the low porch with its balconied roof.

When Lucky Elkins had threaded the agaves and gained the porch in the hot glare of that December noon, he hesitated not a moment in his choice of entrance. Nonchalantly and quite as though no purpose other than to slake his thirst actuated him, he sauntered into the bar and rested contemplative elbows upon it. A nod to the barkeeper betokened familiarity with his tastes on the part of that slovenly individual. Immediately a pint of imported beer appeared from the gloom below the counter, foamed jovially as its cap was flipped off, and took its place beside a goblet within easy reach. Lucky unearthed two ten-cent pieces from a pocket, shoved them toward the decrepit cash register and slowly drained the bottle.

His refreshment achieved, and the inmates of the room duly noted without their having been aware of even stray glances cast in their direction, he lounged down the length of the bar, lighted a cigarette from a box of matches standing on its far end, and knocked at the jamb of a curtained doorway in the rear wall of the room.

If his signal was answered, the response was inaudible to any ears but his own; yet in a moment the curtains swayed and closed behind him sluggishly. He had vanished from the barroom as completely as if he had never entered it.

"*Bo' jou', Marie!*" Ill-pronounced though the French words were, they brought a gleam of pleasure to the face of the old woman who sat crocheting by the window of the living-room and workshop he had entered.

"Ah, Mistair Lucky, *bon jour, bon jour!*" she exclaimed. "You are ze welcome sight! Will you not have ze glass of somet'ing for to drink? Eet make so hot, today!"

"Thanks; I've just had a couple, Marie. I kind of dropped in to have a look at that batch o' *toquilla* hats you've got in from Cuenca." He spoke unnecessarily loudly, as though for the benefit of some one out in the bar, and the meaning look which accompanied the words gave Marie a cue which she picked up volubly.

"But yes, *certainment!*" she ejaculated, laying down her work. "Ah, zey are ze *splendid* hats, of ze best Manta leaf, an' made all under ze water, each one entire. Since two mont' I have wait for zem, Mistair Lucky, an' w'en zey come, an' I open ze bale, I say right away: 'Here ees ze ver' one for Mistair Elkins, who say for so long how he want one for heemself.' Come, I show zem to you, each an' every, but ze one especial—zis way, *s'il vous plait.*"

WHILE she was speaking, she had silently balanced a chair behind the curtains in such a way that anyone moving them aside to enter must inevitably overturn it. Thus fortified against eavesdropping, she pushed open a door, and Elkins followed her into a sort of storeroom, heavy walled as a precaution against possible theft of its contents.

"Now we can talk," she announced with satisfaction as she closed the door behind her. "W'at ees ze mattair?"

"You know that feller Van Zandt, up to Viejo's office?"

"Ze one wit' hair like ze color of *paramo* grass? For a sureness, I know heem."

"Well, he's skipped, run away, vamoosed with a lot o' mighty important papers."

"O-o-ooh, ze *canaille!*" There was a sharp resentment in Marie's tone which bespoke unswerving loyalty to the cause of the American operators of the railroad and corresponding bitterness toward those who betrayed them. "An' for why he do zat?"

"Because he seen a chance to make some easy money, I reckon," Elkins explained. "You've heard of Arturo Carerra, the boss o' Sayambe Province? Well, he'd pay most anythin' to have them papers, or at least get 'em out o' the railroad's hands. Likely he's back of it."

"An' so you go after heem?"

"Not by a blamed sight! He's too wise a lad to have the stuff himself, prob'ly. I've got to work from the other end and trail this feller Van Zandt."

"You know w'ich way he go?"

"No—that's why I'm here. Mebbe you can give me a line on him."

Marie shrugged expressive shoulders. "I help you all I can, but eet ees not mooch. Ze Van Zandt, he have come each day to my bar for hees nip—zat ees all I know."

"He did, eh?" Lucky commented. "Ever have anythin' to say?"

"Ver' leetle. Mos'ly he joost say,

'Hello,' drink an' go out—excep' w'en he wit' somebody."

"Who hung around with him, gener'ly?"

Marie's eyes turned thoughtfully to the ceiling as she began to check off on her fingers.

"*Eh bien!* Zere was Señor Moncaillo, who own ze *botica* w'ere zey sell tobac'—you know heem?"

Lucky nodded casually. The name suggested nothing of significance to him.

"An' ze *jefe politico,* Ramon Aguirre. Ze man who sell tickets in ze *estación,* too—I not know hees name. An' las' week, t'ree-four days, he come wit' ze Major Luza. An'——"

"Wait a minute," Elkins interrupted. "You mean Eduardo Luza, from Buena Vista?"

"But yes, ze major of cavalry who limp w'en he walk."

Lucky leaned forward. "Tell me what they did, far as you saw 'em, Marie."

The old woman's black eyes snapped with concentration as her mind ran back over the incidents to be recalled. She seemed correlating their details, fitting them into a report that would be brief and to the point.

"*Eh, bien!*" she exclaimed finally. "Eet ees like zis: Each time M'sieu' Van Zandt or ze Major Luza ees here alone, at ze bar. *Alors* ze other come in, an' zey say '*Bueno' dia*'.' Zey stan' an' talk, I know not w'at about, an' drink some whisky. One time zey eat *la comida* together. Talk, talk all time. An' always *el Major,* he pay for ze drink an' food."

"You say you never heard what they were talkin' about?"

"Nevair, Mistair Lucky. Zey speak so deep in ze t'roat, an' ver' quiet."

Elkins rose and held out his hand.

"'By, Marie—for a while. I reckon you've slipped me the tip I wanted, and I'm on my way. It's a long shot, but it looks pretty good."

"Ah, zen I am glad!" she answered heartily. For ze Americans I do w'at I can—I am a Frenchwoman!" Her tone changed abruptly. "You t'ink ze Major have ze papers, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"Mebbe him and them aint far apart," Lucky answered dryly. "He's Carerra's son-in-law, you know."

He opened the door and stepped out into the curtained room, then turned and came back.

"Just so things'll look natural, Marie," he said in a low tone, "I'll take one o' them *toquilla* hats and carry it goin' out. Pick me a good one—I want it, anyway."

ELKINS' exit from El Gran Hotel Rigua was a triumph of dissimulation. Not even the most suspiciously inclined among the loungers in the bar would have imagined that anything but the purchase of one of Marie Zulette's excellent Panamas had been his intention, as he shambled to the door, examining the hat and followed by Marie's voluble eulogies on its merit and low price. Even the ultimate touch of stuffing a slender roll of native currency into his trousers pocket, as though at the conclusion of a *bona fide* transaction, he accomplished with a fine sense of dramatic detail.

Outside, he rambled leisurely toward the one general store in the village, where he busied himself selecting a double prospecting outfit: food, pots and pans, blankets, pickax and shovel, and the like. Then to the hut of one Pedro Sanchez, ancient and wizened, muleteer for no man knew how many decades, and gossiper inveterate, whence he emerged after an hour's secret conclave with a puzzled look in his eyes. And finally to the zinc-roofed station, where, chatting with the agent, he awaited the coming of the afternoon freight which would carry him down the line to the railroad quarters among the vaporous foothills.

"The old man seemed in sort of a hurry this mornin'," Bowers greeted him as he swung down from the caboose at sunset.

"Yep—he fired me," Lucky answered with a quiver of one eyelid. "And Joe Mallon, too! We pull out tomorrow—*huntin' for gold.*"

"I get ye," was the foreman's terse rejoinder. "I'll put Shorty on in your place, an' Halpin in Joe's. Know when ye'll git back?"

Lucky shrugged eloquently. "Mebbe Monday, mebbe later—this gold's likely to be right hard to locate. But we've got to get her staked out and the claim filed at Chimbay inside o' two weeks—or it'll be too late," he finished meaningly.

After supper Elkins maneuvered Mallon away from the other men and explained the situation to him. The boy reacted to it buoyantly, his face alight at the prospect of adventure.

"Mebbe there'll be some gun-play—

huh?" he exclaimed. But Elkins cut him short.

"Not if we can help it, Joe. The more things you can settle without fightin', the longer you'll live—remember that. This aint goin' to be no scalpin' party, less'n it has to."

THERE was indeed nothing warlike about the appearance of the little cavalcade which pulled out of Rigua in the early afternoon of the following day and plodded up the sun-baked trail that snaked endlessly toward the crest of the Licay Range.

First rode Lucky, slouched on the back of Shifty Heels, the gray-faced and knowing little saddle-mule that had carried him on many another mountain expedition where roads were none, and sure-footedness was at a premium. Next came a diminutive, lop-eared but unbelievingly enduring burro, heaped high with equipment. From beneath the load his wise and quizzical face peered out humorously, missing nothing despite the lowliness of his rôle. And bringing up the rear, a gaudy red and blue poncho strapped behind his saddle as a precaution against the chill of the high peaks, Joe Mallon bestrode a black counterpart of Shifty Heels and hummed an almost forgotten ditty of his New York gutter days as he watched the trail swing upward into the blue ahead.

Beside their bivouac fire that night, in a grassy ravine four thousand feet above the village and partly sheltered from the keen wind that streamed down from the crest of the range, Elkins enlarged upon the plan he had sketched to Mallon.

"You see, Joe, this hyar town o' Buena Vista that we're headin' for, she's the headquarters for Major Luza. Seems he's stationed there, kind of, and when he aint gallivantin' round the country after the señoritas, or messin' into other men's business, you're likely to find him paradin' across the Plaza, pushin' a chestful o' tin medals and gener'ly actin' high, wide and fancy. It's a right long chance we're takin', but I reckon mebbe it's fifty-fifty that the Dutchman lit out for Luza's home town, at that. Carerra lives a hundred miles from Buena Vista, and Luza aint gener'ly known to be mixed up much with the old man's gang, so they may figure the plans'll be pretty safe there. It's the only real lead we have, anyway. Blind scoutin' round the country at large wouldn't be worth the tryin'; she's too damn big and straight up and down."

"What'll we do if Luza an' Van Zandt aint there?" Mallon queried.

"Son, we'll just use our little old beans. Buena Vista's kinder like a firecracker with two fuses: each half's layin' to knock the block off t'other half if somebody'll only light the match. It's the greatest little town for crooked politics you ever saw. Why, on 'lection day the fellers that happen to own the army at the time throw a guard o' spiggoty soldiers round the pollin'-places, and any man that wants to vote has to vote the way they say.

"This mornin' I picked up a line on who's who in Buena Vista, and when we get there, you will see how it's worked. —Hey you long-eared son-of-a-gun!" he broke off suddenly, "stop fishin' in my pockets! If you want sugar-cane, why don't you ask for it proper, 'stead o' tryin' to rob me? Here's a chunk—now run away and quit pesterin' me."

HE drew a piece of ripe cane from the side pocket of his coat and held it before him as he squatted cross-legged by the fire. Shifty Heels reached a soft muzzle over his shoulder, extended flexible lips, and gathered in the tidbit daintily. Her big eyes rolled toward Mallon as though estimating his opinion of her boldness. Then, withdrawing, she munched the sweetish stuff appreciatingly in the darkness at Lucky's back.

"Seems stuck on yer, that mule," observed the boy. "I always thought mules was kinder mean birds."

"Sometimes they are, and sometimes they aint, Joe. That's about all I can make out of 'em. But this Shifty Heels, she's pretty near human, so long as you treat her good. Old Pedro's had her for years, made her a kind o' pet, and wont let nobody hire her but me. She follows him round like a dog whenever he lets her loose.

"She's queer, though, at that. Some days she's cranky, and then she'll be good for a week. There's just one thing you can always count on with Shifty Heels: if you hit her a clout when she don't deserve it, she wont never set easy till she's squared up for it. It may take her one second, or it may take her a year; but you can be dead sure she'll pay you back good sooner or later."

He got to his feet and threw more wood

on the fire, standing with his back gratefully to the heat as the flames leaped. Out beyond the circle of light Mallon's picketed mule settled down gruntingly for the night. Presently Shifty Heels and the burro followed suit, audibly but unseen.

Lucky yawned and reached for his blankets.

"Reckon I'll turn in, boy. We've got a long ride ahead of us tomorrow."

WITH the small adventures of the next two days, the hoof-slippings and falls and laborious detours for the circumvention of sundry obstacles of the trail, this story shall not deal. They were only such as every traveler encounters in that wheelless land, and so merit but the merest mention. But of the goal to which they led, Buena Vista, the City of the Beautiful View, many pages might be written as the two Americans saw it that third morning of their journey.

"There she lays," Joe, Lucky called back, drawing rein at the verge of a descent that wound interminably down to a city of pink- and blue- and white-walled houses, red-roofed and clustered on an unbelievably green and brown plain. "That's the birdie. Fifty miles from a railroad, and yet they say her gutters are paved with marble. Aint she pretty?"

"You said somethin'!" Mallon agreed. "Don't look as if she was boilin' over with fightin', I'll say. Suppose that big square in the middle is this guy Luza's parade ground?"

"I reckon mebbe so. Here goes to find out, anyhow."

Elkins joggled his boots against Shifty Heels' ribs; the comical burro plodded sturdily after; and so they came to mud and agave walls, glaring streets where Indian women trotted along spinning with miniature distaff and spindle the coarse wool of the mountains, and at last gained the Plaza and a warehouse-like building which bore a sign proclaiming it ornately to be the Hotel Paris.

"Remember, now, if anybody asks us, we're just stoppin' here for a few days before we go on into the Sierra Negro lookin' for gold," cautioned Lucky in a low tone. "The lad that runs this joint belongs to the political gang that's against Carerra, but we'll go easy with him for a while."

They left the main street, rode up an alley, and arrived abruptly in a paved and roofless *patio* in the center of the building. A dejected saddle-horse stood hitched to one of the pillars of the arcaded walk that surrounded it. An equally unkempt Indian lounged in the shade of the balcony.

The Americans tied their animals out of kicking distance of each other and of the somnolent horse, and clumped into the hotel office. After the customary palavering and much summoning of barefooted servants on the part of the proprietor, they were assigned to a big bare room that overlooked the Plaza.

"Don't see no signs o' that Major guy doin' his 'squads right,' " commented Mallon, peering through the *jalousies*. "Not even an alley cat movin' out there."

"It's *siesta* time; that's why," Lucky rejoined. "By the time we've had grub and a smoke, the town'll wake up. No use prowlin' much 'fore then. Let's eat."

THE sun was low in the west when, after a sauntering exploration of the city that yielded nothing tangible save a knowledge of its general street arrangement, they returned to the Plaza and sat down on a bench to watch the passers-by. Presently out of the throng appeared a delicate-featured old fellow in rusty black who, his eye catching the curl of smoke from Mallon's cigarette, paused and courteously asked for a match to relight his own cigar. While he ceremoniously bowed and scraped and expressed undying gratitude for the favor, Lucky appraised him swiftly and then addressed him in Spanish:

"We have heard much of the magnificent drilling of the First National Cavalry here in Buena Vista, señor. Can you tell us when it can be seen?"

"That I do not know, señor. They never go on the parade without their Major, the splendid officer, Eduardo Luza, and I am told that he has been away for many days and none knows when he will return. It is a great pity—you should see them at their maneuvers, a noble sight."

An expression of genuine disappointment crossed Elkins' face.

"We are sorry," he said, "because we hoped much to see them, and will be here only a few days. We are going on into the Sierra Negro."

"It is a noble spectacle, a sight to thrill the soul," urged the old gentleman. "But if you must go—*pues*—you must go!"

He lifted his hat and doddered away, his thin black stick tapping on the marble paving blocks.

When he had gone, Mallon turned a wry face to his companion.

"Score one fer Carerra—eh, Lucky?"

"Sure looks that way, Joe. We'll see what the old geezer who runs the hotel has to say about it."

WHAT that oily and restless-eyed individual had to say was plenty, though it dealt largely with the reputed barracks life of the First National Cavalry and was not at all favorable to that august body's personal code of morals.

Elkins and Mallon led him on, coaxing him adroitly from one point to the next, feeling out the exact depth of his dislike for the troopers and the régime which they represented. Then, in a voice pitched so low that even Mallon at his elbow hardly heard the words, Lucky fired his shot:

"Señor Narvaez, where is the Major Luza?"

If the question had been a literal volley of shot and shell, it could not have taken the proprietor more aback. He gasped, turned pale and tried to hide his confusion in voluble protestations of ignorance. But Lucky was insistent.

"There's no need for you to get scared, sir. I want to find this Luza right bad, and" (here he pulled the trigger again) "Señor Pareja told me you'd know where he is."

Narvaez' eyes narrowed this time, drew to mere slits of glittering black.

"Señor Jorge Pareja, of the Hacienda Cara?" he asked guardedly.

Lucky nodded.

"Then you are not a friend of the Carerra party?"

"Did you ever see an *Americano* who's worked on the railroad who was?" Lucky countered.

"A-a-ah! So you are one of us, a *Liberalista!*" Narvez whispered, his whole attitude changing. "*Bueno, pues*—I tell you:

"Last month he go away north, to Quito, to Cachabamba, to Guayas. Why? That I do not know. Our comrades they watch him, as always, but at last he escape them and is not seen until two days since, when he ride into Buena Vista, go to his *quinta,* the house where he live in the country, and next morning ride away south toward Cuenca. He not come back."

"Anybody with him?" Lucky asked.

"No, señor, he is quite alone by himself."

"He stayed at the *quinta* only one night, eh? Who is there now?"

"Only the *mayordomo* and three servants. My boy, he was hunt the wild pigeon in the cornfields near there all today, and he see no one else. It is a lonely place, señor."

"These four men—what are they like? The reg'lar mongrel kind?"

Narvaez shrugged scornfully. "Yes—dogs who bark but never bite."

"H-m-m," mused Lucky. "You're a real patriot, Señor Narvaez. *Muchas gracias* for what you have told us. And now, two of your good cigars?"

HE pulled a roll of bills from his pocket and laid it on the counter as the proprietor reached for the portly native cheroots. But with a gesture so covert as almost to escape detection, Narvaez waved the money away.

"No, no, my friend! My cigars, my food, my poor house—all are yours! It is for the *Republica,* the noble *Republica,* that we would both die to save from the oppressor. You are a comrade, a *Liberalista,* and you must not pay."

As they moved away from the office, Mallon was tense with excitement.

"Let's shoot out now an' raid that shack!" he exclaimed under his breath. "Gee, I'll bet Viejo'll be tickled to see them plans again!"

"Hold your hosses, boy," Lucky admonished. "We'll 'tend to that tomorrow. It's pretty near dark now, and the house is out four or five miles, from what I've heard."

"But he might git back 'fore then an' burn the plans!"

"No, he wont." The positiveness of conviction was in Elkins' tone. "Nobody travels in this country after dark. As to burnin' the blueprints, you can bet he wont do that. His gang wants to use 'em themselves, I reckon. You see, the first three or four miles o' Viejo's route is the same as Carerra's, so that much o' the survey's already done for 'em.

"The hell of it is," he went on, "we can't tell whether the plans are there at the house or not. Van Zandt swiped 'em first-off, but mebbe he aint met up with Luza since then. Even if he did, Luza's gone pikin' off to Cuenca in kind of a hurry,

an' more'n likely he took the stuff along with him. I don't see no partic'lar reason why he'd leave it with the Dutchman."

"Why don't one of us light out after him, an' t'other one search the house?" Joe was keen for action of some sort.

"Because two men are better'n one on a job like this," Lucky answered grimly. "Sometimes these spiggoties are bad actors if they get the drop on you. Wont take us long to size up things at the shack, and if we can't beat nothin' out o' the fellers there, then we'll hit the trail south. We'll be out o' here 'fore daylight, anyhow."

THE way to the *quinta* of Major Eduardo Luza proved longer than they had expected, and hindered as they were by the pack-burro, whose presence was necessitated by the plan to take up the Cuenca trail immediately if examination of the place proved fruitless, it was long past sunrise when they came in sight of the rambling, one-story building in its setting of eucalyptus and densely massed orange trees.

Not a sign of life was to be seen as they halted to reconnoiter from the crest of a hill that rose directly from the corral behind the house. No smoke from the cooking hut at one side, no Indians loitering about, not even a dog to give warning of their approach. To all appearances the whole place was deserted.

"Bet they've all beat it," Joe ventured disconsolately, his face a study in disappointment. But Elkins shook his head.

"I don't reckon so, kid. It looks queer, but you never can tell how late these black-and-tans'll sleep when the boss is away."

"Come on, then, let's find out," blurted Mallon. He urged his mule down the hill trail, Lucky following on Shifty Heels, and the patient, noncommitttal burro bringing up the rear. In a silence equaled only by the brooding mystery of the *quinta* itself, they skirted the empty stock-corral, the golden-laden orange groves, and reached the square of baked earth that served as courtyard.

"We'll leave the critters here," ordered Lucky in a whisper, dismounting. "They'll stand without hitchin', I guess. Come on—we'll have this gang awake mighty *pronto*."

He strode to the door and beat a peremptory summons on it that echoed hollowly through the interior. No answer. No sound of any sort save the stamping of the animals behind them, pestered by flies.

"Lemme at it—I'll wake 'em up!" growled Mallon. He drew back his foot and kicked the door once, twice, three times, with a force that threatened to rip it from its hinges.

"*Hsst*—hear that? Sounded like somebody movin'," Elkins whispered.

"I'll move 'em!" Joe answered roughly, delivering another series of jarring kicks. But this time they could detect no response at all. Minute followed minute through oppressive silence.

"Joe, mebbe you're right 'bout their havin' beat it," Lucky admitted slowly. "Wait hyar a second while I shinny up to that window and see if—"

"Hands up, dere, you!"

SEEMINGLY at their very shoulders the words ripped through the still morning air with peremptory harshness.

"Keep dem up, now, der both of you, or I blow your brains oudt! Now turn aroundt so I can see who you are."

A dozen yards away, coatless and shoeless as he had slipped out of bed and escaped through a rear window to turn the tables on his would-be captors, stood Van Zandt, covering them unwaveringly with a double-barreled shotgun.

"S-o-o—it is you, eh?" he snarled, recognizing them. "I guess you did not think I would be here! What der hell do you want, I wish to know?"

"You know damn well what we want," Elkins returned coldly. "And you're goin' to hand 'em over to us right lively, too!"

Van Zandt chuckled ironically.

"Der plans I draw for der old bear Viejo Shaefer, I suppose—eh? An' if I tell you I do not have dem, what you say den?"

"I say yer a damn liar!" burst out Mallon, beside himself with rage at the other's mastery of the situation.

"Den I must be one, since you say so," Van Zandt answered sarcastically, though his florid cheeks reddened at the insult. He seemed bent on prolonging his captives' discomfiture, finding a certain relish in their helplessness. "And if I tell you der Major Luza rode away with dem two days ago—I am a liar again?"

Mallon nodded. Evidently the Dutchman's coolness could not be shaken. The twin muzzles of the gun in his hands cov-

ered them steadily. Even through his impetuosity the boy recognized the futility of resistance in the face of those threatening black circles.

Van Zandt took a step or two, edging to one side so as to face them squarely, and as he moved, a thought crossed the inscrutable mind of Shifty Heels, waiting patiently in the background. It was early; her breakfast had been light; and for a whole twenty-four hours she had tasted not so much as a nibble of sugar-cane. Since her master had thus shamefully neglected her, she would try her luck with this stout stranger who had come so suddenly upon the scene. Long ears cocked forward, small feet treading daintily, she advanced upon the unsuspecting Van Zandt and nudged her soft gray muzzle into his side at the exact spot where a pocket should have been.

"What der devil! Get oudt, you—" he screamed, terrified by the apparent attack from the rear. *"Get oudt!"* With his left hand he struck savagely at the face at his elbow, eyes still along the gun-barrels as he held them true with his right.

The blow was a solid one, for all the awkwardness of its delivery, and it caught Shifty Heels fair upon her sensitive nose. With a snort of terror and pain she reared back and stood undecided and quivering, a picture of outraged feelings.

Ludicrous though the incident was in some respects, it seemed to crystallize Van Zandt's plan of action. He gave the mule no second glance as he raised his voice, shouting in Spanish:

"Hóla! Miguel, Pedro, Alfredo, Rafael—bring der rope, *pronto!"*

INSTANTLY arose within the house a sound of wild scurrying. Held helpless as they were by their captor's gun, Elkins and Mallon heard it with sinking hearts. With their backs against the door, they would be easy victim's when Luza's men, under orders from their employer's accomplice should open it for a rear attack. In another minute—

The boy stole a glance at his companion.

"Lucky,"—the whisper was desperate, so low-pitched as to be inaudible a yard away—"I'm goin' to make a play fer me gun!"

"Don't you, boy! Look at the mule!" hissed Elkins.

Out in the sunny barrenness of the courtyard Shifty Heels had come to a conclusion. The trustfulness, the friendly side of her nature had vanished, routed completely by that blow across the nose. In its place surged up the other, the resentful phase, cold, calculating, unequivocally hostile. She would show this big brute something.

Swiftly and yet in perfect silence she backed toward Van Zandt, squarely behind him and measuring the distance to a fraction of a hair. Another step, another, a final glance from an eye whose white showed wickedly—and two iron-shod hoofs, driven with all the power of muscles trained by uncounted mountain miles, lashed out vindictively and caught him full between the shoulders.

A thud of metal against flesh, a grunt that but for lack of breath would have been a howl of pain, a deafening roar as the shotgun, flying afar, struck the side of the house and exploded harmlessly, and Van Zandt lay flat on the ground, while Elkins, feet and fists flying, completed the havoc his mule had begun.

"Mind the door, Joe. Git them men!"

But Mallon needed not the warning. With revolver drawn and a grim set to his mouth, he was already lining up the defenders of the house of Luza with their backs to their own wall. Pedro, Miguel, Alfredo, Rafael—by the time Lucky had reduced Van Zandt to a state of complete submission, he had them all.

"Hold 'em there, Joe," panted Elkins, arising from his labors. "I'll search the place."

He booted Van Zandt with his foot. "Git up, you! Lead me to them plans."

Cowed, half blubbering, all the arrogance beaten out of him, the man blundered to his feet and into the house, Lucky at his heels. When they emerged, Elkins carried under his arm a fat roll wrapped in oilcloth. Methodically and skillfully he began to tie it behind the saddle of the now quiet Shifty Heels.

"Well, I suppose now you have der plans, you don't want me any more?" Van Zandt mumbled sullenly.

Elkins favored him with an unpleasant stare.

"You're damn right *I* want you," he drawled succinctly. "But I want you to take the pack off'n that burro and git aboard yourself. Viejo Shaefer's got a date with you, and you're comin' right straight along with us."

The Great Marquenmore Case

(What Has Already Happened:)

THAT fateful April night when Guy Marquenmore appeared so unexpectedly at his father's country house after seven years' absence in London, old Sir Anthony was very ill; and Guy told Braxfield, the old butler who admitted him, that he would not stay the night, and wished to see only his younger brother and sister—Harry and Valencia. In the interview that followed, Guy told Harry and Valencia what they already knew, in a vague way—that he had done well on the London stock exchange. He told them also that he was about to take a year's business trip to America and that he wished them to know that on his father's death he would not accept the inheritance of the Marquenmore estate, but would turn it over to Harry. The only thing he wished now was a certain green leather pocketbook from a desk in his old room. This was procured for him, and he presently departed—to keep a business appointment, he said, at the Sceptre Inn, near by.

That night Death struck twice at the Marquenmore family. Old Sir Anthony passed away naturally in his sleep. And next morning the body of Guy was found beside a lonely path across the downs, a bullet-hole, made by a weapon fired at close range, in his temple.

It developed that there had been two other visitors to Marquenmore the evening preceding Guy's murder: Mrs. Tretheroe, an old flame of Guy's who had married an army officer and had but lately returned, a widow, from India—Mrs. Tretheroe had called after Guy left, anxious to see him. And John Harborough, who had left the Marquenmore vicinity about the time Guy went away seven years before, and who had been a rival of young Marquenmore for the lady who had married neither—Harborough had called before Guy, to pay his respects and inquire for old Sir Anthony's health.

These three people, then, had come back to Marquenmore after a lapse of years. Now one of them was dead, murdered. So perhaps it was not surprising that at the inquest Mrs. Tretheroe hysterically accused Harborough of murdering the heir to Marquenmore—who, she said, had called upon her late the preceding night, found the old flame reawakened and proposing marriage, had been accepted.

By J. S. FLETCHER

There's a very special allure to the mystery stories by J. S. Fletcher that makes them exceptionally enjoyable. And this latest one is even more captivating than his famous "The Middle of Things" and "Black Money."

Mr. Blick, the detective, however, and Fransimerry, foreman of the coroner's jury, felt that thus far there was no convincing evidence against Harborough. And there were a number of puzzling aspects to the crime—among them the post-midnight conference described by Grimsdale, landlord of the Sceptre Inn, between Guy Marquenmore and two well-dressed strangers. *(The story continues in detail:)*

CHAPTER X

THE RING AND THE PIPE

THE barrister possessed himself of the tobacco-pipe, examined it and passed it up to the Coroner, who in his turn looked it over before handing it to Mr. Fransimerry and his fellow-jurymen. It went the round of the twelve and returned to the barrister, who held it up for Grimsdale to look at once more.

"You found this—which is a brier-wood tobacco-pipe, of superior manufacture, silver-mounted—on the supper-table in your parlor after the three men had gone. Grimsdale?" he asked. "Did you conclude that one of them had left it there?"

"Certain of it, sir."

"Why, now, are you certain? I suppose you'd had other customers in that parlor, during the previous day?"

"Yes sir. But I'd laid the supper-table myself. That pipe, sir, when I found it, was lying on a small plate—where one of the gentlemen had sat. And it had just been used, sir—the bowl was warm."

"I congratulate you on your power of observation, Grimsdale," said the barrister with a smile. He laid the pipe on the table before him, among his papers, and turned to the Coroner. "I think, sir, you spoke of adjourning at this stage?" he continued. "If I may make a suggestion, it would, I think, be best if the adjournment is of such a nature as to afford time for more searching inquiry; it seems to me that there is a good deal to go into."

"We will adjourn to this day fortnight," said the Coroner. He turned to the jury and gave them some instructions and advice as to keeping their minds open until further evidence was put before them. Then, with a murmured expression of his hope that by the time they met again, the police would be able to throw more light on what was a very painful problem, he

left his chair, obviously relieved that the morning's proceedings had come to an end.

THE old dining-hall rapidly cleared: spectators, witnesses and officials began to unpack themselves out of nooks and corners and to drift away in groups and knots, discussing the events and revelations of the morning. Mrs. Tretheroe went off with her two guests; Harry Marquenmore and his sister left the room in company with Harborough; the jurymen filed away in two's and three's. But in the center of the temporary court, around the big table at which the lawyers and officials had sat, with books and papers before them, several men gathered, and began to discuss matters informally—the Chief Constable, Blick, the barrister who had represented the authorities, Chilford, Walkinshaw, and Mr. Fransimerry, who, in spite of the Coroner's admonition, felt himself justified in hearing whatever there was to hear.

"What I feel about it," Chilford was saying as Mr. Fransimerry joined the group, "is just this—and I say it as solicitor to the Marquenmore family: there must be a searching investigation into Guy Marquenmore's business affairs and his private life in London. This affair was not originated here, nor engineered here! If Detective-sergeant Blick wants to get at the bottom of things, he ought to begin in London, where Guy Marquenmore has lived for some years past."

"You think he was followed down here?" suggested the barrister, who, business being over, had lighted a cigarette, and sitting on the edge of the table, was comfortably smoking. "You think this was a job put up in London?"

"I think there's every probability that all and everything that we've heard this morning has practically nothing whatever to do with the real truth about the murder of Guy Marquenmore!" answered Chilford. "I'm quite certain, in my own mind, that John Harborough is as innocent as I am, and I'm not much less certain that the two men who were with Guy at the Sceptre are also innocent. The probability is that those men will be heard of—they'll come forward. You'll find that the meeting at the Sceptre—an odd one, if you like!—was nothing but a business meeting. No, we've got nowhere yet! As I say, if Blick, there, wants to do some ferret-work, he's got to go back and start in London. How do we know what Guy Marquenmore's affairs were—or his secrets? For all we know, somebody or other may have had good reason for getting rid of him."

"What puzzles me considerably," observed the Chief Constable, "is—how did those two men who were with Guy Marquenmore at the Sceptre come into and get out of the district unobserved? My men have already made the most exhaustive inquiries at every railway station in the neighborhood, and we've got hold of nothing!"

"Strangers, too!" said Walkinshaw.

"How do we know that?" demanded Chilford. "There are a tidy lot of men within an area of twenty miles who might have business dealings with Guy Marquenmore. His business here that night might have been just as much with those two men as with his brother and sister. Probably it was."

"Grimsdale asserts that the first man was an American," remarked Walkinshaw. "We haven't a plenitude of Americans in residence about here. I could count them on my fingers."

"That's so," said the Chief Constable. "If the man was an American,—and Grimsdale says he's met a good many in his time, so he ought to know,—he came from somewhere outside our neighborhood. But what beats me is—how did he, and the other man, get away unobserved on Tuesday morning?"

MR. FRANSIMERRY, who, like Blick, had listened attentively but silently to these exchanges of opinion and idea, coughed gently, as if deprecating any idea that he wished to interfere.

"Talking of—of America," he remarked, "it may be of no importance, and not even relative to the subject under discussion, but I may observe that a mail steamer left Southampton for New York at one o'clock on Tuesday afternoon last. Now, Marquenmore is within thirty miles of Southampton by road, and if this man—the first man—was an American, it is possible that he journeyed to Southampton, caught that boat and was away to sea before hearing of what had befallen the man whom he had entertained to supper. I know about that boat, because I mailed some antiquarian documents to a friend of mine in the United States by it."

The Chief Constable twisted his military

mustache and considered Mr. Fransimerry.

"Um!" he remarked. "Might be a good deal in that—he might certainly have taken this place in his way between London and Southampton. But the queer thing is, we can't hit on a trace of his coming or going!"

"Why did he never return to the Sceptre—where three pounds, four shillings in change was due him?" asked Walkinshaw.

"I don't know," said the Chief Constable. "But I'm very sure of this: whoever he was, he didn't board the early morning train from Selcaster to London, either at Selcaster or at Mitbourne that particular morning. There were only five passengers went aboard at Selcaster and two at Mitbourne, and the railway folks know every man Jack of 'em!"

"It's not necessary to board a train to get into or out of a district," observed Walkinshaw. "My own belief is that these two men came here and left here by motor-car."

The Chief Constable looked at Walkinshaw and grunted his dissent.

"Do you think I haven't thought of that?" he said. "I've had my men making inquiries of that sort all over the place! Every neighboring village—every farmstead on the hillsides! And not one scrap of information."

"That doesn't surprise me, nor affect what I say," retorted Walkinshaw. "You know as well as I do that where we are now is about the middle of what we'll call a triangle. On each of all three sides of us lies a big main road. On every one of these three roads there's no end of motor-traffic nowadays; I ought to know, for I live on one of them. I reckon there are at least forty cars of one sort or another pass my house every hour."

"Not first thing in the morning!" interrupted the Chief Constable sceptically.

"I'm giving you an average," said Walkinshaw. "From five o'clock onward, anyhow. Do you think one car would be noticed out of the hundreds that come and go? Rot!"

"Where did they put their car while they came to the Sceptre?" asked the Chief Constable.

"I see nothing difficult about that," replied Walkinshaw. "I'd engage to hide any car, however big, in one of our byways or plantations, or in a convenient spot in the hollows of the downs, for a few hours, without anybody seeing it. A lonely district like this, and at night too! Easy enough!"

"If these two men came together in a car," said Chilford, "why did one man present himself at Grimsdale's at nine o'clock in the evening, and the other at two o'clock in the morning?"

"For that matter, if you're going into why's and wherefore's," retorted Wilkinshaw, "where did the first man go when he walked out of the Sceptre's door after first going there? He was away until close on eleven o'clock. Where had he been?"

"Well, we've gone into that too!" said the Chief Constable almost defiantly. "There isn't a soul in the village who saw him!"

"Or who'll admit they did!" sneered Chilford. "He must have gone somewhere, and seen somebody." He pulled out his watch. "I'm going home to lunch," he said. "This is waste of time. My advice to Blick is—go back on your tracks and get to work at the fountainhead, in London!"

"What's Blick say?" asked the barrister with a laugh. He had steadily smoked cigarettes, in silence while the others had talked. "Come, Blick?"

"Blick is a wise young man," said the Chief Constable. "He's going to say nothing. You'll take your own line, eh, Blick?"

"As at present advised," answered Blick with a smile. "Always ready to hear anything in the way of suggestion, though."

"Come along," said Chilford. "It's two o'clock. Glad to give any of you, all of you, some lunch if you'll come with me. Cold food, but plenty of it."

THE men trooped out into the hall. And there, coming from the morning-room, they saw Harry Marquenmore and Valencia. Harry came up to the group and nodded at Blick.

"My sister wants to ask Sergeant Blick a question," he said, turning to the Chief Constable, "—something about my late brother's personal effects."

Blick turned to Valencia; the other men paused, interested and attentive. Valencia looked at the detective with something of anxiety.

"It was you, wasn't it, who examined my brother Guy's clothing—and what he had on him?" she asked. "You mentioned a lot of things in the witness-box

this morning. Did you mention everything?"

"Everything, yes," replied Blick.

"Every single thing that you found?"

"Every single thing!"

Valencia's eyes grew more troubled. She looked round at the attentive faces.

"There—there was something that you didn't mention that my brother certainly had on him when he went out of this house on Monday night at half-past ten," she said, turning again to Blick, "a ring—a ring of very curious workmanship, on the third finger of his right hand."

"He had one ring on the third finger of his right hand," said Blick. "A very fine diamond ring—a single stone."

"He had two rings on the third finger of his right hand," asserted Valencia. "The diamond ring you speak of, and this other one. I spoke of it to him while he was here. It was a ring of very odd appearance—it looked to me like copper, with some enamel work on it. It attracted my attention because—because I know some one who has a ring exactly like it—its duplicate, in fact."

"Yes?" said Blick quietly. "Who?"

"Mrs. Tretheroe," replied Valencia.

The men glanced at each other.

"You are sure your brother was wearing this second, odd-looking ring when he left you?" asked Blick.

"I am certain of it," affirmed Valencia.

"And you say that Mrs. Tretheroe has a similar ring?"

"Which she always wears," said Valencia.

"There was no such ring on your brother's finger when I made my examination," remarked Blick. "But now—I'll see into the matter."

HARRY and Valencia went back to the morning-room, and the others made for the front door. But before they reached it, another interruption in their progress toward Chilford's hospitable table occurred. A young, alert-looking man came up.

"Mr. Chief Constable," he said with confident assurance, "allow me to introduce myself—Mr. Summers, of the Daily *Sentinel*—specially sent down, sir."

"What do you want?" asked the Chief Constable. He was thinking of Chilford's cold roast beef, and had a natural dislike of reporters. "Nothing more to tell you than what you've heard."

"I should be obliged if you'd show me the five-pound note which the presumed American gave to Grimsdale," said Mr. Summers, "and the tobacco-pipe which was left at the Sceptre."

The Chief Constable turned to Blick.

"Any objection to that?" he asked.

"I should say that Mr. Blick—from what I happen to know of his great abilities—has no objection," interposed Mr. Summers, who was clearly one of those young men who leave no stone unturned in the effort to build up good copy. "Mr. Blick, sir, knows the value of publicity—especially in a journal of our immense circulation—as well as I do."

"No objection at all," said Blick, laughing. "There's the note—I suppose you want the number? B.H.887563. The pipe—that's on the table inside—the police have it. Here, I'll show it to you."

HE went back into the old dining-room with Summers; the others waited, chatting about Valencia's information respecting the ring. A few minutes passed; then Blick, looking slightly puzzled, put his head into the hall.

"Chief Constable!" he called. "That pipe—have you got it?"

The Chief Constable turned around with a sudden roused alertness.

"I?" he exclaimed. "No—I haven't it. Isn't it there?"

Blick shook his head, his puzzled look changing to one of vexation. He withdrew into the dining-room again, and the Chief Constable strode after him. The other men followed, each impelled by a curiosity for which they would have found it hard to account. Blick was rummaging about among the books and papers on the table. Two or three policemen were there; so too were a similar number of solicitors' clerks, and the Coroner's officer; at one end of the table a couple of local reporters were busily writing out their notes.

"I've never seen it—at least, since it was held up," said a police-sergeant to whom Blick was appealing. "I saw Grimsdale produce it, and I saw the Coroner and the jurymen handling it, and I've never seen it since."

"Who had it last?" asked Blick.

"I had!" answered the barrister. "I took it from the jury and laid it on the table—just there."

"Well, it's gone!" said Blick. He turned to the police-sergeant. "Have any

of your men gone away who might have been likely to pick it up?"

"Nobody's gone away yet," replied the sergeant. "We're all here—all of us that came."

Blick turned over everything that remained on the table. His face grew curiously set, and he said nothing.

"Everybody that went out of the room passed along that side of the table," remarked the sergeant. "If anybody wanted to pick it up and carry it off, they'd nothing to do but put a hand out. Nobody would notice, in that crush."

"Who should want to carry it off?" asked Blick with asperity.

Summers, who had been assisting in the search, suddenly chuckled.

"There's one man in existence who'd have been jolly glad to carry it off!" he exclaimed.

Blick looked up, frowning. "What do you mean?" he snapped out. "Who—what man?"

"The man who left it on the supper-table at the Sceptre, of course!" retorted Summers with another chuckle. "How do you know he wasn't here, among the deeply interested audience? May have been!"

Blick threw aside a final mass of papers, and turned to the door.

"Well, it's gone, anyway!" he muttered.

"Nice piece of evidence disappeared, too," soliloquized Summers. "You might have traced it to its rightful owner, Mr. Blick. But I think he's got it—what? Clever! However, if he's the person who purloined it off this table, you know one thing: he's somebody who's somewhere close at hand. Eh, Mr. Blick?"

But Blick was once more in the hall, and the Chief Constable and the other men followed him.

"Odd, that, Blick!" said the Chief Constable. "Who can have got it—and why?"

"There may be something in what that newspaper chap says," answered Blick in an undertone. "The man who left it at the Sceptre may have been here this morning, and taken the opportunity to possess himself of it. However—"

"Now come across the park to my house, you fellows, and have some lunch," broke in Chilford. "All ready—come on!"

Blick excused himself; he had work to do, he said. On the previous day, finding that his labors at Marquenmore were likely to be protracted, he had taken rooms at the Sceptre, and thither he now hastened. He had many things in hand, much to think over. That morning, before going to the inquest, he had sent a messenger into Selcaster with instructions to buy certain matter for him; his first question on reaching the Sceptre was to learn if the messenger had returned.

"Parcels on your sitting-room table, Mr. Blick," answered Grimsdale. "Lunch there, too."

Blick sat down to his lunch alone, and ate and drank steadily for half an hour. Then, when the table had been cleared, he lighted his pipe, pulled out his penknife, and cut the string of the parcels that had been sent him from Selcaster.

CHAPTER XI

First Steps

THE messenger whom Blick had sent into Selcaster that morning, before he himself went up to Marquenmore Court to attend the Coroner's inquest, had carried a letter to the principal bookseller and stationer in the old city. There were certain things that Blick found himself in great need of in tackling the problems which had just been put before him; the bookseller was the man to supply him. And now here were the bookseller's parcels—one a long, rolled thing, carefully wrapped in canvas; the other a fat little parcel in brown paper. Blick undid that first and drew out and laid on his table a folding road-map, a general map of the county, two or three local guidebooks, illustrated by photographs, a more ambitious work, "Environs of Selcaster," also full of pictures, a "Bradshaw's Railway Guide," and a local railway time-table.

He looked over all these carefully as he laid them out—they were just what he wanted. But he felt still greater interest in the long canvas-covered parcel, which, divested of its wrappings, proved to contain the Government Ordnance Map of the Marquenmore village and immediate surroundings—a big, square thing, on stout paper, wherein every road, lane, footpath, house, cottage, meadow, wood, field, coppice, river, stream, hedgerow and stile, was marked, named and measured. Blick's detective instincts rejoiced at the sight of that masterly performance and he blessed the men of the Ordnance Survey service for their meticulous care in preparing it.

Going out in search of Grimsdale, he procured tacks from him; with these he fastened his map to a convenient blank space on the wall of his sitting-room, and for the next half-hour stood smoking his pipe in front of it. At the end of that time he had memorized the general lie of his surroundings and committed the more important place-names to the secret cells of his quick brain.

He turned then to the guidebooks, maps and time-tables, and for two hours pored over them absorbed. He wanted to know all about roads, railways and times —spade-work, this, but of high importance. And he saw at once, that, as Walkinshaw had said, during the informal talk which had followed on the adjournment, Marquenmore lay near the middle of a sort of triangle, with main roads running along each side. The triangle formed by these roads was of the sort which has two sides longer than the third, but equal to each other. Marquenmore lay in the southwest part of this triangle, inclining toward the corner made by the bare line and the longer line of the three; consequently it was nearer to two sides of the triangle than to the third, and therefore to two of the main roads than to the other. Now, of these three main roads, two, both starting from London, ran to the Court, within a few miles of Marquenmore; the third ran all the way along the coast itself. As regards highways, then, Marquenmore was in direct communication with London, exactly sixty-five miles to the northeast, and with several coast towns at nearer distances.

In addition to the triangle made by these main roads, there was yet another, made by railways. The railways, indeed, followed, and ran parallel with the highways: they corresponded to them in every respect: road and rail ran alongside each other, with no greater intervening space at any point than a mile or so. Marquenmore was within easy distance of these main railway routes. Several stations could be easily gained from it. Selcaster itself lay two and a half miles to the southeast, Mitbourne about the same distance to the east; there was a somewhat important junction three miles to the southwest, and a roadside station four miles due north. And on turning to his time-tables, Blick discovered that between four and six o'clock in the morning, there were, taking these four stations altogether, a considerable number of trains going north or south, east or west, and that from two stations, the junction aforesaid, and the one to the north, there were at a quarter to six every morning, workmen's special trains, which doubtless conveyed large numbers of craftsmen, artisans and laborers into the big shipping port a few miles away on the coast. Altogether, he saw that a smart, astute man would have no difficulty in getting away unobserved from the Marquenmore district by an early morning train, in any one of at least six separate directions.

TURNING again to the question of access and excess by the roads, Blick remembered what Walkinshaw had said about the facilities which the district afforded for successfully hiding a motorcar while its owner or occupant paid a visit. Here the Ordnance Map on the wall gave him great help. The entire contour and configuration of the country was plainly shown. North and northeast of Marquenmore village, behind Greycloister, Mr. John Harborough's big house, the Warren, Mr. Fransimerry's residence, and Mrs. Braxfield's domain, Woodland Cottage, lay over downs, intersected by deep lanes, and honeycombed by disused chalk-pits, thickly grown over with vegetation and shrubbery; there were also plantations, coppices and here and there deep woods. It would be an easy thing for anyone to turn aside from a main road into these solitudes, leave a motorcar in the shadows of some old, unworked pit, or among the elms and beeches of a wood, while he came down into the village.

Moreover, Blick noticed that on the Ordnance Map were marked several grass-tracks across the downs; now, he had already seen enough of the downs about Marquenmore Hollow to know that the turf up there was so wiry, resilient, and firm that you could drive an automobile across it almost anywhere with as great ease as on a macadamized road, and without leaving much trace. Therefore a man might have turned off the main roads, crossed the downs to some point within a couple of miles of the village, left his car in some convenient old chalk-pit and felt assured that no one would know how he came nor how he left. Up there, on those solitudes, there was not a house, not a cottage, not even an outlying farm, marked on the map.

So much for these matters: Blick now turned to a third. Grimsdale had said that when the three men left his house at a quarter past three on Tuesday morning, he saw them walk up the road in the direction of Greycloister and Mitbourne; Blick directed his attention to this road. Immediately in front of the Sceptre, flanking on its front garden, in fact, was the main road of the village; at the corner of the garden it divided—one branch to the right, turning off direct to Selcaster, the other, on the left, turning to Mitbourne, and at about three hundred yards from the Sceptre passing the entrance gates of Greycloister. Now, according to Grimsdale, the three men took this road and disappeared along it. But Guy Marquenmore, if the medical evidence was reliable, was shot dead, about four o'clock, at Marquenmore Hollow, about a mile north of this road. How had he come there?

The Ordnance Map and its meticulously careful markings showed that. Two hundred yards from the Sceptre Inn, on the Mitbourne Road, there were two footpaths, one on either side of the way. One, on the south, or righthand, side, went across the meadows in the direction of Selcaster; the other, on the north or lefthand side, turned up to the downs between Greycloister and Woodland Cottage. Near Marquenmore Hollow—in fact, at the very spot whereat Guy Marquenmore's dead body had been found by the plowman Hobbs—this path struck into another which led direct to Mitbourne station. And on seeing this, Blick came to a conclusion: When the three men came to these footpaths, they separated. One man either turned back to the village, (unlikely, thought Blick) or took the righthand footpath to Selcaster (very probable, Blick considered); the other two men, of whom Guy Marquenmore was certainly one, took the lefthand path, and climbed the hillside to Marquenmore Hollow. There Guy Marquenmore was suddenly murdered, and whichever man it was who was with him, whether the presumed American who had come to the Sceptre at nine o'clock on Monday night, or the man who had been given admittance at two o'clock on Tuesday morning, was the murderer.

ARRIVED at this conclusion, Blick felt somewhat cheerful. He refilled and lighted his pipe, put his hands in his pockets and lounged out of his sitting-room, across the hall, and into the bar-parlor. Though it was only five o'clock in the afternoon, the cosy bar-parlor contained several customers—village idlers who were discussing the inquest and the tragedy that had given rise to it. All and each already knew Blick as the great London detective who had come there to find out who had killed poor young Master Guy, and to hang that same varmint when found, and they stared at Blick's light hair, blue eyes, chubby countenance, and smart town clothes as if wondering how such a youthful-looking cherub could possibly possess the faculties of a ferret and the persistency of a foxhound. But Blick, beyond giving them a friendly nod, paid no attention to these patriarchs and wiseacres—he fully intended to cultivate their acquaintance at some future time, but just then he wanted a word or two with Grimsdale.

Grimsdale, in his shirt-sleeves, was polishing glasses at the farther end of the bar; Blick strolled up and leaned over to him.

"I say!" he whispered. "A word or two with you, Grimsdale. That pipe you found—"

"Yes sir?" returned Grimsdale, leaning across the bar.

"I suppose," continued Blick, "that you took a good look at it?"

"I did, sir."

"Did you notice the name, or initials of the makers?"

"Yes sir. It was one of those L. & Co's pipes. I know 'em well enough, Mr. Blick—my old guv'nor, Sir James Marchant, used to smoke 'em. He's given me one of his old ones, now and again."

"One of Loewe & Company's, eh?" said Blick, who had already assured himself of that fact, and only wanted to know if the landlord knew.

"L. & Co's, sir—that's what I call 'em: that's how they're stamped on the wood and on the silver mount. And of course, markings on the silver—a lion and so on, same as all silver articles are."

"Did you notice anything else about the pipe?"

"I noticed two things, Mr. Blick—I'm one of those that's given to noticing. It was a newish pipe, hadn't been smoked much. That's one thing. And the other was this: there was a slight, very slight chip in the edge of the bowl, as if its owner

had knocked out the ashes against something sharp—perhaps against the edge of a fender, or against the heel of his boot, and caught a nail there: I've seen many a good pipe chipped that way, however sound the wood is."

"Good!" said Blick. "You've certainly a talent for observation."

Grimsdale smiled.

"Aye, well!" he said, sinking his voice still lower. "I didn't say anything about it in that witness-box, but—between you and me—when I learned all I did about this murder, I put a mark of my own on that pipe!"

"You did?" exclaimed Blick. "What mark?"

"Bit of a cross on the silver band," said Grimsdale. He winked knowingly at the detective. "I'd know my own mark again, anywhere!"

Blick nodded. Then he glanced round at the men in the far corner of the room.

"Gossiping about all this, I suppose?" he asked.

"Aye!" assented Grimsdale. "Lord bless you, they'll talk of nothing else for many a day, unless there's a four-legged fowl or a calf with three heads comes along! It's pie to them, all this, Mr. Blick. You being a Londoner, you don't know what village folk are for talk and gossip!"

"Who's the biggest gossip in the place?" asked Blick.

"Benny Cripps, the sexton," replied Grimsdale promptly. "Get talking to him, and he'll tell you the whole history of Marquenmore, and every man, woman, and child in it, high and low, rich and poor, since Doomsday—whenever that was, and it must be a long time ago. They say he knows the pedigree of these Marquenmores, for instance, better than they do themselves!"

"An interesting old party," remarked Blick. "Where does he hang out?"

"Next cottage to the churchyard," replied Grimsdale. "Old thatched cottage."

"Well," said Blick, lifting his elbows off the bar-counter. "I'm going for a stroll, to have a look round. You'll have supper ready for me about eight?"

"Right, sir—got a nice roast chicken for you," answered Grimsdale. "A beauty!"

Blick laughed, nodded and went away into the village street. He had an eye for the picturesque, this tracker of criminals, and the little south-country settlement, half as ancient as the hillsides above it, appealed to him. Marquenmore was a place of tiny thatched cottages, set in gardens and orchards, with here and there a substantial farmstead set back from the road in its paddock or home-garth; its main feature stood in its midst—a gray old church whose tower and spire rose high above the elms and poplars that fenced in the churchyard. In these early spring days there was a great sense of peace about these rustic surroundings, and it struck Blick that it seemed odd that he should be there, amidst so much natural serenity, under his present circumstances. Everything just then, from the new flowers and plants in the cottage gardens to the new nests high in the fresh-leaved trees spoke of life—and his task was to discover the cause of a violent death.

HE was presently reminded of that death and its consequences by the sight of an old man who in a nook of the tree-surrounded churchyard was superintending the digging of two graves. Blick remembered then that Sir Anthony Marquenmore and his elder son were to be buried side by side on the next day but one—the old man, accordingly, must be the sexton Benny Cripps, of whom Grimsdale had just spoken. He entered the churchyard and went up to him; the sexton, a gnarled old fellow of apparently seventy, turned from his two diggers and gave the detective a knowing nod. He sat down on a box-tomb close by, and pulling out a short clay pipe, proceeded to light it.

"You be the young London feller what's come here to find out who killed young Mr. Guy, I do hear?" he observed, looking Blick over with critical eyes. "A sharp un you be at your job, too, I do understand. Well, and I 'low as how you've got your work set, my fine young man, I do so! 'Taint going to be found out in a day, aint that, nor yet in a week. Didn't make much out at the Coroner's 'quest, neither—no!"

"You were there, eh?" asked Blick.

"There I was, Master, and hear all as was said. And come away about so wise as I did go. Lord bless 'ee, 'taint only just starting, this here! You'm like one o' they exploring fellers that goes into furrin parts, setting out, like, on a path that you don't know the end of!"

"I guess you're about right," admitted Blick. "Bit of a tangle, isn't it?"

"I believe 'ee, my son! And so far as I see, I don't see no sort of a clue as you can lay hands on to guide 'ee, like. All same, I do have my own opinions—sure! And aint going to alter 'em for nobody—not for the King himself, and no disrespect to him, neither."

Blick sat down by the old man's side, and lighted his own pipe.

"You're Mr. Cripps, aren't you?" he asked. "Sexton, I think?"

"Benjamin Cripps I be, young master, and sexton I am, and parish clerk, and a mort o' other offices, and the one man in this here village can't do without, nohow. Five vicars there's been in Marquenmore in my time, and here I am—buried four of 'em! They comes and they goes—but I stops. Been parish clerk here five and forty years, and my father, he was same for nigh as many, and his father before him, he was same too, but for over fifty. The Crippses, we've been in this parish as long as they Marquenmores themselves, and buried a sight of 'em; and now I'm a-going to bury two more. This here church, now, you might say as how we Crippses, it belongs to we—knows all about it, we do, and about most things in this here village. Keeps it—so to speak."

"AND what do you think about this affair, Mr. Cripps?" asked Blick. "A man of your experience will have an opinion. Do you call it murder, now?"

"Murder I do entitle it, my dear young London man, and a grievous and bloody one! Aint going for to say as how young Master Guy was a parrygon of righteousness, 'cause he wasn't, and didn't make no pretensions to being one o' them here saints what we reads about in the prayer-book. But murdered he was, and cruel shameful: and you aint got on the real truth o' the matter I do suppose—no, nor wont yet awhile. But I hope 'ee will, and I'll tramp cheerful to hear whoever done it sentenced to be hanged—so I will!"

"You haven't any idea of your own about it, I suppose?" suggested Blick.

"Aint got what you might call precise ideas—yet," declared Cripps. "But Lord bless 'ee, of course it do be something to do with something rising out of that there young Jezebel at the Dower House! And I don't care if she do hear me say so. Her be a terr'ble sinful and scarlet lot, that! I mind she well enough when her pa was vicar here, and her a young lass that should ha' been minding her hemming and stitching, and suchlike woman's work. But her didn't never take to no such peaceful occypations; her was allus a-trapesing about wi' a pack o' young fellers at her skirts, and a-setting 'em by the ears. Lot o' trouble her occasioned when she was a girl, and now as soon as her comes back to the place, her starts it again."

"Then you think Mrs. Tretheroe's something to do with it?" asked Blick.

"Don't say her's anything to do wi' it, active-like," replied the old sexton. "But I do say as how, in my opinion, her's at the bottom of it, one way or another. Lord bless 'ee, some on 'em young gentlemen was for fighting each other about her before her was eighteen year old! If it had been in the old days, there'd ha' been men was for fighting each other about her Her was that sort—first favoring one, and then t'other, till they was all mad, like!"

"I suppose Mr. Guy Marquenmore was pretty mad about her at that time, eh?" suggested Blick.

"Umph!" said Cripps. "Runned after her a deal, he did, to be sure. But he was a powerful bad un for running after womenfolk of all sorts, high and low—turned the heads of half the lasses in this village, he did! Lord bless 'ee, he was always a-making love, all round—couldn't help it, seemed so. Left some aching hearts behind him, did Master Guy, when he went away to London town."

"What, among the village girls?" asked Blick.

"Aye—and 'mongst the village men!" growled the sexton. "There was more than one young feller that had reason to hate him, so there was! Dead he is, and not to be spoke ill of now—but he was a bad un, surely!"

This paradoxical answer suggested a new train of thought to Blick, and he presently went away to think it over. But ere he had gone far, he remembered that he had a question to ask of Mrs. Tretheroe, so he passed through the village and betook himself to the front door of the Dower House.

CHAPTER XII

The Dower House

THE DOWER HOUSE was a big, rambling, old-fashioned place which stood within large inclosed grounds and gardens

of its own, in the southeast corner of Marquenmore Park, a little way out of the village, and about two hundred yards from the Sceptre Inn. Nearly as capacious as Marquenmore Court itself, it possessed a considerable range of stabling and outhouses, and was altogether a residence of wide extent and accommodation. Blick took a rapid, estimating view of it and its surroundings as he walked up the drive; everything had lately been done up and put in order there; the Dower House, he thought, was much more pretentious in appearance than the Court. The ancient residence of the Marquenmore family was outwardly shabby, neglected, much in want of fresh paint; the Dower House was spick and span, its lawns and gardens trim and carefully kept. And Blick was not at all surprised when, in answer to his knock and ring, the door was opened by a very tall, supercilious footman, clad in a gorgeous livery. It appeared to be an effort to this person to bring his eyes down to the level of the caller's face.

"Mrs. Tretheroe at home?" demanded Blick.

"Mrs. Tretheroe is indisposed," answered the footman. "She is not receiving today."

Blick pulled out his cardcase.

"I am sorry to hear that Mrs. Tretheroe isn't well," he remarked. "But I saw her an hour or two ago, and I think she will give me a few minutes' interview on very urgent business. Just give her my card, if you please."

The footman took the card gingerly, glanced at it, stared at Blick's youthfulness a little wonderingly, and backing away from the door, seemed to invite the caller inside. Blick stepped into an outer hall.

"My orders were very precise," remarked the footman, grudgingly. "But if it's very important business—"

"It is!" interrupted Blick. "Very!"

"I'll see Mrs. Tretheroe's maid," said the footman. "Please to wait."

HE vanished into the gloom of an inner hall, behind a heavy portière; and Blick, left alone, looked round him. The place in which he waited was small; an ancient oak press stood on one side of him; on the other a big stand wherefrom hung a medley of coats, cloaks and outdoor wraps. And among them, the most prominent object, was a smart raglan overcoat of a brightish blue shade which Blick recognized at once. He had seen it at the inquest that morning—worn by the big German who had sat at Mrs. Tretheroe's right throughout the proceedings.

With one of those rare flashes of intuition which are the very inspiration of genius in a man of his profession, Blick moved like lightning to that coat and slid his right hand into the nearest pocket. He felt a pair of gloves—and beneath the gloves, a pipe. With his ears strained to the keenest tension and his eye kept warily on the folding curtains, he drew that pipe out and gave one glance at it. He would have chuckled with delight had he dared—for this was the pipe that Grimsdale had found on the supper-table at the Sceptre! There was no doubt of it—there was the slight chip in the briar-wood. . . . .

"Where is Mr. Blick?" demanded a woman's voice somewhere behind the curtains. "In the front hall?"

Blick slipped the pipe back into the pocket, moved himself six inches, and was staring with much interest at a fox's mark, mounted on the wall, when the curtains parted, and a woman appeared. For a second he looked at her with suddenly awakened interest; she was no ordinary woman, he decided. Primly and somewhat coquettishly dressed in black, with a smart cap and an even smarter apron of spotless muslin, she looked more French than English, and as vivacious as she was undeniably pretty. But the prettiness was somewhat faded: this, decided Blick, was a woman of thirty-five or so who had had affairs in her time; there were the signs of old fires in her brilliant eyes and about her lips; it seemed to him that she was the sort in whom secrets lie sleeping. And she was the sort of woman, too, who could not look at a man without smiling at him; she smiled now as she glanced at him.

"Mr. Blick?" she said in a soft, demure voice. "You want to see Mrs. Tretheroe? She is not very well—that affair this morning, you know, and all the rest of it—nervous headache. But if it's business—"

"It is, but nothing to distress Mrs. Tretheroe," answered Blick. "A question or two."

THE woman held aside one of the curtains and revealed a roomy inner hall, on one side of which rose a galleried staircase.

"Come this way, please," she said.

Blick followed her up the stair. An open door at the end of the gallery showed him a drawing-room, and in it a grand piano; at the piano sat the German. He was singing, and accompanying his fine baritone voice with soft chords. His conductress glanced at Blick and smiled.

"Mr. Baron — singing Italian love-songs!" she murmured. "He prefers that to shooting or hunting or golf! Tastes differ, don't they?"

"With nationalities," said Blick. He had already decided that Mrs. Tretheroe's maid was a bit of a character, worth cultivating, and he smiled back at her. "I guess he's not English, eh?" he suggested.

"German!" answered the maid knowingly. "All fat!" She laughed, paused before a door, tapped gently, and opening it, motioned Blick to enter. "Mr. Blick, ma'am."

Mrs. Tretheroe's voice, somewhat languid in tone, bade Mr. Blick enter, and he walked into what he immediately took to be the boudoir wherein its occupant had held her tête-à-tête with Guy Marquenmore after their meeting on Monday night. Although it was still quite light outside, a rose-tinted lamp was burning in this luxurious nook, and by its subdued gleam Blick saw Mrs. Tretheroe, negligently but becomingly attired, lounging on a sofa: if she was pale, he thought, she was perhaps the more striking. And whether she had a nervous headache or not, she was smoking; the room was heavy with the peculiar scent of fine Turkish tobacco; and on a stand near its mistress' sofa stood an open box of cigarettes.

"Take a chair," said Mrs. Tretheroe, glancing approvingly at Blick's good looks and smart clothes. She pointed to an easy-chair close to herself. "Have a cigarette, wont you? I'm smoking to soothe my headache. I got quite upset by all that business this morning. Such an awful lot of talk about nothing, don't you think?"

OUT of politeness, Blick took a cigarette, though he hated Turkish tobacco like poison, and dropped into the easy-chair.

"Depends," he answered tersely. "Sometimes you have to do an awful lot of talking over things of this sort—no end of questions, you know, before you can get at one little bit of truth. But I don't want to bore you with a lot of questions, Mrs. Tretheroe."

"Oh, that's all right!" replied the lady, complacently. "Rather interesting, after all. I suppose you do get a lot of interest in your work, don't you? You ought to," she added, giving her visitor a direct glance out of her half-shut eyes. "You're so very young—a mere boy, I should think!"

"Not quite such a chicken as I look!" retorted Blick with a laugh. "I've had twelve years of it. But now—business! I'm sure you wont mind if I ask you one or two personal questions, Mrs. Tretheroe? Well, first—I see that on the third finger of your right hand you wear a somewhat curious ring."

"This!" answered Mrs. Tretheroe. "You may look at it." She stretched out her hand and laid it, a very slim and shapely member, in Blick's palm. "Odd, isn't it?" she added, as after a moment, during which she turned her hand over, she withdrew it. "Unusual!"

"It's a very uncommon sort of thing, I should think," replied Blick. "Now, do you know if the late Mr. Guy Marquenmore had a ring like that?"

"Of course he had!" she answered. "It was he who bought both rings—years ago. He and I were once together in Portsmouth, and in one of those queer old curiosity-shops that you find in those sort of places, we saw these two rings. He bought them, for a pound or two, and we agreed to wear them forever. Poor Guy!"

"Was he wearing that ring when you saw him the other night?" asked Blick.

"He was! He told me he'd never ceased to wear it—and I assured him that I'd always worn mine."

"He had it on his finger when he left you?"

"Certainly he had!"

"Well—it wasn't there when he was found next morning," said Blick. "That's a fact!"

"That wasn't mentioned at the inquest!" Mrs. Tretheroe exclaimed.

"No," said Blick. "I didn't know of the ring's existence until Miss Valencia Marquenmore told me—after the adjournment. She had noticed that her brother was wearing it when he called at the Court before seeing you."

"And—it was not found on him?"

"It was certainly not found on him."

MRS. TRETHEROE threw away her cigarette. She frowned; and her eyes grew somber.

"Then—that's another proof that Harborough killed him!" she exclaimed.

"How?" asked Blick.

"Jealousy! He killed him out of jealousy, and took the ring from him when he was dead—mad with jealousy because Guy had something on him connected with me!"

"You really believe, Mrs. Tretheroe, that Harborough killed Guy Marquenmore because he was jealous of him—about you?"

"Yes, I do—I'm certain of it!"

"But," said Blick, "Harborough said—you remember his evidence?—that he'd been cured of his—er—passion for you some years ago."

"Don't believe it!" answered Mrs. Tretheroe. "If he had, then it all came back to him when he met me the other afternoon! I saw quite well that Harborough was just as madly in love with me as ever! Then—Guy came along, and—and—well, as I said, he and I made it up, quickly. And he met with Harborough up there on the hillside, and of course they quarreled, and Harborough killed him! I don't care what you police people say, nor the Coroner and his jury, nor the magistrates: I *know!*"

"Then you don't pay any attention to the evidence about the two men who were with Mr. Guy Marquenmore at the Sceptre that night, Mrs. Tretheroe?"

"Not a bit! A mere business meeting!"

"He didn't tell you whom he was going to meet?"

"Not at all—not one word! Merely—a business appointment. I wasn't interested."

"Well," said Blick after a moment's silence, "there's just one other question I want to put to you: You had three or four more guests in your house, I believe, at that time: you don't think it possible that some one of them was the second man who turned up at the Sceptre?"

"Certainly not!" exclaimed Mrs. Tretheroe. "Of course, I know every one of them well. Not one of them as much as knew Guy! They were all military men—men I knew in India. They all had their wives here with them—except, of course, Baron von Eckhardstein; he's not a military man, nor married. But until he came here, to my house-party, he'd never even heard of the Marquenmore family. Why—does somebody suggest this?"

"Not at all!" replied Blick hastily. "But in cases of this sort, when there are strangers about in a place—well, you've got to find out who they were, you know."

"I've told you who my guests were," said Mrs. Tretheroe. "Of course, the mere idea that any of them went to the Sceptre at that time of night is ridiculous. No, the meeting at the Sceptre amounts to nothing. You concentrate on Harborough—he did it! He was always a man of mad, unreasonable, ungovernable temper—or perhaps I might have married him, once."

Blick said nothing in reply to this. He did not share Mrs. Tretheroe's confidence in her guests—particularly as only a moment before he had glimpsed, in the wing mirror of her dressing-table, Von Eckhardstein in the open doorway behind him, eagerly eavesdropping. How much of their interview had the man heard—and why was he so interested?

The detective rose to go—and Mrs. Tretheroe, with another approving look, gave him her hand.

"Come and see me again—to tell me how you're getting on," she said. "Of course, I'm awfully interested!"

BLICK made his way downstairs. At the foot of the staircase the maid suddenly appeared—and smiled. Blick smiled back.

"I haven't made your mistress' headache any worse," he remarked.

"The headache's too much cigarette-smoking," she whispered, with a look. "I say!"

"What?" asked Blick, whispering too.

"Has anything—been found out?" she asked.

"No—too early," answered Blick. "Why? Do you know anything?"

"I? Good heavens, no! Merely curious—being a woman."

"What's your name?" inquired Blick with a smile.

"Halliwell," she replied quickly. "Why?"

"Miss or Mrs?" asked Blick.

"Miss! What makes you ask?"

"Just wanted to know," said Blick. "I shall be here some time, most likely, and I'm sure to meet you again."

Then, with another smile, he went away, and once clear of the house, dismissed everything but one thought. That was an important one: Von Eckhardstein, on leaving the improvised courtroom that morning, after the Coroner's adjournment, had possessed himself, in passing the table

whereon it was laid, of the tobacco-pipe which had been left at the Sceptre. Now, then—was Von Eckhardstein the man who had left it there?

Blick had a trick of imagining possible reasons for anything: he began to invent some now. Von Eckhardstein might be one of those folk who had a mania for collecting objects connected with crime—he, Blick, had come across more than one maniac of that sort, and knew that such would stop at nothing, not even theft, to achieve their desires. Or he might know the man who had left the pipe, and have quietly abstracted it, in the crush and confusion, with the idea of destroying evidence against a friend. But anyhow, there the pipe was, in Von Eckhardstein's pocket, where he had slipped it on picking it up from the table—and Blick had seen and identified it.

"And if it's his," mused Blick, "then he's the man who went to the Sceptre at two o'clock last Tuesday morning, and left at three-fifteen with Guy Marquenmore and the other chap! That's a dead sure thing!"

HE strolled back to the inn, and in due course sat down to his supper. Grimsdale tapped at his door and came in, just as he had finished.

"There's some of the rustics talking about this murder, in the kitchen," he remarked with a sly smile. "Would you like to hear what they've got to say?"

"They wouldn't talk before me," said Blick.

"I'll put you where you'll not be seen," answered Grimsdale. "You just come with me."

He led the detective across the entrance hall, past the bar-parlor and into a pantry which lay between a private sitting-room and the inn-kitchen. The pantry was unlighted, save for a latticed window set in the kitchen wall. Grimsdale motioned Blick to approach and look through this.

"They can't see you from their side," he whispered. "But you can see and hear everything from this. Listen!"

Blick put his face near the lattice and looked through. Half a dozen laborers, mostly middle-aged or elderly men, sat near a cheery fire in the old-fashioned kitchen, pots of ale on the tables before them, pipes of tobacco at their lips. They were all typical rustic, gnarled, weather-beaten, some dull of expression, some uncannily shrewd of eye—one such was just then laying down the law.

"Aint no manner of doubt as how Master Guy was done to death felonious!" he was saying. "Murder that is, and nobody can say as how 'taint, surely! But who done that aint going for to be found so easy as some make out. Done in a corner, as you med say, and nobody aint the wiser."

"Somebody murdered he, all same," observed another. "I 'low there aint no other way o' considering the matter than that. But who he be, I dunno, and I be mortal sure nobody else don't know, faith!"

"Well, 'taint in my conscience for to say as how I b'lieve Master John Harborough, up to Greycloister, done it," said a third man. "I can't bring myself for to agree that a gentleman born would be gittin' out of his bed at three o'clock of a morning for to go shooting at another gentleman! 'Twould seem a 'nation queer sort of a Christian privilege, would so! Noo—I aint a-going to consider that, nohow!"

"Then who done it?" asked somebody.

Nobody spoke for a while; then a dark-faced man who up to this had sat silently smoking in a corner, leaned forward.

"I reckon naught o' these crowner's 'quests and a pack o' lawyers and police fellers!" said he with decision. "Allus goos a-huntin' the wrong hare, they does! Don't us as has lived in these here parts all our lives know well enough that this young man left a pack o' mortal enemies behind of him when he went away, seven years it is ago? Aint there men round about here as had sweethearts and lassies whose heads he turned with his ways? Wasn't he allus a-making love to all the good-looking young women? Doon't 'ee tell me! There's more nor one man this side the downs as would be glad o' the chance of getting his knife into Master Guy Marquenmore—or a pistol-bullet, either! That's how he come by his death, so I do think!"

There was a murmur of general assent. An old man's voice arose out of it.

"The ways of Providence be uncommon curious!" he piped. "Shouldn't wonder if what Ben there say be of the nature of truth. Revenge be a mighty strong weapon in a man's right hand, and it do grow all the stronger wi' keeping, like

good ale. Aye, sure, it med be a matter o' revenge—"

Blick presently went away, to think over this suggestion. Grimsdale came to him again, looking mysterious.

"There's a young man out there in the garden wants to see you—alone, in secret," he said.

"Who is he?" asked Blick.

Grimsdale gave him a knowing glance.

"One of Mrs. Tretheroe's grooms," he answered.

CHAPTER XIII

William Pegge

THE detective instinct which was Blick's second nature rose, strong and eager, when he heard this announcement. He too glanced at Grimsdale in knowing fashion.

"Something to tell?" he suggested.

"Didn't say as much to me," answered the landlord, "but I should say so. Came hanging round our side-door till he got a sight of me, and then asked if you were in, and if he could see you, all to yourself—didn't want anybody else to know."

"Bring him in—and tell him nobody will know anything whatever about it," commanded Blick. "Strictly private—that's the idea, eh?"

Grimsdale glanced at the window, and crossing over to it, drew its curtains. He left the room—to return a minute later with a young man in whipcord clothes and smart Newmarket gaiters; a shrewd-eyed, keen-faced fellow who regarded the detective pretty much as he might have regarded a slippery fox just breaking cover.

"William Pegge, Mr. Blick," said Grimsdale.

Blick nodded affably to his shy and watchful visitor, and pointed to a chair close to his own by the cheery fire.

"Good evening, Pegge," he said. "Sit down—will you have a drink?"

Pegge slid into the easy-chair, put his hat on the ground and grinned sheepishly.

"Well, thank you sir," he answered. "Don't mind a drop of ale."

Blick looked at Grimsdale, who went out and returned with a frothing tankard which he sat down at the groom's elbow.

"See that we're not disturbed, Grimsdale," said Blick. "If anybody—never mind who it is—wants me, say I'm engaged."

The landlord withdrew and closed the door, and Blick pushed his tobacco-pouch over to his visitor, who was fingering his pipe.

"Try a bit of that," he said hospitably, "and light up. Well—you wanted to have a talk with me, Pegge. What is it?"

BEFORE Pegge replied to this direct invitation, he filled and lighted his pipe, got it fairly going, and lifting the tankard of ale to his lips, murmured an expression of his best respect to his entertainer. Then with a look round his surroundings, indicative of a desire for strict privacy, he gave Blick a shrewd glance.

"I shouldn't like to get into no trouble," he remarked.

"Just so!" agreed Blick. "You wont—through anything that you say to me."

"Nor yet to get anybody else into trouble," continued Pegge. "That is—unless so be as they're deserving of it."

"Exactly—unless they're deserving of it," said Blick. "Then you wouldn't mind?"

"Don't mind telling what I know to be true," replied Pegge. He looked the detective well over again. "I s'pose," he went on, "I s'pose that if I tell you—something, I should have to tell it again—as a witness, like?"

"All depends on what it is, Pegge," answered Blick. "You might—if it's very important. Or, you mightn't—if it's merely something that you want to tell me, between ourselves. Anyway, whatever it is, you'll come to no harm, so long as you speak the plain truth."

"Them witnesses, now?" suggested Pegge. "Before crowners and magistrates, and judges at the 'sizes—are they protected? Nobody can't do nothing at 'em for telling what they know, eh?"

"Strictly protected in every way," said Blick with emphatic decision. "Bad job for anybody who interfered with a witness, Pegge! Make yourself comfortable on that point, my lad."

Pegge nodded, took another mouthful of ale, and seemed to make up his mind.

"Well, I do know something!" he said suddenly. "I was half in a mind to tell it this morning, up there at the inquest—"

"You were there?" asked Blick.

"Most of the time," assented Pegge. "I heard all that Grimsdale said, anyhow. It was along of what he said that I thought of coming forward, d'ye see, but I didn't exactly know what to do, and so, when I hear 'em talk about an adjournment, I

thought I'd put it off, and think matters over. However, when I hear you were stopping here to look after things, I thought I'd mention it to you, like."

"Quite right, Pegge—much obliged to you," said Blick. "Make yourself easy. And now—what is it?"

Pegge removed his pipe from his lips, and leaned a little nearer to his listener.

"Well," he said, "it's like this here. You'd hear what Grimsdale said about Mr. Guy Marquenmore coming to this house that night before he was murdered, and being with two other gentlemen?"

"Of course," responded Blick, "I heard it."

"One of 'em," continued Pegge, "a tall man—tall as Mr. Harborough? So Grimsdale said—from what he see of him, as they was going away?"

"Yes, I remember," said Blick.

"Well, I'll tell 'ee something," Pegge went on, showing signs of rising interest in his own story. "Grimsdale'd tell you that I'm groom at Mrs. Tretheroe's—we've a coachman and two grooms there; I'm head groom. Our mistress has five horses at present—couple of hunters, two carriage horses, and a very good cob. Now, on Monday afternoon, this here cob—'taint common sort of an animal, for Mrs. Tretheroe, she give a hundred and forty guineas for him only a month since—took ill—colic, or something o' that sort—and I had to fetch the veterinary surgeon to him. The vet., he was at our place for an hour or two that evening a-doctoring of him, and he sort o' pulled him round, but says he to our coachman and the rest of us, 'One of you chaps,' he says, 'will have to sit up with this cob all night, and look well after him.' So I offered to do that—t'other two is married men, and lives in the village here; me being a single man, I lives over the stables, d'ye see?"

"I see," said Blick. "You were on the spot."

"On the spot, so to speak," agreed Pegge. "Well, the vet., he leaves us some medicine, and he tells me what to do, all through the night, with this here cob; and so, when it gets late, and all the rest of 'em had gone, I gets my supper in the servants' hall, and takes a bit o' something to eat during the night, and settles down as comfortable as I could in the saddle-room, next to the loose-box where we had this poorly cob. He went on all right, that cob did—hadn't no trouble with he at all, and he's right now—quite fit again. However, that's neither here nor there, in a way of speaking; what I mention the cob for is to show you how I come to be up all that Monday night, d'ye see?"

"I understand," said Blick. "It's all clear, Pegge. Go ahead!"

"Well," continued Pegge, "there's nothing happens till about a quarter to two o'clock in the morning. I know it was that, 'cause I had to keep looking at the cob every so often from the time the vet. left him, and that was one of the times. I'd just been into his loose-box, and come out when I remembered that I'd no tobacco left in my pouch. But I had plenty in a tin in my bedroom, so I went off to fetch it. Now, then, you must understand that our stabling at the Dower House is separated from the drive by a high hedge of macrocarpus trees—shrubbery, d'ye see? I was going along this hedge side, between it and the coachhouse wall, on my way to the stairs that leads up to my bedroom, when I hear somebody coming down the drive, t'other side the hedge—soft, like. So I stops dead—"

"WAIT a minute," interrupted Blick. "What were you walking on yourself, Pegge? What sort of pavement, or path?"

"Asphalt—laid down recent," answered Pegge promptly. "Runs all along the front of our stabling. Put down when Mrs. Tretheroe came and had things smartened up."

"And what had you on your feet—what sort of shoes?"

"Pair of old tennis-shoes that the housekeeper had given me," replied Pegge. "Some gentleman had left 'em behind him."

"Very well," said Blick. "Go on. You stopped dead—"

"Stopped just where I was, stole in between the bushes, and looked into the drive. Then I see a man coming down it, from the side of the house, where there's a door by which you can get out into the back gardens. He come right past me, walking on the grass path at the side of the gravel roadway."

"You saw him clearly?"

"Considering it was night,—a clear night, though,—I see him as clearly as what I see you! That is—with a bit of difference, like."

"You saw him clearly enough to know who he was?"

"I did!"

"Well," asked Blick, eying his informant closely, "who was he?"

Pegge looked with equal closeness at his questioner.

"That German gentleman that's staying with our missis!" he answered.

"Baron von Eckhardstein?"

"That's him! The Baron, we calls him."

"You're absolutely certain of this, Pegge?"

"Take my dying oath of it!" asserted Pegge.

BLICK refilled and lighted his pipe, and smoked in silence for a minute or two.

"Well," he said at last, "where did he go?"

"Went a few yards down the drive, and then turned into a path that goes through the shrubberies toward the main road," replied Pegge. "It comes out into the main road very nearly opposite the cottages, just beyond this place—the Sceptre. There's a little iron swing-gate in the holly hedge—you'll maybe have noticed it? He'd come onto the road through that, about two hundred yards from here."

"And you say that was at about a quarter to two, Tuesday morning?"

"At all about that," affirmed Pegge. "It would be six or eight minutes to, when I see him, 'Twas a quarter to, anyway, when I see the cob—and I wasn't in his box many minutes. Then I went straight to get my tobacco-tin, and heard these footsteps."

"I suppose you thought it was a queer thing, a guest going out of the house at that time of night, didn't you?" suggested Blick.

"Uncommon queer, I thought!" agreed Pegge. "But then, 'twasn't any concern of mine. And I shouldn't ha' taken much more notice of it if I hadn't see him again."

"Oh!" said Blick. "You did see him again, then?"

"I did—and when it was getting light, too—see him clear enough, that time!"

"And what time was that?"

"We've a clock over our stables," said Pegge. "It had just struck four."

"Four o'clock!" repeated Blick meditatively. "Um! And where did you see him at four o'clock? Same place?"

"No," replied Pegge. "Just before four o'clock I began to feel as if I could do with a cup of tea. I'd got a teapot, with some tea in it, but of course I wanted boiling water. Now, we've a gas stove in a little room at the end of the stables that our coachman uses as a sort of sitting-room for himself, d'ye see, so I went off there to light it, and boil some water in a kettle. It struck four while I was in there. I'd just put on the kettle, when I heard it strike four. Now, there's a window in that little room as looks out on the back gardens—they run from the back of the Dower House to the foot of the park, where it begins to rise toward the downs. There's a thick plantation of pine and larch between the gardens and the park, and I suddenly see this here Baron come out of it, as if he'd come down from the high ground above."

"Was he alone?" asked Blick.

"Oh, he was alone, right enough, just as before," replied Pegge.

"How far away were you from him?"

"Twenty-five or thirty yards."

"Where did he go that time?"

"Walked down the side of a big holly hedge toward the same door that I reckon he'd come out of."

"Could he be seen from the house?"

"No, I reckon not," said Pegge. "There's a thick belt of trees—beeches, just come into leaf—between the house and those gardens."

"You saw him pass that?"

"Saw him go into it," said Pegge. "Once through it, he'd be close to that side-door I spoke of."

"I SUPPOSE you know the Dower House pretty well, Pegge?" pursued Blick.

"Yes," asserted Pegge. "I was there before Mrs. Tretheroe came and took it. Been there, off and on, ever since I was a young un. Went there first when I was fourteen."

"Well, that side-door, now? What is it—where does it lead, when you get in?"

"Into a lobby that runs along the back of the house. There's a staircase opens from it, a side staircase, that comes out, through a double door at the top, into the big staircase in the hall."

"So that anybody coming from the bedrooms could easily get at it?"

"Easy enough!" assented Pegge.

"I suppose there'd be none of the servants about at four o'clock in the morning?" inquired Blick, after a moment's thought.

Pegge opened his mouth in a broad grin.

"Not likely!" he said. "Servants' get-

ting-up bell goes at six o'clock. Catch any of 'em being up before that!"

"Talking about servants," observed Blick, "do you know Mrs. Tretheroe's maid?"

Peggy smiled.

"Daffy Halliwell?" he answered. "Course I do!"

"Well, and who is Daffy Halliwell? And what's her proper Christian name?"

"Daphne," said Pegge promptly. "Who is she? Why, her father was a bit of a farmer t'other side of the downs, beyond Marquenmore Hollow. Dead now, he is. There was two o' them girls—Daffy and Myra. Daffy went out to India with Mrs. Tretheroe and come back with her. Myra—I don't know what's become o' she. Disappeared, like, just about that time—though I recollect now she was going to be married to a chap as lived near them—Jim Roper, woodman to Sir Anthony."

BLICK paid but little attention to these details; he was thinking over the principal points of the groom's information.

"Now, Pegge," he said, a moment later, "an important question—am I the first person to whom you've told this story?"

"You're the very first!" replied Pegge promptly. "I haven't mentioned it to a soul but you!"

"Didn't ever remark to any of your fellow-servants that you'd seen Baron von Eckhardstein out at that time of the morning?" suggested Blick.

"No!" affirmed Pegge. "I'll not deny that I might have done it, just in a casual way, if I hadn't heard of Mr. Guy Marquenmore's murder that morning. But I did hear of it, very early—earlier than most folks, before either our coachman or the second groom came to the stables; so I said nothing."

"Who told you of the murder, so early?" asked Blick.

"Our village policeman," replied Pegge. "I was standing at the end of our east walk when he and Hobbs went up the hillside to the downs: Hobbs had been to fetch him. I should have gone up with them to Marquenmore Hollow if I could have left the cob. I'd just walked along to the edge of the grounds, like, to get a bit of fresh air after being all night in the saddle-room, when the policeman and Hobbs hurried by. And putting one thing to another, I thought I'd hold my tongue. And I have—till now."

"And at last you thought you'd tell me? Well, you've done right," said Blick. "No harm'll come to you, Pegge,—you're safe enough."

"Well, I'd a reason why I come to you tonight," remarked Pegge, with a sudden shrewd look. "I reckoned up that it was best."

"Yes? Now, why?" asked Blick.

"Because this here Baron is off tomorrow morning," replied Pegge. "Leaving!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Blick. "What time?"

"I've orders to drive him to Selcaster railway station to catch the ten-eight express to Victoria," said Pegge. "We shall leave here at half-past nine."

"There's a Mrs. Hamilton there at the Dower House, isn't there?" asked Blick. "A friend of Mrs. Tretheroe's? Is she leaving, too?"

"No," answered Pegge. "Just him. I'm driving him in the dogcart. Only him."

Blick rose from his chair.

"Very well, Pegge," he said. "Now, then, just remember this: not a word to any living soul! Just go on as if everything was—ordinary. You'll hear from me. You did right to come, and remember what I say—keep all to yourself!"

WHEN the groom had gone, after taking amusing precautions to make sure that no customer of the Sceptre saw him leave the detective's sitting-room, Blick thought over what he had just heard. There was no doubt in his mind now that the Baron von Eckhardstein was the second man of the midnight meeting at the Sceptre: Pegge's story, and his own knowledge that Von Eckhardstein had extracted the pipe from the solicitor's table at the inquest, convinced him of that. But was that sufficient to make one suspect him of murder? Blick thought not—emphatically not. He could scarcely believe it possible that a man would murder another, remain in close proximity to the scene of the murder, and generally act as Von Eckhardstein seemed to have acted. Yet he might know something, probably did; and whether there were sufficient grounds or not for accusing him of actual guilt or complicity, there were certainly plenty for requesting him to give some account of himself. If such a request were suddenly sprung upon him, there might be revelations.

"I'll have something out of him!" muttered Blick. "Something he must know—and he'll have to speak!"

With that resolve strong in his mind, he sought Grimsdale, ordered breakfast for seven-thirty sharp next morning, and bade the landlord have a cab ready to carry him into Selcaster at eight o'clock.

CHAPTER XIV

GONE

THESE matters arranged and dismissed from his thoughts, Blick, having had enough of business for that night, turned into the bar-parlor of the Sceptre, minded for a little relaxation before retiring to bed. He had been in there once or twice since taking up his quarters at the inn; usually there were two or three Marquenmore men to be found round the fire, a farmer or two, the miller, the carpenter, the blacksmith, engaged in discussing the latest news of the village; Blick liked to hear them talk. But on this occasion the room was almost empty; there was, in fact, nobody in it but a little meek-and-mild-looking man in a tweed knickerbocker suit, who sat thoughtful and solitary near the hearth, and turned an unusually large pair of spectacles on the detective with a sort of apologetic look. He moved his chair back a little, as if to invite Blick to the cheery blaze.

"Thank you," said Blick. He dropped into a chair facing the stranger and drew out his pipe and tobacco. "A bit of fire's quite welcome, though we're nearly in May," he opened.

"Very welcome indeed, sir," responded the other, "especially when you've been out in the open all day!"

"Been walking?" asked Blick, with a glance at the stranger's knickerbockers.

"I have, sir! Done thirty miles today before I came to this place," replied the stranger. "Right across the downs. I always take a holiday twice a year—early spring and late autumn—and spend it pedestrianing. Run all over this particular part of the South in my time. But I never came to this particular village until today. And I confess that what led me here—for in the ordinary way I should have put up at Selcaster—was curiosity! I read in the newspapers about this Marquenmore mystery; so, being near, I thought I'd like to see the place."

"Queer business, isn't it?" said Blick.

"Queer indeed, sir!" agreed the stranger. "You're interested in it, sir?"

"Got to be," answered Blick laconically. "Professionally."

THE stranger brought his big spectacles to bear on Blick and regarded him with rapt attention. Then he bent forward and spoke in a hushed voice.

"Is it possible, sir, that I have the pleasure of meeting the famous Detective-sergeant Blick, whose name I have heard in connection with this case?" he asked almost reverentially. "Do I see Mr. Blick in the flesh?"

"You do," replied Blick. "All there is of him!"

"Bless me!" exclaimed the stranger. "Very proud, I'm sure, to meet you, sir. My name's Crawley—I come from Tooting. Rate-collector, Mr. Blick—an arduous and humdrum occupation, sir, but it keeps me in form for walking, of which exercise I'm passionately fond. Dear me! Now, it may seem an extraordinary thing, but do you know, sir, in the course of my five-and-forty years of existence, I have never met a gentleman of your profession before! A very exciting and engrossing profession, I believe, sir—quite adventurous?"

"Depends," said Blick. "Dull and monotonous enough, sometimes. You can, of course, get excitement and adventure out of a problem in mathematics, but there isn't very much of either in doing a long sum of compound addition, is there?"

Mr. Crawley looked his admiration—and his failure to comprehend.

"I mean," added Blick, "that our job is very often one of adding this to that, and that to this, until you've got a total."

"Very good, sir, very good—I see your meaning!" said Mr. Crawley, rubbing his hands. "Oh, very good indeed, sir—an excellent illumination! It wouldn't be fair of me, I suppose, to ask if you've arrived at a total in this Marquenmore problem, Mr. Blick?"

"I can soon answer that for you," said Blick. "I haven't."

"A very stiff nut to crack, I should think, sir," remarked Mr. Crawley. "I read all the evidence in the paper—the Daily *Sentinel*, Mr. Blick—as I sat on a hillside eating my modest lunch. Very interesting indeed—more interesting, sir, than any of those sensational novels that

people borrow from libraries—oh, much more! Real life, sir!"

"Make anything out of it?" suggested Blick. "Got any opinion?"

Mr. Crawley glanced at the door and lowered his voice.

"I have opinions, Mr. Blick," he answered. "Yes sir, I have opinions. I am not a betting man, sir, but I would lay money that I know what is at the bottom of this affair!"

"Aye? What, now?" asked Blick. "Always glad of an idea."

"Money!" said Mr. Crawley solemnly. "Money, sir—money!"

"Just how?" inquired Blick.

MR. CRAWLEY took off his spectacles, revealed a pair of weak, dreamy eyes and shook his head.

"I think the unfortunate young man, Mr. Guy Marquenmore—queer name, sir!—was followed. Tracked!" he answered. "Tracked, sir! With money at the bottom of it—yes!"

"Do you mean that he was robbed as well as murdered?" asked Blick.

"No sir—I don't mean that at all," said Crawley with emphatic decision. "I observed that Mr. Guy Marquenmore's property and money were left untouched. No—I mean that money is at the bottom of the mystery of his murder, that he was murdered by some evil person who will benefit by his death, in a pecuniary sense, Mr. Blick. I may be wrong," concluded Mr. Crawley, "I may be wholly and entirely wrong—but on the evidence, sir, such is my opinion. And I have served on a jury more than once."

"I shouldn't wonder if there's a good deal in what you say," admitted Blick. "There's generally some question of money at the bottom of all these things. However," he added, as he pulled out his watch and yawned in the act, "up to now I've got precious little light on the subject; perhaps I'll get a bit more tomorrow."

Then, with a laughing remark that even detectives must sleep occasionally, he bade Mr. Crawley good-night and went off to bed. Mr. Crawley flung him a last remark as he left the room, accompanied by a wag of his forefinger.

"Don't forget, Mr. Blick—though a gentleman of your ability and experience needs no reminding of it, I'm sure—don't forget that it's always the unexpected that happens! The unexpected, sir! Ah, there's a great deal in the unexpected! No one knows, sir, what the morrow may not bring forth!"

"Guess you're about right there, Mr. Crawley," assented Blick. "You've hit it in one this time!"

HE had no idea of what the morrow would bring forth, neither then, nor when he presently fell fast asleep, nor when he woke in the morning, nor when at eight o'clock he climbed up into the trap in which Grimsdale was to drive him into Selcaster. Mr. Crawley, who had also breakfasted early, stood at the inn-door when Blick emerged; he was equipped for walking, and was fastening a small satchel on his shoulders.

"Off?" inquired Blick.

"Only for the day, sir," replied Mr. Crawley. "I am going to have a full and glorious day on the downs—behold the receptacle of my lunch! And I am so well satisfied with the Sceptre, Mr. Blick, that I propose to make it my headquarters for the rest of my holiday. So I shall perhaps have the pleasure of seeing you tonight, sir—when," he added in a whisper, "I trust the day may have brought forth—profitably, eh?"

"You never know your luck!" responded Blick.

He said little to the landlord as they drove into Selcaster, but when they came to the ancient Market Cross in the middle of the old city, he laid a hand on his arm.

"Grimsdale," he said, "pull up, and set me down here. I'm going to see the Chief Constable—I'll walk along the street. And listen—I want you to stop in Selcaster a bit. Be down at the station at ten o'clock sharp. I'll see you there."

He got out of the trap and went off in the direction of the Chief Constable's office, and Grimsdale turned into the big courtyard on the Mitre, to wait until the appointed time. At five minutes to ten he went down to the station, and handing over his horse and trap to the care of a boy, walked upon the up platform. The London express was nearly due; and as usual, there were many passengers awaiting its arrival: the platform was thronged. Grimsdale was quick to observe that Blick was there, and that near him, mingling with the crowd, were two or three plain-clothes policemen of the local force: clearly Blick was expecting somebody. And Grimsdale, a bit of straw protruding

from his lips, watched keen-eyed and observant.

Ten o'clock chimed from the many towers in the city, and nothing had happened. In five minutes more the big express would come thundering in; in eight it would have glided away again on its sixty-mile run to London. At one minute past ten Mr. Blick, who was keeping a sharp watch on the booking-office, left the platform and went outside the station. As he emerged on the open space in front, William Pegge, driving Mrs. Tretheroe's smart dogcart, came racing up—alone.

Pegge singled Blick out from the folk who hung about the station-doors and pulled up right before him. The detective was at the side of the dogcart in an instant. His eyes went to the vacant seat at the groom's side.

"Where is he?" he asked in a sharp whisper.

Pegge bent down.

"Gone!" he answered. "Hooked it, during the night! Nobody in his room this morning—clean disappeared! Mrs. Tretheroe sent me in to tell the police—she says something's happened to him."

"Happened to him? What does she mean?" growled Blick.

PEGGE bent still lower. As he spoke, they heard the express coming—it entered the station behind them with a roar and a rattle that died away into the hiss of escaping steam as the engine pulled up and came to its brief rest.

"I heard Mrs. Tretheroe say to the housekeeper that the Baron often went out walking very late at night," he answered. "She said he's a bad sleeper, and goes out walking to make himself sleep. I made out that she thought he'd gone out that way during the night, and she believes he's had an accident, or something of that sort. She's sending folk round to look for him—and I'm to tell the police here."

"Wait a minute," said Blick. The people who had got out of the express were coming from the exits; he moved out of their way. "You've no idea what time he went out?" he asked, glancing at Pegge.

"I've no idea," replied Pegge. "I did hear that he went to bed at his usual time, but—" He paused. Grimsdale had come bustling up and was tapping Blick's elbow. Blick turned quickly: Grimsdale pointed to a tall man who had just emerged from the station and stood at its principal entrance looking about him.

"There!" said Grimsdale. "That man! That's him—the man who came to the Sceptre on Monday night—the American!"

At that moment the tall man caught sight of Grimsdale, started, smiled, nodded and came hastily across.

"Hullo, landlord!" he said. "The very man I was waiting to see! Say—how's this affair about Guy Marquenmore going on? I've traveled all night to reach this city so that I could tell about things—never heard of it myself till yesterday evening, right down at Falmouth. Have they laid hands on anybody?"

Grimsdale was looking from the stranger to Blick, and Blick hastened to speak.

"Are you the man with whom Guy Marquenmore had supper at the Sceptre last Monday midnight?" he asked abruptly. "The man who booked a room there, and never occupied it?"

"I am that man," replied the stranger with a ready nod and smile. "No other!"

"Do you mind telling me who you are?" asked Blick. "And what you are?"

"I do not. My name is Edward Lansbury, and I'm a financier, with businesses in New York and in London. Who are you, and what's your business?"

"Detective-sergeant Blick of the Criminal Investigation Department, New Scotland Yard. I have this case in hand, Mr. Lansbury, and I'll be glad if you'll tell me what you know about it."

"Sure! Everything! That's what I've run up from Falmouth for. Where'll we talk?"

"Come this way," said Blick. The plain-clothes men had come up behind him; he turned and whispered to them, and they went away in the direction of the police-station. "Don't wait for me, Grimsdale," he continued. "I shall be detained here for some time, so you can go back at once."

But Grimsdale brought a hand out of his pocket, offering something to Lansbury.

"Your change, sir," he said: "Three pound fourteen. Bill was twenty-six shillings, sir."

Lansbury laughed, took the money, and handed some of the silver back.

"Guess I'd forgotten all about that!" he said. "Here, get yourself a drink."

"Thought you had, sir," remarked Grimsdale, phlegmatic as ever. "Thank you, sir."

HE went over to his trap and drove off, and Blick signed to his companion to follow him toward the Chief Constable's office.

"I'm truly thankful you've come, Mr. Lansbury," he said as they walked up the street. "Everything's in more or less of a fog about this affair!"

"Well, beyond what I know myself—which is not a great deal,—all I know of it has been got from a London paper that I picked up in my hotel at Falmouth yesterday evening," said Lansbury. "I set off here almost at once—been on the train practically all night. What's the latest development?"

"The latest development," replied Blick, "is one of which I've only heard within the last few minutes. Do you know the Baron von Eckhardstein?"

"Sure! I know him well. He was with me and Marquenmore at the little inn that night—I left Marquenmore and him together at three o'clock or so, Tuesday morning. Von Eckhardstein, of course, was the tall man that the landlord saw us walk up the road with—as, I saw, the landlord mentioned in his evidence."

"Well—Von Eckhardstein has disappeared—during this last night. Clean gone! I suppose you don't know anything about that?"

"Less than nothing! But what's all this about? Seems to me—"

"Wait a bit," interrupted Blick. "We'll be alone with the Chief Constable in a minute. Then—tell me all you know. We want it!"

THE Chief Constable, to whom Blick had sent a message by the plain-clothes men, was awaiting him and the newcomer in his private office. He looked at Lansbury with considerable interest, and suddenly asked a direct question.

"Are you the Mr. Edward Lansbury who had a good deal to do with the Vilona Real Estate Development Company some few years ago?" he inquired. "You are, eh? Um! I've got a pretty fair holding in that—very profitable it's been, too. And what can you tell of this Marquenmore affair, Mr. Lansbury? We shall be very glad to know."

Lansbury dropped into an easy-chair at the side of the Chief Constable's desk, and put the tips of his fingers together.

"Well," he said, "I'll tell you all that I can tell—that is, all that I actually know. As regards the actual murder of Guy Marquenmore, seems like it amounts to nothing; as regards what happened just before it, well, you must make out of that what you can! All I can tell you is as to what took place at the Sceptre Inn."

"And why you, Marquenmore and Von Eckhardstein met there," said Blick.

"Sure! Well, as to why we met there," continued Lansbury. "As I told you at the railway station just now, I am a capitalist. I have business interests in this country as well as in my own: I have an office in London, just as I have an office in New York. Naturally, I know a great many financial operators in both countries. I knew Guy Marquenmore well enough—a smart man who had done well. I know Von Eckhardstein, not so well, but sufficiently. He, of course, is better known than I am, or than Marquenmore was—known in London, Paris and Vienna—"

"A German, I suppose?" asked the Chief Constable.

"No—Von Eckhardstein is an Austrian," said Lansbury. "Well, I have had dealings with these two—separately, you understand, never together—on various occasions, and always found them straight men of business. Now, very recently, Marquenmore wrote to me that he had a deal on in which I should find it profitable to join, with the idea of developing its results in the States. He told me in a letter what it was—but I do not wish, at present, to tell you, for the thing is a most important secret. I will, of course, tell it if it becomes necessary to do so in the interests of justice—that is, if my telling the precise details will help in the arrest of Marquenmore's murderer. But just now I would rather not say—and it's not relative to the pertinent matter. It's sufficient to tell you that Marquenmore has the chance—an option, in fact—of buying a certain something from a certain somebody, and he invited me to go in with him; his proposition was that I should acquire one-third, he would take up another, and we would find a third man to buy the remaining third. We had a little correspondence about the thing to be purchased—I may tell you that thing was a trade secret. While we had this correspondence, Marquenmore was in London, and I was at either Southampton or at Falmouth—I have business at both places just now.

"Now, about the middle of last week, Marquenmore wrote to me and said that as I was at Southampton, would I meet him at the Sceptre Inn, Marquenmore, Selcaster, on the next Monday night? He was going to Marquenmore Court that evening, he said, on family business, and would join me at the Sceptre when it was over—at ten-thirty or so. We fixed this up. I came on from Southampton by an evening train, walked out to Marquenmore, booked a room at the Sceptre, and ordered supper for two. While it was being got ready, I took a walk outside—I had been kept indoors a great deal for some days, in a close-atmosphered place, and I was enjoying the fresh air. I strolled outside this village of Marquenmore, and I met Von Eckhardstein."

"A moment," interrupted Blick. "What time was that?"

"It would be between nine-thirty and ten, as near as I can remember," replied Lansbury.

"Dark, then?"

"Oh, quite dark! I should not have seen Von Eckhardstein but for the fact that I struck a match to light my cigar. He saw me—he was leaning against a gate, close by. He hailed me, and after I had expressed my surprise at our meeting, told me that he was the guest of a lady in the village. Then he wanted to know what I was doing there. It immediately occurred to me that he was the very man to take up the remaining one-third share I have mentioned to you, and so I told him my business. I also explained the proposition, and told him what Marquenmore and I proposed to do."

"Another question," said Blick. "Did Von Eckhardstein know Marquenmore? Had they ever had any dealings?"

"I do not think they had—no. As to knowing each other—I dare say they may have been, and probably were, familiar with each other's names, as business men. But I am sure that until that night they had never known each other personally."

"That," remarked Blick, "is precisely what I wanted to know. Go on!"

CHAPTER XV

Was it Robbery?

LANSBURY smiled at the note of eagerness in the detective's voice. He leaned forward in his chair, looking from one to the other of his listeners as if to indicate that he was now coming to the really important part of his story.

"Go back a bit, you mean," he said with a laugh. "To my meeting with Von Eckhardstein. Well, as I said, I explained the proposition to him. We walked along the road, leading outward from Marquenmore, for some time, discussing matters. We—"

"Meet anybody—see anybody?" interrupted Blick.

"I don't remember that we encountered a soul!" answered Lansbury. "Pretty lonely parts, those. We walked up that road perhaps a mile, then turned and came back to about where we'd met. By that time we'd got onto other topics than that which I'd first mentioned. Von Eckhardstein was not greatly taken with the matter I put before him. He saw its value as a commercial proposition, but while he felt that it would materialize well in this country and in mine, he was not so sure if he could make it a big thing in the mid-European countries, because of certain German opposition. However, he neither said yes nor no; and when we were about to part, he asked me where I was staying, and what time I'd be likely to go to bed. I told him I had put up at the Sceptre Inn, close by, and that I expected Marquenmore there about ten-thirty to eleven, to supper, and that he and I would be sure to sit up late, as we'd a good deal to talk about.

"Von Eckhardstein then told me a thing which may be of some significance to you police people, now that things have turned out as they have. He said that he was suffering badly from insomnia, couldn't sleep at night—at any rate as he ought to—and that since coming to this place where he was visiting, he'd frequently gone out on long walks in the middle of the night, to see if he could induce sleep. He said that if he so went out that night, and if, in the meantime, he'd changed his mind about the proposition I'd put before him, he'd likely drop in on Marquenmore and myself, if he saw a light in my sitting-room window. So—"

"From his last remark you gathered that he knew the Sceptre?" inquired Blick. "Enough to know where your sitting-room was, eh?"

"Well, that's what he said, anyhow," replied Lansbury. "As for my sitting-room, it was one which the landlord

showed me into when I stepped into his house—a biggish room on the left-hand side of the hall, with a French window that opened on the front garden."

"Precisely," said Blick. "I'm occupying that room now. Well?"

"Well, we parted on that," continued Lansbury. "Von Eckhardstein turned into a little gate that led, I suppose, to the house where he was staying, and I strolled back to the Sceptre. I sat down and waited for Marquenmore. He was very late in coming; in fact, he didn't come until close on twelve o'clock. He was in very high spirits; he told me, as we sat at supper, that he'd met his old sweetheart—handsomest woman in England, he called her!—and that they were both so pleased to meet again that they'd fixed it up to be married right off, and I'd have to be his best man. Then we got on to business, and I mentioned Von Eckhardstein. Of course, he knew all about Von Eckhardstein, and he said that Von Eckhardstein was staying with this lady he, Marquenmore, was going to marry, though he hadn't met him then, being more pleasantly engaged. We went on discussing our business until close on two o'clock in the morning. Just about that time I heard the latch of the garden gate snap, and guessing that it was Von Eckhardstein out on one of his nocturnal rambles, I opened the French window and stepped into the garden. There he was, coming across the bit of lawn, and I took him in and introduced him to Marquenmore, and we began to rediscuss the business proposition. That—"

"A MOMENT, if you please!" interrupted Blick. "Before you tell us about that, will you answer a question which has just occurred to me? During the time you three were together, did Marquenmore ever mention to Von Eckhardstein his approaching marriage? I want to know, particularly."

"No, I am sure he did not," replied Lansbury promptly. "While the three of us were together, nothing but the immediate business proposition was discussed. What Marquenmore may have said on that subject, if he said anything, to Von Eckhardstein later, when I parted from them and left them together, I can't presume to speculate on, but during the hour or so in which we were all in company, nothing was talked of but business. Now, without telling you the exact details of the secret, I'll tell what that business was. A young fellow who lived in a small country town between this city and London, getting in touch with Marquenmore as a financial man, offered him a trade secret which he was anxious to sell outright, for strict cash, for a certain amount of money that he required to set himself up in business. The amount asked was three thousand pounds. It was a good bargain—a very good bargain. The advantage was on the side of the purchaser, but the young fellow had fixed his own price and would evidently be well content if he got it. After Von Eckhardstein came to the Sceptre, we all three talked the matter out; Marquenmore had the papers and showed them; and we decided to buy: that is, Von Eckhardstein decided to come in, for Marquenmore and myself had already made up our minds. We then settled matters: Von Eckhardstein and myself each giving Marquenmore a thousand pounds in notes as our shares—"

"Do I understand that you each gave Marquenmore one thousand pounds, in notes—there and then?" asked Blick abruptly. "Notes?"

"Why, certainly!" answered Lansbury. "That's just what I said. Bank of England notes. To which, of course, he added a similar sum of his own—to make up the three thousand. What's surprising you?"

"Do you mean to say that all three of you were carrying large sums of money on you—like those?" asked Blick. "Walking about with a thousand pounds on you?"

"That's no great sum to carry," replied Lansbury. "Men in our line have to carry a good deal of ready money about them. A thousand pounds doesn't take up much room in a wallet."

"There would be notes of big denominations, I suppose?" suggested the Chief Constable.

"Exactly!" assented Lansbury. "Mostly so, at any rate. Notes of five hundred or two hundred each. I remember that Von Eckhardstein handed over two notes of five hundred. Mine were smaller—four two hundreds, one one hundred, and two fifties. I don't know anything of Marquenmore's—he simply put our money to his in an envelope with the rest of the papers."

"Why notes at all?" asked Blick, in whom an absolutely new train of thought

was now developing. "Why could not this transaction have been settled by a check?"

"Because the young fellow of whom I have told you—the seller—particularly wanted his money in notes," replied Lansbury. "He lives in a small town between this city and yours and London. Marquenmore was going to call on him on his way back, hand him the cash, and the thing was settled. Do you get that?"

BLICK was beginning to manifest a certain restlessness. He got out of his chair, put his hands in his pockets and began to pace the room with bent head. Suddenly he twisted round on Lansbury.

"Then, when Guy Marquenmore went out of that inn, the Sceptre, at three o'clock on Tuesday morning, he'd three thousand pounds, in Bank of England notes, on him?" he said. "Is that a fact?"

"Sure!" replied Lansbury. "He had!"

Blick gave the Chief Constable a significant look and snapped out a significant word.

"Robbery!"

The Chief Constable nodded. He too was beginning to see developments.

"Looks like it," he said. "Murdered for what he had on him. And yet—" He paused, looking at the detective with professional appeal. "Odd," he went on, "that everything else was untouched."

"That makes things all the more significant," observed Blick. He turned to Lansbury. "Did you see where Marquenmore put the money—the bank-notes and the papers you referred to just now?" he asked.

"I did. In the inner breast pocket of his coat."

"Just put them in—as one puts letters, or anything of that sort, into one's pocket?"

"Sure!"

"Did he ever leave that room in which you were all three sitting until you all left it for good?"

"He did not! None of us did."

"Well," said Blick, after a pause, during which he appeared to be deep in reflection, "what happened after you'd finished this business?"

"Nothing unusual. We talked a bit, had a whisky-and-soda, lighted a fresh cigar, perhaps—"

"Ah!" remarked Blick. "That reminds me of another question. Were you all smoking cigars?"

"No," replied Lansbury. "Von Eckhardstein was smoking a pipe. He said cigars made his insomnia worse."

"Well—you left at about three o'clock, I think?" suggested Blick.

"About that. Marquenmore was going across country to a station called Mitbourne; we said we would walk a little way with him. We left by the French window: it was then beginning to get gray in the sky—you could see things. We walked up the road, past the village cross and the old church. A little farther on, I remembered that I had bought a local railway time-table at Selcaster on arriving there the previous evening. I pulled it out, and on consulting it, found that I could get a train at Selcaster soon after four o'clock which would get me to Southampton and Salisbury, and thence on to Falmouth. I decided to catch it, and said I shouldn't bother about returning to the inn.

"Marquenmore then pointed out a footpath which, he said, led across the meadows to Selcaster, and advised me to take it; he himself, he remarked, was going by another, exactly opposite, on the other side of the road, which made a short-cut over the downs to Mitbourne Station. We then bade each other farewell, and parted. I took the footpath to Selcaster; Marquenmore took the other, up the hillside; Von Eckhardstein went with him, observing that he would walk a little more before turning in. The last I saw of them they were rounding the corner of a high hedge together, in close conversation."

"And that's all you know?" said Blick.

"That is all I know," answered Lansbury. "All!"

A PAUSE in the conversation ensued; Blick began to pace the room again, thinking. The Chief Constable, who, during the whole of Lansbury's narrative, had occupied himself in drawing apparently aimless lines on his blotting-pad, laid down his pen, sat back in his chair and stared at the ceiling; he too was apparently in deep thought. But it was he who first broke the silence.

"I suppose Von Eckhardstein is a wealthy man?" he asked of Lansbury.

"He enjoys that reputation in financial circles," replied Lansbury. "You may safely say he is."

"Not likely to murder another man for a couple of thousand pounds?"

"I should say not!"

"Well," remarked the Chief Constable with a glance at Blick, "it now looks as if Guy Marquenmore was murdered for—not two, but three thousand pounds! Anyway, according to you, Mr. Lansbury, he'd that sum on him when you left him at, say, half-past three, and it wasn't on him when his clothing was examined by Blick there, a very few hours later! Who got it? Where is it?"

Blick turned in his walk and came back to the hearth by which they were talking.

"Have you got the numbers of the notes you gave to Marquenmore?" he asked. "I suppose you have, of course!"

"I have not," replied Lansbury. "Careless, perhaps, but that's so—I haven't. But I reckon my bankers may have them—they enter numbers when paying them out, don't they?"

"Who are your bankers?" asked Blick.

"International Banking Corporation—London office in Bishopsgate," replied Lansbury promptly. "But I can't be certain that I got those particular notes there. I may have—in which case, they will have the numbers. But I mayn't—in which case they wont have. Those notes, or some of them, may have been paid to me by other people. And once or twice, recently, I have cashed checks for large amounts in other places than London. My operations are considerable, and I handle notes in large numbers."

"All the same," said Blick, "we'll have to do what we can in tracing those notes. But now we're faced with another matter. Von Eckhardstein is missing. His hostess thinks he's had an accident while out on one of his night-walks. I don't! I think he's run away."

"Why?" asked the Chief Constable.

"Why didn't he come forward at the inquest and tell us what Mr. Lansbury has just told us?" answered Blick. "He'd the chance—and he sat there and said nothing. Von Eckhardstein knows something, and he must be found. I wish I'd laid hands on him last night. Now we must get to work on tracking him. You'd better come out with me to Marquenmore, and let's see into things."

"I hope you don't want me?" said Lansbury. "I am particularly anxious to get back to Falmouth. But I shall return from Falmouth in two days, and shall then be for several days at Southampton, close by you."

"Leave us an address, or addresses, that will find you at short notice," said Blick. "There's no need to keep you from your business, Mr. Lansbury. And we'd better be getting to work on our own!"

BLICK presently hurried the Chief Constable off to Marquenmore and Mrs. Tretheroe. The events and revelations of the morning had given him an entirely new conception of the case in hand, and he was now blaming himself bitterly for not having asked Von Eckhardstein to account for his possession of the pipe as soon as he had discovered that it was in the financier's overcoat pocket.

"But I was saving that up for this morning," he said, grumblingly, as he and the Chief Constable drove along to Marquenmore. "I meant to stop him as he was entering the station to catch that ten-eight express, tell him that you and I wanted some information from him, get him to your office, and have things out with him. Now—it's too late!"

"You don't know that yet, Blick," remarked the Chief Constable. "If this man was accustomed to strolling about at night, he may easily have had an accident, and be lying in some lonely part of those downs or woods waiting for help. Anyhow, so far, I don't see anything to incriminate him, in my opinion."

"He was the last man known to be with Guy Marquenmore," said Blick.

"Maybe! But it isn't likely that he'd murder him for the sake of those banknotes," retorted the Chief Constable. "Von Eckhardstein's name is known to me; he's a man who's dealt in millions in his time, and been in at some of the biggest flotations of late years. My opinion is that he walked some distance up that path with Guy Marquenmore, left him, returned to the Dower House and knew nothing of Marquenmore's murder until he heard of it later. Marquenmore met the actual murderer after he parted with Von Eckhardstein, and I should say that the murderer is a man who was thoroughly conversant with Marquenmore's movements and doings, knew that he was to take that path to Mitbourne Station, and lay in wait for him at Marquenmore Hollow. That's how I work it out."

Blick made no reply to this for a few minutes. The Chief Constable's dogcart had covered another half-mile of road before he spoke again.

"There's no doubt that the brier-wood pipe of which we've heard a good deal was Von Eckhardstein's," he said at last, "nor that he left it at the Sceptre, nor that Grimsdale produced it at the inquest, nor that Von Eckhardstein picked it up from the solicitors' table as he went out. Now, if he's an absolutely innocent man, why didn't he get up at that inquest, explain his presence at the Sceptre, admit that he did leave his pipe there, and behave candidly and openly, instead of keeping everything back and purloining that pipe as cleverly as any pickpocket? Come!"

"Can't say," answered the Chief Constable. "I should imagine that he'd reasons of his own for keeping silence—especially after he'd heard Grimsdale say that he couldn't identify the third man of the party."

"Well, there's another queer thing," remarked Blick. "Von Eckhardstein must have known that eventually this man Lansbury would come forward. He'd know that Lansbury would let the truth out—as he has. We've got at that, anyhow!"

"Have we got at the truth of anything?" asked the Chief Constable, a little cynically. "If we're going in for mere theorizing, I can suggest a dozen theories. Here's one to cogitate over. Blick, supposing there's some big financial operation at the bottom of all this, and that the removal of Guy Marquenmore was a necessity to those chiefly responsible? I've known of men getting a bullet through their brains simply because they were in the way! And as to truth—well, give me proof! Truth's not so easy to come at in these matters, and I doubt if we shall get any substantial contribution to it here," he added significantly as they drove up to the Dower House.

"Haven't the least idea what we shall get!" responded Blick, equally cynical. "But we may find something."

WHAT they did find was Mrs. Trethero in a state of high excitement. She was convinced that her guest, unable to sleep, had gone out for one of his midnight strolls, and had fallen into some old pit or disused quarry. Her own menservants, several villagers, and the local policeman had been searching for him since breakfast time, with no result. She scouted the idea that he had taken it into his head to go away, and it was with scorn and indignation that she gave Blick his private and business addresses in London. Blick cared nothing for either indignation or scorn; he went off to the village telegraph office and wired for news; he also sent private messages of his own to headquarters in London in furtherance of his object: one way or another, he meant to have news of Von Eckhardstein.

"After all," he said to the Chief Constable, as they lunched together at the Sceptre, "there's no getting away from the fact that, according to our information, Von Eckhardstein was the last person who saw Guy Marquenmore alive!"

"No!" answered the Chief Constable. "You're wrong, Blick. The last person who saw Guy Marquenmore alive was the man who murdered him."

Blick regarded this as a verbal quibble and changed the subject. Late in the afternoon he got replies to his various telegrams. Nothing had been seen or heard of Von Eckhardstein at his usual London haunts. Nor, when night fell again, had any news of him come to hand in Marquenmore.

CHAPTER XVI

Family Matters

EARLY in the morning of that day Mr. Fransimerry, in common with all the rest of the Marquenmore people, heard of the strange disappearance of Baron von Eckhardstein, and like many of them, he joined in a search for the missing man. Since his coming to the Warren, Mr. Fransimerry had become minutely acquainted with his immediate surroundings, and he knew of many nooks and corners of the woods and downs wherein a stranger might easily have met with an accident. There were queer places in that neighborhood; two thousand years ago, the folk who were here before the Romans, had quarried the hillsides, scooped out caves and pit-dwellings, and made long lines of fortifications and trenches; and these primeval works, grown over in course of time, were danger-traps for the unwary who wandered through the backwoods or crossed the rough, unfrequented parts of the uplands: more than once, in Mr. Fransimerry's short experience of Marquenmore, he had known of man or horse falling into some unexpected cavity.

Some such accident as this he conceived

to have been possible in the present instance, and when he heard of Von Eckhardstein's disappearance, he took his stoutest walking-stick, some lunch in his pocket, and a small flask of brandy and water, and set out to prospect. In the course of the day he met many folk who were similarly engaged—Mrs. Tretheroe was so much concerned about the fate of her guest, and so convinced that evil had befallen him, that she had pressed into service every villager who could be spared from his proper and usual labors, and had offered a handsome reward for success. But when eventide came again, and Mr. Fransimerry, weary with tramping up hill and down dale, returned to his own fireside, no success had materialized: the Baron, as far as Marquenmore folk were concerned, had vanished.

Mr. Fransimerry sat down to his solitary dinner, puzzled and wondering. He had thought of little else than the Marquenmore problem since it was first presented to him; and the more he thought, the more he was bewildered. He had listened with care and patience and, he hoped, with understanding, to the evidence put before himself and his fellow-jurymen, and he was bound to confess that he had made little out of it. What seemed to him much the most important fact of that evidence was the affair of the brier-wood pipe.

There was no doubt that that pipe had been left on the supper-table at the Sceptre by one of the two men who were there with Guy Marquenmore. There was no doubt that Grimsdale produced it at the inquest, passed it round, and left it lying on the table; there was no doubt that it was abstracted from that table between the moment of adjourning and the moment wherein the officious newspaper reporter asked to see it. What was to be deduced from that? In Mr. Fransimerry's opinion one certain conclusion: the owner of that pipe, the man who had left it at the Sceptre, was present at the inquest *and had kept silence.* Who was he? Mr. Fransimerry had asked himself that question a hundred times, and got no answer. He was unaware of Blick's doings and discoveries, and had only his own knowledge to go on. But he felt sure of one thing—the owner of the pipe had purloined it from the solicitors' table of the temporary court in the old dining-hall so that it could not be used in evidence against him. Once more—who was he?

MR. FRANSIMERRY was still puzzling about this and various other collateral questions when his bachelor dinner came to its end. He rose from his chair and meditated a little; then, remembering that he had had a very hard and trying day, he went to his modest cellar, found a bottle of his best good old port, and carefully decanting it, carried the decanter and a brightly polished glass or two into his library. With his slippered feet on the padded fender-rail, the decanter of port at his elbow, and a cheery fire of beech-logs in front of him, Mr. Fransimerry proceeded to do more thinking. But he had not followed his train of thought very far when his trim parlor-maid entered to his presence, and informed him that Mr. Harborough was in the hall, and would be obliged if Mr. Fransimerry would see him for a few minutes.

Mr. Fransimerry rose from his deep chair with alacrity. He had never had speech with Harborough before the occasion on which they met at Marquenmore Court on the morning of the murder, but he knew all about him as the wealthy owner of Greycloister; he regarded him as a wrongly accused man, and he was sorry that his homecoming should have been marred by so much unpleasantness. Moreover, Mr. Fransimerry was the sort of man who is always glad of a chat with anybody; and just now, in spite of the Coroner's admonition to him and his fellow-jurymen, he felt that he had plenty to talk about. He accordingly hastened into the hall, with open hand and welcoming smile.

"Hope I am not disturbing you?" said Harborough, as his host led him into the cosy library. "An odd time to call—but I had a reason."

"My dear sir, I am only too delighted!" exclaimed Mr. Fransimerry hospitably. "Try that chair—and a glass of my port. I can recommend both."

"You are very good," responded Harborough. "I'm no great judge of wines," he added, taking the glass which his host handed him with old-fashioned courtesy; "and as to easy-chairs, I haven't had much acquaintance with them of late years—a camp-stool has been more in my line, Mr. Fransimerry! Well," he continued, as Mr. Fransimerry resumed his own seat, "I came to ask your advice about something: I rather formed the opinion, when I met you the other day, that you were the most

likely man round here to take a common-sense view of things."

"Flattered, I'm sure!" said Mr. Fransimerry. "I hope I am a common-sense person."

"Well, you know what I mean," observed Harborough. "You're not likely to let local prejudices and gossip affect you. Now, I want to ask your advice—as I said just now. Tomorrow, Sir Anthony and his elder son are to be buried in Marquenmore churchyard. I, of course, have known the Marquenmore family ever since I knew anything. Guy Marquenmore and I were close friends as boys and young men, until the estrangement happened of which you heard the other day. Now, do you think it would be proper if I attended the funeral—having regard to present circumstances?"

MR. FRANSIMERRY fell into a naturally judicial attitude. His face became thoughtful, and, at first, a little doubtful. But suddenly it cleared.

"My dear sir," he said, "it is, I believe, within my recollection that, when you were giving evidence before myself and my fellow-jurymen the other morning, you said, clearly, plainly, distinctly, without any apparent mental reserve, that your one-time feeling of anger and resentment against the late Guy Marquenmore had completely died out, years ago, and that, had you met him again, you would have offered him your hand. Am I right?"

"Quite!" replied Harborough. "On all points."

"Then I see no reason why you should not attend the funeral ceremonies," said Mr. Fransimerry. "None!"

"Well—one's got to remember that there are people—close at hand—who believe I killed Guy Marquenmore," said Harborough.

"Um!" remarked Mr. Fransimerry dryly. "But—are there? I mean—seriously?"

"Mrs. Tretheroe—and her following," suggested Harborough.

"Has she any following?" asked Mr. Fransimerry, more dryly. "And as for herself—temper, my dear sir, temper! I don't believe the woman thinks anything of the sort, if you could really get at her mind—if she has one."

"I think she did—at first," said Harborough, after a moment's reflection. "Natural, perhaps."

"Natural perhaps if one is foolish enough to believe that people cherish resentment indefinitely," said Mr. Fransimerry. "She must know that her accusation was—ridiculous! I do not think I should attach the slightest importance to Mrs. Tretheroe's opinion. But," he added, as if struck by a sudden happy thought, "I know what I should do! I should just ask the two young people at Marquenmore Court what their wishes are. My opinion is that they would be glad of your presence."

"Hadn't thought of that," said Harborough. "Bit slow, I think. I'm sorry enough for them, God knows! And I think they know that whatever I once felt about their brother I—well, I got over it long since."

Mr. Fransimerry gave his visitor a keen, sidelong glance.

"I suppose Guy Marquenmore really did treat you badly?" he suggested.

"Yes!" answered Harborough, with simple directness. "But—I've forgotten it. And—not all his fault, either. As I say—I've forgotten it."

"Queer business, this murder!" remarked Mr. Fransimerry. "And now here's a second mystery. You've heard, of course, about this Baron von Eckhardstein?"

"No," replied Harborough. "I've heard nothing. I've been away from Greycloister since very early this morning until just now—came straight to see you soon as I got back. What about Von Eckhardstein?"

"Disappeared!" exclaimed Mr. Fransimerry. "Last night. Clean gone—no one knows where." He proceeded to give his guest a circumstantial account of the day's doings, and of his own share in them. "What do you think of that?" he asked in conclusion. "Odd, isn't it?"

"The whole affair's odd," asserted Harborough. "It looks to me as if—but, really, I think that's impossible!"

"What's impossible?" demanded Mr. Fransimerry.

"Well, I was thinking—I was going to say—it almost looks as though this might be a second murder!" answered Harborough diffidently. "I've been wondering—but as I said, I'm a bit slow at the thinking game, sometimes—if Von Eckhardstein wasn't the man who turned up at the Sceptre at two o'clock in the morning—in that case—"

Mr. Fransimerry started.

"Ah!" he said. "When you came in, I was just getting to some such conclusion myself! If he was that man, then that accounts for something else. But supposing he was—you were going to say?"

"I was going to say that in that case, it looks as if he and Guy Marquenmore had been mixed up in business matters," replied Harborough. "And if so, business matters—some big money deal—may be at the bottom of this. For instance, somebody may have wanted to get rid of both of 'em? Heard of cases of that sort, myself—not in this country, though."

It may be, it may be!" assented Mr. Fransimerry. "The whole thing is a mystery which seems difficult of solution, and—"

WHAT more Mr. Fransimerry was going to say was never said. At that moment the door opened, the trim parlormaid murmured something indistinctly, stepped aside, vanished, and gave place to Valencia Marquenmore, who came into the room so rapidly that she failed to see Harborough, whose tall figure was hidden from her by a screen.

"Oh, Mr. Fransimerry!" she exclaimed, as she entered. "Do forgive me for rushing in on you so unceremoniously, but I'm in an awful lot of trouble, and I want your help, and—oh!"

She had rounded the screen by that time, and had caught sight of Harborough, who got to his feet, looking awkward.

"I'll go!" he said.

"No, indeed!" protested Valencia. "Not a bit of it—I'd—I'd just as soon tell you as Mr. Fransimerry—I'll tell you both. You're men—you'll know what to do."

Mr. Fransimerry signed to Harborough to stay where he was and drew a chair forward to the hearth.

"What is it, my dear?" he inquired, as Valencia seated herself. "Anything that we can do, I am quite sure will be done, if it's within our power."

"I don't know that it's in anybody's power to do," answered Valencia. "Nothing, I should think! The thing's done, and can't be undone!"

"And what is done?" asked Mr. Fransimerry, softly.

Valencia looked from one man to the other. Each was watching her attentively; each saw that she was somewhat excited and vexed, and probably angry.

"I may as well blurt it straight out!" she said suddenly. "My brother Harry is married to Poppy Wrenne!"

Again she glanced at the two men—this time inquiringly. Harborough became sphinxlike in expression; Mr. Fransimerry took off his spectacles and began to polish them.

"Um!" he said, in still softer accents. "A secret marriage?"

"Of course!" exclaimed Valencia. "Three months ago—in London."

"And known, until now, to nobody?" inquired Mr. Fransimerry.

"Yes it was known!" said Valencia. "It was known to Mrs. Braxfield!"

"The bride's mother!" remarked Mr. Fransimerry, slowly. "Dear me! Really! And so—Poppy Wrenne is really Lady Marquenmore?"

"Of course!" snapped Valencia.

"There's no doubt about the marriage—its legality, I mean?" asked Mr. Fransimerry.

"None!" declared Valencia, as curtly as before, "whatever!"

Mr. Fransimerry remained silent a moment. Then he looked past Valencia, toward Harborough; rubbing his chin, Harborough stared at the fire. Mr. Fransimerry turned to Valencia.

"And what is the trouble?" he inquired. "As you say, my dear, since the thing is done—why, it is done!"

"The trouble's this, Mr. Fransimerry," replied Valencia. "Harry came and told me this an hour ago. He said that he and Poppy Wrenne had been in love with each other ever since she left that boarding-school that her mother sent her to, and lately Mrs. Braxfield had been in the secret, and she had consented, not only to their engagement, but to their marriage in London, when Poppy was staying there three months since. It was when Harry went up to town for the holiday—he was away quite a month. Well, now—now that things are as they are—you both know what I mean—Mrs. Braxfield insists that the time has come for this to be made public; she insists that her daughter shall take her rightful place at—at the funeral tomorrow, as Lady Marquenmore, and she has threatened Harry that unless this is done, she will—well, I suppose she'll make a scene!"

"And—your brother?" asked Mr. Fransimerry. "What does he say?"

"He would rather have postponed it until the funeral is over," replied Valencia.

"Then—he was going to announce it, in due form. But Mrs. Braxfield is adamant—he's seen her twice today, and she wont budge an inch! She insists that Lady Marquenmore should be in her rightful place tomorrow—to be seen and known as Lady Marquenmore by everybody."

Mr. Fransimerry caught his other guest's eye.

"What do you say, Harborough?" he asked.

HARBOROUGH, conscious of Valencia's sudden gaze in his direction, flushed under his brown skin.

"I—er—oh, well, I—I don't think I'm much of a hand at advising in these matters," he said shyly. "I—er—don't know much about 'em, don't you know. But it seems to me that it might be—I might ask, eh?—What does the young lady—Lady Marquenmore—say about it?"

"Good!" muttered Mr. Fransimerry. "Excellent! Now, my dear, what *does* Lady Marquenmore say about it?"

"Lady Marquenmore, who isn't at home, but who's arriving there late tonight, writes that she would infinitely prefer to do precisely what her husband prefers and proposes to do," replied Valencia. "She agrees entirely with Harry—but as far as I can gather, Mrs. Braxfield is the sort of person who will either have her own way or make things very disagreeable if she doesn't get it! That's the situation—and don't you think, Mr. Fransimerry, that as you know all of us, you might see Mrs. Braxfield tonight, and persuade her to listen to reason? I don't want any scenes—tomorrow."

"I will go!" said Mr. Fransimerry. "I will talk to Mrs. Braxfield. But—do I understand that your brother's intention—"

"Harry's intention is to announce his marriage as soon as the funeral is over," said Valencia. "I am not going to the church—there will be only men there. When they come back to the house, there will be some legal formalities—my father's will, and so on. Mr. Chilford will be there, and others, kinsfolk, you know. He will make the announcement then."

"I will go and see Mrs. Braxfield at once," said Mr. Fransimerry. "Whether I have sufficient influence with the good lady to move her to accede to your proposition, my dear, I do not know, but I will do my utmost. But you," he continued, as all three went out into the hall, where he took down his overcoat and cap, "you, my dear, cannot go back across the park alone! . . . . Harborough?"

"All right, sir," said Harborough quietly, "I'm going with her."

"Thank you—both," murmured Valencia. "Not that I'm afraid of crossing the park by myself, though."

Mr. Fransimerry opened his front door, went along a path in his garden and whistled.

The two people behind him heard a rustle, then a rattling of a chain.

"My dog!" said Mr. Fransimerry. "I never go out at night without him. Down, Tinker! I call him Tinker," he continued, "because I bought him, as a pup, from a disreputable fellow who came round here mending pots and pans."

"What is he?" asked Valencia. "A mongrel—of sorts?"

"No," replied Mr. Fransimerry. "He's a pure-bred Airedale—the finest breed in the world for—shall we say?—police purposes. That's what I bought him for. This is a lonely situation, and we have queer folk round here sometimes."

AT the gate of Mr. Fransimerry's garden the three separated; the two younger people went across the hillside and the park, in the direction of Marquenmore Court; Mr. Fransimerry took the nearest route to Woodland Cottage, his dog running a little in front of him. Twilight had come long since; the skies were dusky; in Deep Lane, into which he presently descended, it was black as a winter midnight. Down there, in the few yards which he had to traverse before climbing the opposite bank, Mr. Fransimerry's Airedale terrier left him; presently he heard him whimper among the thick bushes.

"Rabbits!" said Mr. Fransimerry. "Come away for this time, Tinker!"

The terrier came back, still whining, and obviously restless and unwilling. He behaved as if he wished to return to the spot he had just left, but his master called him to heel, and went forward. Just then Mr. Fransimerry's thoughts were not of rabbit-warrens and eager dogs—they were of the unexpected revelation which Valencia Marquenmore had made to him, and of his coming interview with that capable and masterful woman, Mrs. Braxfield.

CHAPTER XVII

Too Late

MRS. BRAXFIELD herself opened the door of Woodland Cottage to Mr. Fransimerry, and making out his identity by the light of the lamp in her hall, bade him enter in tones of warm welcome.

"Never rains but it pours!" she exclaimed, as she ushered the visitor toward her parlor. "I've got one caller already, and now here's another. Glad to see you, Mr. Fransimerry!"

Mr. Fransimerry stepped into a well-lighted, cosy sitting-room, and found himself staring at Blick—who smiled and nodded as Mr. Fransimerry hesitated on the threshold.

"If you're talking business matters—" he suggested.

"Not at all!" exclaimed Mrs. Braxfield. "This young gentleman—too young, I tell him, to have such a job as he has!—simply came to ask me what he calls a pertinent question about my evidence the other morning—if I was certain that the man I saw on the hillside the morning of the murder was Mr. John Harborough? The idea!"

Blick, who looked very much at home in an easy-chair, gave Mrs. Braxfield a whimsical glance.

"Well, you haven't told me yet if you were certain!" he said.

Mrs. Braxfield bridled.

"I'm not so old that I've lost the use of my eyes, my lad!" she exclaimed. "I can see as well as you can—better, for anything I know."

"It was very early in the morning," remarked Blick. "The light was uncertain—I've learned that there was a good deal of mist about on the hillsides. Hobbs, the man who found Guy Marquenmore's body, says that about here it was very misty indeed that Tuesday morning."

"How does he know?" demanded Mrs. Braxfield sharply. "Was he about here at that time—four o'clock?"

"He was about here an hour and a half later, and if it was misty at five-thirty, it would be still more so at four-fifteen," retorted Blick. "Now, if it was—as it was!—misty, you might easily mistake one person for another, Mrs. Braxfield. And at the time you referred to in your evidence, there was a man, closely resembling Mr. Harborough in height, build, and general appearance—I don't refer to facial resemblance—who was somewhere in this immediate neighborhood."

"What man?" asked Mrs. Braxfield, suspiciously.

"Baron von Eckhardstein," said Blick. "That's a fact!"

MRS. BRAXFIELD turned to Mr. Fransimerry, who had been standing during the exchange of words, and pointed him to an easy-chair, opposite that in which Blick sat. She took another, between the two men.

"Oh!" she said. "So he was up here, was he? That foreign man, staying at Mrs. Tretheroe's? Oh? Indeed! Well, I never saw him. The man I saw was Mr. Harborough. To be sure, now I think of it, that foreigner is about Mr. Harborough's height and figure."

"Now that you think of it—again—don't you think that you may have been mistaken?" suggested Blick. "Don't you think that the man you saw may have been Von Eckhardstein, and not Harborough? Come, now!"

"No!" said Mrs. Braxfield. "You wont come it over me, young man! I've been in a law-court before today, and you're suggesting answers to your witness. The man I saw, and that I spoke about in that witness-box was John Harborough!"

Mr. Fransimerry, utterly puzzled to know what all this was about, glanced at the detective.

"I—er—thought that Mr. Harborough fully admitted that he was up this way on Tuesday morning about four o'clock?" he observed.

"Mr. Harborough did—Mr. Harborough was up here," agreed Blick. "There's no question of that. But so was another man—Von Eckhardstein. It's all—for me—a question of exact times and places. I thought that Mrs. Braxfield might have been mistaken, but as she was not, I can only congratulate her on her excellent eyesight! Oh, by the way, Mrs. Braxfield," he added with a smile. "There's another matter—a pleasanter one—on which I must congratulate you! I heard in the village, just before I came up, of the event which you had announced. I wish your daughter every happiness in her new station; from what I'm told, she'll fill it admirably."

"Why, thank you, I think she will; and I'm much obliged to you," responded Mrs. Braxfield. "But that'll be so much Greek

to Mr. Fransimerry—you don't know what he's talking about, Mr. Fransimerry, do you?"

"I—I think I do, Mrs. Braxfield," replied Mr. Fransimerry. "I—the fact is, just before coming out, I had a visit from Miss Marquenmore. She told me that her brother, now Sir Harry Marquenmore, was married to your daughter, and that he intends to make public announcement of the fact to his kinsfolk and his solicitor tomorrow, after the sad ceremony of which we are all aware is over. But—er—I understood that no other announcement had yet been made?"

"Did you?" exclaimed Mrs. Braxfield, a little contemptuously. "No doubt you would—from Valencia Marquenmore! But they have me to reckon with, Mr. Fransimerry, and I intend that my daughter, Lady Marquenmore, shall occupy her rightful position tomorrow! She'll get home here tonight from London, where she's been staying with friends—I expect her from Selcaster station about eleven o'clock—she's coming by the last train—and tomorrow morning she'll assume her proper place at Marquenmore Court. As to whether she attends the funeral ceremonies of Sir Anthony and Mr. Guy, she and her husband, Sir Harry, can decide."

MR. FRANSIMERRY made no immediate reply. He was conscious now that the ground had been cut from under his feet; there was no chance of fulfilling his promise to Valencia. Evidently, the new Lady Marquenmore's mother had assumed responsibility, mounted her high horse, and had her own way.

"I sincerely hope the young people will be happy," he said, lamely. "I—er, trust so!"

"Be their own fault if they aren't!" declared Mrs. Braxfield, sharply. "What's to prevent it? I sha'n't! I've been uncommonly good to them—especially to him—far more so than most mothers would have been in similar circumstances, I assure you, Mr. Fransimerry. You don't know everything!"

"I know next to nothing, ma'am," protested Mr. Fransimerry. "I am just acquainted with the bare fact of the marriage."

"Well, I'll tell you," said Mrs. Braxfield. "I don't mind your knowing, and I don't mind this young man knowing, stranger though he is—"

"I've been trying to say good-by for the last ten minutes," said Blick, good-humoredly. "But you were so engrossed with your family affairs that you didn't notice I'd risen, Mrs. Braxfield. I wasn't lingering to listen—out of curiosity."

"Never said you were!" retorted Mrs. Braxfield. "Sit down again—as you're concerned in Guy Marquenmore's affairs, you're concerned in his brother's, my son-in-law. I said, I didn't mind your knowing the facts of this marriage. I don't mind anybody's knowing: it's not my fault that it hasn't been open. It was like this, Mr. Fransimerry: you know that my daughter is a very pretty, very graceful, highly accomplished girl. She gets her good looks from my family—all our women have been distinguished for their good looks, though I say it myself—"

"You may safely and justly say it for yourself, ma'am!" murmured Mr. Fransimerry. "As I have frequently observed."

"I join in Mr. Fransimerry's sentiments, Mrs. Braxfield," added Blick with a bow. "Precisely what I was thinking!"

"Well, I've worn very well," said Mrs. Braxfield complacently. "We all do—and as I say, my daughter has inherited the family good looks. And as for her accomplishments! Cost me no end of money, I can tell you, her education did! And having brought her up like that, well, I sold my business at the Sceptre and retired here, so that the girl would have proper surroundings. And it was not so long after coming here, Mr. Fransimerry, that I found out that she and young Harry Marquenmore were sweet on each other, and meeting in these woods and so on. I wasn't going to have that going on unless I knew what it all meant, and what it was going to lead to, so I had it out with him.

"Then he got me to consent to an engagement, though he persuaded me to let him keep that secret from his father and sister for a while. And in the end he got round me about this marriage—he promised that if I'd only consent to that, he'd tell Sir Anthony of it very soon afterward. So I gave way, and I saw them married, in a London church, and just afterward Sir Anthony fell ill, and Harry made that an excuse for putting things off, and though there were times—plenty of them, Mr. Fransimerry!—when he could have told his father; and of course, he could have told his sister at any time—

he was always making excuses. So when Sir Anthony died the other day, and this affair of Guy's happened, and Harry came into the title and estate, I made up my mind that I'd have the thing seen to and put right at once, and I told him so. I've seen him twice today, and he's just like every Marquenmore that ever I knew—obstinate and self-willed! He wanted to put off again—until his father and brother were buried. I said no—my daughter was going to take her proper position as mistress of Marquenmore Court tomorrow morning. And so she will!"

"I think, ma'am," observed Mr. Fransimerry, quietly, "you said just now that you had announced this marriage?"

"I have!" answered Mrs. Braxfield.

"To whom, may I ask?" inquired the elder visitor. "Mr. Blick, I think, has heard it from somebody in the village?"

"I announced it to the proper people," replied Mrs. Braxfield with spirit. "I'm not the sort of person to do otherwise. I announced it to the Vicar, to Mr. Chilford, the Marquenmores' family solicitor, and to Mrs. Perrin, the wife of the principal tenant-farmer."

"With leave, I suppose, to tell the news to anyone?" suggested Mr. Fransimerry.

"Of course! Why not, Mr. Fransimerry?" exclaimed Mrs. Braxfield. "My daughter is Lady Marquenmore!"

Mr. Fransimerry coughed—a short, dry, embarrassed cough, and Mrs. Braxfield looked at him, suddenly and sharply. She had detected, or fancied she had detected, some meaning in that cough.

"What, now?" she asked, a note of impatience in her voice. "What's that mean, Mr. Fransimerry? I know you're a lawyer, though you don't practice it—are you implying that my daughter isn't Lady Marquenmore?"

"If her husband is Sir Harry Marquenmore, ma'am, your daughter is certainly Lady Marquenmore," replied Mr. Fransimerry, calmly. "But—is he?"

MRS. BRAXFIELD'S rosy cheeks turned pale.

"Whatever do you mean?" she demanded, with an awkward attempt at an incredulous laugh. "Sir Harry! Of course, he's Sir Harry! His father's dead—his brother's dead—"

"Supposing his brother left a son?" said Mr. Fransimerry, in quiet, level tones. "What then?"

Mrs. Braxfield turned paler than before. And now Blick, keenly alive to the new situation and possibilities, spoke, looking at the elder man.

"You wouldn't say that unless you'd some grounds for saying it," he observed. "Have you? Because, if so, I'd like to know. It's my duty to get all the information I can about Guy Marquenmore."

"Mr. Blick," answered Mr. Fransimerry in his gravest accents, "your profession being what it is, I can speak freely to you. And I will speak freely to Mrs. Braxfield, things having developed as they have. What I am going to say has only been known to me for a few hours; I think it may be known to the Marquenmores' solicitor by now—it may be—and possibly to Harry Marquenmore. But I'll tell you and Mrs. Braxfield what it is, now—it may save some trouble. Mind, this is nothing that I can personally vouch for—it is only something that I have heard. And it is this:

"I may tell you that I have spent the whole day searching for Baron von Eckhardstein; I have been all up and down in the lonelier parts of the woods and in some of the downs valleys. About noon I was in that very out-of-the-way valley on the other side of one hill, called Grayling Bottom—a wild, solitary place, Mr. Blick. There is just one human habitation in it, tenanted by a woman whom Mrs. Braxfield no doubt knows—Margaret Hilson. It was very chilly in that valley—a sunless, cold place always; and I asked Margaret Hilson to let me sit by her cottage fire while I ate my lunch, which I had carried out with me. This woman is a close, reserved person—the sort, I should say, who could keep secrets forever if she chose—but she talked to me with some freedom about the present events and situation. And finding that I was a lawyer, she talked still more freely, and in the end—knowing, as she said, that things would have to come out—she said she would tell me something that she had kept entirely to herself for four years.

"Briefly, it was this: Margaret Hilson says that at just about the time of Guy Marquenmore's disappearance from these parts, there also disappeared a girl named Myra Halliwell, a very pretty girl, one of two daughters of a small farmer in this neighborhood, whose sister, Daphne Halliwell, she said, went out to India as

lady's maid to Mrs. Tretheroe, came back with her, and is now in her service at the Dower House. This Myra, says Margaret Hilson, was considered to be engaged to be married to a man named Roper—James Roper, a woodman, still, I believe, employed on the Marquenmore estate. But as I have said, she, according to Margaret Hilson, completely disappeared at the same time that Guy Marquenmore left the Court. That," observed Mr. Fransimerry, pausing in his narration and glancing significantly at the detective, "is an important matter to keep in mind—in view of what follows."

BLICK nodded. But he was not watching Mr. Fransimerry so much as he was watching Mrs. Braxfield. Obviously she was more than deeply interested in the story which was being so unexpectedly revealed to her, and since the introduction of Myra Halliwell's name her interest had deepened almost to the point of agitation.

"Well," continued Mr. Fransimerry, "what follows is this: Margaret Hilson, some four years after the disappearance of Myra Halliwell, from these parts, went to London, to visit a sister of hers who lived near Wandsworth Common. Margaret usually went out on the common of a morning, to take the air, while her sister, a workingman's wife, was engaged on her household tasks. One morning, as she was strolling about, she saw a young, smartly dressed woman whose appearance seemed familiar to her, and who had with her a nursemaid in charge of a perambulator in which was a child. They came near, and in the smart young woman Margaret Hilson recognized Myra Halliwell. The recognition was mutual: both stopped and spoke to each other. And the result was that Myra Halliwell pledging Margaret to secrecy, confided to her that she was married to Mr. Guy Marquenmore, and that the child in the perambulator, now three years old, was their son—"

Mrs. Braxfield suddenly smote the table with her clenched fist.

"A lie!" she exclaimed hoarsely. "A lie—all through! Why, he asked Mrs. Tretheroe to marry him, the night he was here! You both heard her swear it—in the witness-box; you know you did!"

Blick said nothing. He was watching Mr. Fransimerry now—convinced that there was more in and behind this story than he had at first imagined. Its various phases were opening up new ideas, new visions to him; he was becoming professionally excited over it.

"I have not yet finished, Mrs. Braxfield," said Mr. Fransimerry quietly. "Allow me. Now, Margaret Hilson—who, in my opinion, is just the woman to keep close thoughts—promised young Mrs. Guy that she would keep the secret—and she did. But a year ago, Margaret Hilson went to visit her sister again—at the same place. Again, she took her walks on Wandsworth Common. And one morning she met, not Mrs. Guy Marquenmore, but the same nurse, with the same child, then grown into a sturdy boy of six. She spoke to the nurse, who told her that the mother was dead—had died a year previously, of pneumonia: the child, she said, was being brought up by a lady to whose care he had been intrusted on his mother's death, and she the nurse, remained with him.

"The nurse, who probably saw no reason why she should not talk freely to a woman with whom she had seen her late mistress in close and intimate conversation, added some details. She said that the child's father came to see him twice a week, and always spent Sunday afternoon with him: she the nurse, spoke of him as a handsome and well-to-do man. She further said that the child was called after him—Guy. Finally, she told Margaret Hilson where her late mistress was buried—and Margaret Hilson went to see the grave. She found it easily enough from the particulars given her, and she saw the inscription on the tombstone—'Myra, wife of Guy Marquenmore.'

"That, too, Margaret Hilson has kept to herself; but, Mrs. Braxfield, she was not going to keep it to herself longer than tonight! Her intention, when I called at her cottage, was to tell Mr. Chilford all that she knew, this evening; as I did call, she told me. I advised her to tell Chilford at once; by now, she may have done so—I suppose she has. I don't think there's the slightest ground for doubting the truth of her story. Why should there be? And it is, of course, absolutely certain that if the late Guy Marquenmore's little boy is alive, why, he's the heir to the title and the estates!"

The conclusion of this captivating story contains even more dramatic episodes. Be sure to read it—in our forthcoming July issue.

The Panther of One Claw

A highly colored story of dramatic events in a tropic seaport, by the author of "The Girl in the Blue Sarong."

By GEORGE F. WORTS

LUCRATIVE and foul and sinful was the Sign of the Blue Grin. Peopled with yellow phantoms and white fools, it was perched like a bird of prey, an evil, sprawling bird, on the bank of a blackish, gurgling *klong* which floated garbage and sewage from the City of Brilliant Diamonds into the coffee-colored Menam Chow Phya when the tide ran out—and which, when the tide ran in, drank back the garbage and sewage again.

Like some poisonous mushroom it had taken root in the rich black mud of the river-bank. The humblest of seedlings, it had grown and grown and grown. Thrice it had been leveled to the ground by fire, and each time it rose to grow and grow again until at length, in its last translation from the ashes, it was fashioned of teakwood—a teakwood temple to the little wiggling green god of evil that resides in every man. And as teakwood it remained until it perished for all time at the hands of Red Durga, who was an expert in teakwood and a fairy prince besides.

It was a temple altogether devoid of architectural grace. An ugly boxlike structure of two stories was the beginning, and as the fame of the Blue Grin spread, a wing was added here, an L there, then other wings and more L's, until the Blue Grin had stolen a frontage on the *klong* and a frontage on Dam Kruk, the Black Lane, of more than eighty yards, and was, inwardly, a maze of crooked halls and twisted, unexpected stairways.

Better known in its prime among sailing men and knockabouts generally than the smugly notorious Number Nine of Yokohama, it presented sin in many more alluring aspects. There was no form of recognized vice that you could not indulge in at the Blue Grin as long as your money lasted, whether your tastes inclined toward strong drink, the black smoke, fan-tan, or merely painted ladies—or all four! In the old days a sailor from a ship in port overnight could spend a month's pay handily—and get his money's worth in the Blue Grin. And when Papeete Irene took

hold—hah! But let us begin at the beginning.

THE origin of the Sign of the Blue Grin is shrouded in the mists of antiquity, as is fitting and proper. So notorious a dive deserved something better than a prosaic birth; its beginning, to serve the ends of poetic justice, must have been ugly and perhaps a little horrible; and a fair half-dozen of strange tales so account for it. All of them have the flavor of many tellings by rough men with imaginations as big as the seas on which they toiled and fought and perished; and not among the least of these—which is the one that I privately abide by—is the one which pertains to the violent death and ribald burying of a nameless British sailor, a fo'c'stle rat, a dauntless soul who had not yet qualified for his A. B.

The name of the nameless one's ship is likewise forgotten; it might, for the purpose, have been *The Flying Dutchman.* Tradition agrees, however, that she was an India merchantman, a clipper ship in regular trade between Oriental ports and Liverpool—the spice-trade as it was called in those days. She had lain to outside the Menam bar for a few caddies of rice from Krunga Tep, as Bangkok was known then—the City of Brilliant Diamonds.

Four men among her crew, among whom was the fo'c'stle rat who has furnished food for so many romantic gullets, had sickened of bullying mates and were hungering for sweet-scented adventure ashore with the golden-skinned, bright-eyed girls who paddled down from Paknam and Paklat in canoes laden with mango-steens and plantains. They angled what pay they could from a grudging skipper, and took French leave.

In a filthy waterfront dive run by a marked Chinaman, one Lou Long Lee, a long-knife man who was wanted on a blood-account by certain vindictive men in Canton, the four adventurers overheard feverish talk of the sapphires to be had for the taking in the white sandy bed of the Chantaboun River above Chantaboun town.

WITH the sapphire fever—which is identical with the gold fever—upon them, and much strong liquor doubtless coursing through their veins, they journeyed to the Chantaboun on the backs of elephants, and there obtained a likely sapphire claim from a band of astonished Parsees. They obtained the claim with dirk-knives and rocks which lay handy, and at once commenced mining operations.

Mining for sapphires in the Chantaboun in those days consisted simply, if one cares to believe so, of stripping to the skin, diving into the chocolate flood, and scooping up handfuls of pebbles. The white sand was fairly dotted with sapphires. In one day, says the legend, they had recovered from the river-bottom a capful of the crude blue stones and a sprinkling of rubies.

And on the second day the nameless sailor was killed—stabbed at the bottom of the river while he was scooping sapphires into his hands! The vengeful Parsees had, it seemed, been watching the proceedings with jealous eyes from the jungle on the opposite bank, and unseen by the four sailors, one of them had slipped eel-like into the water when their fated comrade dived. That he had struck bottom forcibly was evident when his body rose to the surface a few hours later. The river sand had roughly scratched his chin, and in his nether lip two huge sapphires were embedded! And protruding from the muscular flesh between his shoulder-blades was the ivory haft of a curly Burmese dagger!

IN his death agonies his mouth had twisted into a horrible grin. The fearful grin remained for days on the dead sailor's face—and became a deathless trademark.

The three survivors, disheartened by the turn of events, returned to the City of Brilliant Diamonds with their dead comrade, only to find that their ship had sailed away to Calcutta.

A sea-burial was now out of the question. They debated. They debated over fiery whisky in Lou Long Lee's groggery, with the bloated corpse, grinning its horrible blue grin, lying upon a table near by, possibly to Lou Long Lee's secret displeasure, although this is not mentioned in the legend. They drank, and they deliberated long into the night. And at an unholy hour of the morning a drunken caprice of the ship's carpenter, who was one of the surviving trio, decided them. They carried the nameless sailor with ribald chanteys into the mango-mist of the pallid dawn, and there they dug a grave and buried him—in the river mud alongside of Lou Long Lee's infamous

shanty. Chips, who was something of an artist, obtained tools from Lou Long Lee and fashioned a grave-marker out of a slab of tallow-wood upon which he carved and painted as an epitaph nothing but a ghastly blue grin.

THE account of this sacrilegious burial spread out, as such accounts will, over the Seven Seas. Sailors from all the great ports in the world wore a path down Black Lane to the grave of the nameless sailor whose epitaph was a grin of blue Javanese lacquer; and before long, the commercial instincts of Lou Long Lee had prompted him to hang that bone-white grave-marker with its mocking blue grin from an iron gallows above his doorway! And there it was beaten upon by winds and rains and equatorial suns, the tallow-wood bleaching whiter and whiter as the years rolled by, the grin unfading in leering testimony to the merits of Javanese lacquer; it was rescued each time the edifice went up in belching smoke and flame—rescued to adorn the doorway that shortly followed it.

Now, that is the legend, and you can accept it or not as you like. More to the point: the celebrity of the Blue Grin grew like a rolling snowball, the unfading blue crescent on the tallow-wood grave-marker grinning through the years upon the passing of the clipper ship and the fore-an'-after, the coming of steam and ironsides, of steam and steel, of coal-burners and oil-burners.

With the tradition Lou Long Lee grew likewise rich and fat, was at length found by the unforgiving and unforgetting Canton enemies, and dispatched with alacrity into the keeping of his venerable ancestors. Then it was that the Blue Grin was taken over by a woman, and such a woman—hard and cruel and brilliant, as only the women who are reared in the southern seas can be!

Her wild beauty and her panther's nature had already brought to her no little fame. Throughout Polynesia they called her Papeete Irene, and sometimes the Panther of One Claw, as a compliment to the habit she had of carrying in her left stocking a thin, flat dagger which she was never loath to use.

PAPEETE IRENE came into Bangkok one fine morning on a trading-schooner, honeymooning with the first and only husband she ever had, Jacques la Fite. They had been legally married in Papeete, where La Fite ran a tavern of sorts. He was a hot-tempered, suspicious-natured man, something of a panther himself; but where Papeete Irene was wantonly generous, he was the very soul of stinginess. The sailors and traders in those parts said of him: "You can stay soberer for five dollars in Jacques la Fite's than in any bar in Polynesia." Why Papeete Irene took up with him, with all the fine chances for matches she had had, was hard to understand. Perhaps it was the attraction of opposites. But the flame of their passion was not long in expiring.

La Fite and his bride had been trading among the islands for two months when they put into Bangkok for supplies, and here the flame expired in a grand puff. That night in Lou Long Lee's they quarreled over a bracelet of elephant's hair and gold that Papeete Irene had bought from an itinerant Siamese gem-setter, and that quarrel went down into history.

When Jacques la Fite sailed away next morning for Papeete, he left behind him one of his thumbs, the lobe of his left ear, and his bride of two months—who lay in a cot in Dr. Dill's private hospital with concussion of the brain. It was possibly natural enough, and certainly it was characteristic of Jacques la Fite that he left her there without a dollar.

DR. DILL was at that time preparing to retire from the practice of medicine and surgery and to enter the more lucrative fields of rubber, teakwood and tin. He was a very rich man then, rich, and powerful in secret ways. His rôle of medical missionary among the Siamese had won him hosts of powerful friends. He was, even at that time, the most powerful American in southeastern Asia, with the ability to make men or break them at his pleasure.

Papeete Irene was among the last of his regular patients, and when he found that she had been born in San Francisco, there was little that he would not have done for her. He nursed and doctored her back to health and sanity, and when her baby was born, delivered it with his own hands. The baby was a girl, and Papeete Irene promptly named her Yalo, a South Sea name of a tiny red flower that grows in the craters of extinct volcanoes. She pronounced it silkily, with

two inflections, one low, like despair, the other high, like hope, accenting the *Y* as the Spaniards do—"Ea-lo."

During Papeete Irene's convalescence from the historic quarrel with her husband in the Blue Grin, and her confinement, Dr. Dill made the discovery that the black-haired, smoldering-eyed creature who had been abandoned by "that rascally La Fite," was a woman who might well be employed in some of his darker affairs. There was no sentiment at any time between the Doctor and Papeete Irene; but there was a recognition and a mutual admiration of like intelligences. The spoken word meant very little to either of them; that was where the strongest resemblance lay. Papeete Irene knew men and their weaknesses; she could fish the most inaccessible information out of the closest-mouthed man; and with such talents the Doctor recognized in her useful material.

His opportunity to make definite and permanent use of her occurred shortly after the birth of Yalo, when the Canton enemies finally found and dealt with Lou Long Lee, thus leaving the Sign of the Blue Grin without a proprietor. Dr. Dill purchased the Blue Grin for Papeete Irene with several strings attached, which need hardly be enumerated. He knew Papeete Irene's kind well.

She took over the Blue Grin a few days after what remained of Lou Long Lee had been properly nailed up in a handsome, lead-lined satin-wood box and shipped to the land of his fathers.

PAPEETE IRENE introduced very few innovations into the management of the Blue Grin. All she did, practically, was to add to it the hard, brilliant luster of her personality, and to issue one important and inviolable rule: the painted ladies, the Belgian, Chink and Jap girls, were hereafter to confine themselves exclusively to their own department. Papeete Irene was, inherently, not a reformer. From her own broad experience she had simply patterned a life for little Yalo. As far as she was concerned, Yalo could grow up to drink booze, to smoke hop and to play fan-tan if she so desired, but—not the other thing. Even when Yalo was very young, her mother was pitilessly frank about all this—the folly of giving herself to men—well, promiscuously. Such women as she, Papeete Irene informed her little daughter time and time again, were intended to be lures, and nothing more than lures. Let her grow up beautiful—and pure—and the men would come to the Blue Grin in armies. They would some seeking a difficult and delicious conquest. They would coax and curse and rave and threaten all manner of horrible things, but—they would continue to seek. Papeete Irene's philosophy was to let them keep on seeking, then they would come again and again. When they got tired of striving for the inaccessible Yalo, they would continue to come.

It was the first philosophy that Papeete Irene had ever voiced, and it is probable that something vaguely akin to respectability was born in her with the creation of a daughter. For the first time in her life a defensive phrase was on her scornful lips. When she was drinking and joking with men, and her little daughter was near, for no clear reason she would suddenly say: "Ah, I have a husband in Papeete. That La Fite, you know?" Oh, yes. Her auditors would nod wisely while they guzzled their whisky or ale. It became a habit with her, whenever glances, however mildly questioning, were addressed at Yalo, to drag in that husband of hers in Papeete, until he became a pillar of strength and respectability. She would mention tenderly, with a pitying head-shake: "But such a wild fellow! I had to leave him." It infuriated her to have the slightest doubt cast upon Yalo's parentage, as was quite natural, looked at both ways, with all those painted ladies in the segregated department hard by.

YALO sprouted in the rich, fervid soil of the Blue Grin as tender, delicate flowers have a habit of sprouting—the blacker the soil, the lovelier the sprouting. She was, at all ages, a dark little beauty. She should have been utterly spoiled, and wasn't. From childhood to adolescence she was dandled upon the knees of boisterously adoring seafarers, and at adolescence her experienced mother, appreciating that no knee was any longer fatherly, ordered the practice discontinued.

But Yalo la Fite, even at the age of eleven, was a match for any man. She avoided laps and rough arms and clumsy kisses with elfin grace, and at the same time teased for and got money, presents, queer trinkets from all over the world. And if the horseplay become too strenuous for her liking, she would reach deftly into the

stocking of her slim left leg and flash upon the smoky air an ugly little bejeweled dagger. One night she slit open a man's cheek with it, from ear to mouth, for presuming to fondle her soft little waist.

Oh, Yalo was her mother's girl—and a little more. Shrewd observation taught her things that her mother had learned a little late. She would not drink. She would not smoke the black stuff. She would not kiss any man. She was preserving herself—for what or whom? A fairy prince? Perhaps. More likely she was preserving Yalo for Yalo. And in the famous, dingy bar from dark until dawn, when business warranted it, she became superlatively what her mother had dreamed and hoped—a lure, stirring up the little green god of evil that resides in every man, coaxing him, luring him to spend wildly, to gamble, to drink.

At seventeen she was an orchid-thing, with skin as white as the wing of an albatross, eyes green like sea-ice, blackish hair straight and glinting like wire, and lips that would have tantalized a saint. A tiger-lily rearing her proud head above the muck—a virgin in the toughest dive on the China coast!

Her fame was great, and the Blue Grin was making money—too much money. It was after Papeete Irene had taken hold that so many wings and L's were added, for she ran the Blue Grin on sound, business-building principles: the best of liquor, and no knock-out drops; *yang-yao*, the richest and choicest of Indian opiums—none of the cheap Mongolian stuff, and no adulterating it with tree-gums either; and in the other department, the liveliest, best-looking girls you could find between Yokohama and Singapore. And added to it all, her brilliant, flashing personality, and the soft lure of that delectable Yalo. A money-making combination—you bet!

THROUGH a goodly portion of these seventeen years, Papeete Irene had kept faithfully in mind the injunctions of her benefactor. There had been no causeless murders in the Blue Grin—no naked, mutilated corpses dropped from black windows or trapdoors into blacker water as had characterized Lou Long Lee's business-like management. Men had met violent death in the Blue Grin, to be sure; but these were respectably explained to Dr. Dill—a whisky-bottle thrown with too accurate aim in a brawl—a drunkard's careless pistol activities—a knife in the back for a real or fancied wrong. No; the Blue Grin's management was clean for a good many years, as clean as those clearing-houses for vice along the Oriental waterfronts can be kept clean. And from time to time she had been of great value to her benefactor. Through her Dr. Dill possessed himself of delicate and valuable information which would not have been obtainable otherwise, and through her he executed, from time to time, his secret judgments upon men.

The trouble lay elsewhere—in Papeete Irene's own head or bosom. It was ambition, the burning ambition of a rich, powerful woman of forty-five to be yet more powerful. It must have taken hold of her gradually, almost imperceptibly; vague, indefinite rumors commenced to circulate. She was dabbling in petty native politics; she was dispensing judgments of her own. A man who knew too much about one little affair, a Eurasian, had entered the Blue Grin, and there his trail ended, never to reappear. The first mate of a Japanese freighter was seen one evening sipping hot *saki* in the Blue Grin's bar—next morning he was found, a naked corpse with irises strangely contracted, lodged in the spiderwort below Tatem landing.

SHORTLY after this occurrence it was noised about that Papeete Irene and her Yalo had had a falling out. The girl, because of moral or other convictions, had threatened to leave if certain things were not stopped. Yalo did not appear in public for several days, and it leaked out that Papeete Irene had endeavored to show the light of reason to her with the aid of a malacca stick. But Yalo did not leave, perhaps because of the malacca stick, and perhaps because there was no other place for her to go.

Another quarrel followed, this time over the foolish and fat, stupid but powerful Prince Churabunda, who had more wives than he could count on all his fat little fingers and toes, and a desire in his putrid little heart for Yalo. Churabunda for a son-in-law meant, for Papeete Irene, influence in important circles. But Yalo would not yield, even when shown the light repeatedly with the malacca stick.

Rumors of dark doings in the Blue Grin persisted. Papeete Irene was getting troublesome. She dabbled more and more

in native politics. She financed a Lao uprising, both for power and profit. She became suddenly dangerous, a threat.

DR. DILL became, with equal suddenness, impatient. In financing the revolt of an aspiring Lao *nang p'uchai*, she had, unwittingly or not, upset one of the Doctor's pet schemes. He sent her, delicately, a warning. Her reply amounted to a declaration of hostilities. Papeete Irene had tasted the intoxicating wine that Dr. Dill considered his private vintage. She had tested her weapons and found them strong. An underworld obeyed her lightest wish, her severest command. She was independently wealthy. The Doctor's methods were her own. What was sauce for the goose was sauce for the gander. So she defied him. Foolish woman!

For several days Dr. Dill did nothing. It was characteristic of him to do nothing—for several days. He had driven one man stark, raving mad by doing nothing, for several days, but nothing. And then Red Durga furnished him with the solution he wanted, by happening to drift down the Menam to Bangkok in a breadfruit dugout from his post in northern Siam.

Now, Red Durga hated civilization and all that civilization stood for, its weakness and its wickedness. He had been in Dr. Dill's employ for twelve years, since the age of twenty, and in all twelve years he had visited Bangkok but once before. What had soured him on the world no one could explain. He led, to all external appearances, a very happy existence at his lonely post high up in the Himalayan foothills.

And unlike so many men who come from northern countries for service in the jungles, he had not—to external appearances—deteriorated. He was a "son of the sun," one of those rare and privileged creatures who seem immune to the destructive rays of southern sunlight. A relentless force seemed to drive him, and he was ruthless. Under his supervision a thousand natives swarmed the jungles, sawyers, chain-men, elephant-men, raftmen, and so on. They admired him, respected him and hated him. He was scarred from head to foot from attacks that had been made upon him, generally from behind; and it was his proud boast that he had never yet had to kill a man. He knocked their heads together, or sent them sprawling twenty feet with a blow from one of his mighty fists.

Red Durga was the kind of man at whom you look and unconsciously straighten your shoulders. He topped six feet by two or three inches, and he carried this height with the grace of a grenadier. He had a great barrel of a chest and the voice of a bull, eyes that were of a blue like baked porcelain, and hair of a violent orange. His face was brick-red, and it wore an expression of eternal peace. Even when angriest he, paradoxically, never seemed to have lost his temper. His voice would utter reverberant, volcanic sounds; the whole earth would seem to tremble under your feet when he roared; yet even in those moments his great red face was placid, almost kind. He had lived a life of violence; he heartily enjoyed violence, practicing it when, where and if necessary; and you liked him the more for it. His loyalty to Dr. Dill was like that of a great bloodthirsty mastiff.

HE had come down from his post six hundred miles by canoe to confer with the Doctor on a matter of pressing business, and he came into the Doctor's presence in the nighttime, stamping out into the elaborately copper-screened veranda where Dr. Dill sat placidly smoking his after-dinner foot-long white Burmese cheroot, deliberating upon Papeete Irene and smoldering under her insult.

Red Durga wore white drill trousers and a sleeveless white cotton shirt, and he resembled a red bull sewed up in sailcloth. His china-blue eyes were glowing like a cat's, and his face wore its perpetual boyish smile. He spoke feelingly for a space of five minutes, a mixture of upcountry Siamese and English, as his brain ponderously revolved the outrage that had brought him here.

Dr. Dill, listening with intense admiration while that huge voice rolled and rumbled through the house, gleaned that Red Durga had been trailing a raft of teak-logs, steel-die stamped and branded with the Doctor's fantastic and irrevocable *D*. He had tracked the logs as far south as Ayeuthia, and then they had vanished as if the sun had drunk them up with the morning fog. He banged an arm of the chair into which he had recklessly thrown himself. He had come here principally to get the Doctor's permission to deal di-

rectly with the thief, whom he knew by reputation and whom he would dearly enjoy rending into fine bits with his bare hands, after smashing every stick of furniture in that rascal's office into kindling-wood with the thief's body as a club!

A shaft of light from an inner room fell upon his great red face as he talked, and the Doctor marveled at the serenity which was retained there even while the slowly working mouth launched the most horrible projects for reprisal.

If the Doctor denied him permission to smash that crawling mud-snake, he would, he threatened finally, smash something to relieve his pent-in disgust at the rapacity of mankind.

"Smash the Blue Grin," Dr. Dill suggested faintly.

He could see the giant body of Red Durga stiffen and relax with wonder as he, very gravely, reiterated this suggestion.

"H'm," Red Durga brought out a comment at length. "That woman down there is under your protection."

"No longer," he was informed. She was, Dr. Dill amplified, not only out from under his protection, but she was standing in the way of a juggernaut. Now, Red Durga knew something of the inner mechanism of that recent Lao affair, and he had had suspicions even then. He was not greatly surprised when the Doctor supplied him with knowledge which linked the Lao *nang p'uchai* with the man who had spirited away that teak-raft. The inference was obvious. It rather left Papeete Irene in the predicament of one who unwittingly thrusts his head into the dripping jaws of a tiger, did it not?

"You want me to do what, then?" the giant softly asked, after reflection.

"Tear it wide open. Start a riot. Burn it to the ground. A rumpus, Red. A rumpus and a real fire; that's what I want. Do you need a little whisky to put you into the right mood?"

"It is a vicious place, anyhow, and I am in the right mood now," the young man returned happily. "However, I will drink a little whisky with you for the sake of companionship."

IT was after eleven when Red Durga left the Doctor's house with detailed suggestions, inclusive even of Yalo's fate, and as he walked all of the way to the Black Lane, it must have been close on to midnight when he swung into the open doorway under the iron gallows where hung the historic enameled blue grin.

A Hollander and a French tramp were in port that night and the Blue Grin was, when he strode into the bar, filled with noisy, drinking deckhands and oilers and engineers from the two ships.

Red Durga stopped just inside the doorway with his back to the Black Lane, his blank blue eyes sweeping the crowded, smoke-fogged room as if he were seeking a table. A group of men at the bar were focused on a tall woman in glove-fitting black satin who had come up to them. Her black hair was slightly gray at the temples, but her skin was smooth like cream, and the color of cream, except for the bright dab of scarlet where her lips were. She was questioning one of these men at the bar, with both white hands resting lightly on his shoulders; and he was smiling fatuously into her eyes.

Red Durga could not have been standing in the doorway more than five seconds when a curious hush fell upon the room. It is safe to say that none among them had seen Red Durga before, or for that matter, many who had resembled him.

HE stood there with his white shirt flapping softly in the off-river wind, his disreputable sun-helmet swinging lightly from one great red thumb, his feet planted wide, as men plant their feet on the decks of rolling ships. Yet he was no sailor—a glance told that. He was of the jungle; and in his bearing was that thing without name which caused a full third of the men in the room to reach automatically for hidden knives and pistols. For this was the hush that preceded a storm.

Papeete Irene gazed at the newcomer with quickly narrowing eyes. Sooner than any of her patrons she had sensed danger, but she did not remove her white hands from the shoulders of the fatuous sailor. She shrugged slightly, with a droll tightening of the corners of her mouth, but the room remained silent, watchful, expectant—waiting, all on tiptoes, so to speak.

It was as if a gorilla had walked into the Blue Grin from out of the jungles which surround Bangkok; and every line of his placid face, every angle of his posture, was noted by experienced eyes with sharpening interest. For here was a man with blood in his eye. Here was a man whose loosely hanging fists meant fray.

Yet he continued to gaze mildly across the smoke-fogged, whisky-reeking room as if he were a souvenir-hunter who was trying to decide what he wanted to take along with him. What had held him there so long in that curious attitude was nothing else, as you have suspected, but his first glimpse of Yalo.

SHE was in the act of rising, with a yellow cigarette in her lips, from a table where a half dozen merrily gesticulating French sailors were sitting when Red Durga had entered; and her eyes seemed to be caught by his as if in a steel-jawed trap. Now, Yalo had caught the eyes of ten thousand men in the doorway of the Blue Grin before Red Durga came there; she had smiled at each of the ten thousand with intimate welcome, and the better part of the ten thousand had avidly smiled back.

Now she did not smile, but stood, with one of her hands caught over her breast, and looked and looked at him, as if he were something, some one, she had been expecting would pass through that doorway since the first of the ten thousand crossed the threshold, but was surprised when he actually did.

As ever, she was gowned meticulously and maliciously for her part. A frock of apple-green silk was cut just low enough to hint at the existence of a maidenly bosom, and just high enough to permit a glimpse of enticingly silk-stockinged slim legs. She wore fat white diamonds on her slim white fingers, jet pendants at her ears, a yellow Bangalore love-flower in her sleek black hair. There was studied abandon and invitation in every gesture she made, every posture of her virtuous young body. Ah, there indeed lay her great charm—the virgin of the Blue Grin! She was, as Red Durga saw her in the tingling moment before fists crashed and blood flowed, virtue incarnate.

Papeete Irene must have divined the reason for his presence the instant he flicked his blue porcelain eyes from her daughter to a great copper-bellied Chinese *dong* hanging by gilt chains from a rafter and guttering and smoking evilly; for at the next instant a forewarning, an instinct, had placed her in the advantage—poised, ready, for the first move that Red Durga should make.

She had only to raise her voice above that expectant hush—and her minions were flying to her support. It had all happened, of course, in a space of time measured off by a dozen heartbeats, from Red Durga's entrance, to the moment he was hemmed in and fighting a host of yellow devils for his life.

ASTONISHING impressions prevailed. A gaunt Mongolian in flapping blue, lips spread across yellow fangs, spilling like a huge blue bottle down a stairway, leaping to a table and launching himself with both hands clutching a bar of iron. Another Chink strangling him from behind. Yet another clawing at his knees. And beyond this, through the foul mist of smoke, the livid face of Yalo, who was the chemical that transformed the huge mass of him into animated destruction. Her scream of warning was like a spear of sound.

He battered in the face of the Mongolian with the piston drive of one great fist, kicked a clinging Chink in the belly, ducked lightly as a crinkly knife sang past his ribs, and plunged with flailing arms like a great stumbling windmill through a scrambling, squawking mass of waiters and sailors.

Red Durga bawled at her: "Into that corner—you there!" And she screamed: "You better get t'hell out o' here!" Each misread the other's intention. Yalo stooped to her stocking and flashed aloft the jeweled dagger. Red Durga knocked her then with a soft cuff of the flat of one paw into the designated corner, where she went down in a cursing heap. He clambered upon a table, kicked it clear of bottles and glasses, jerked a swinging *dong* from its gibbet and hurled it into the colored bottles back of the bar.

Papeete Irene screamed anew as the flame and smoke gushed from the neck of the *dong* like a hungry dragon's tongue. A bottle spinning lazily over and over flew past Red Durga's head and crashed with a liquid burst against the wall behind him, drenching the half-stunned Yalo with the pinkish sirup of grenadine.

A CHAIR batted his legs. A dozen Chinks seemed to be swarming simultaneously upon the table, snatching at his kicking legs, and behind them fight-thirsty French sailors.

He grabbed the chair and knocked another copper-bellied *dong* from its chains, then another.

And through the choking fumes of oil-smoke and burning wood, he glimpsed Yalo's face and Yalo's arm, which still terminated in thin, silvery steel, as the steel descended into the back of a Chinaman.

A spinning chair-bottom caught him thuddingly in the chest and knocked him off the table upon the heads of milling foes, but he landed upright and beside Yalo, whose steel clicked and *seeped* along other steel that was even then intended for Red Durga's heart! It was then that he began to understand.

"You stand by me, little un," he roared at her.

"You fool! You great fool!" she screamed.

A spiral of flame licked up the pillar, and vanished sickly in strangling smoke. Across the room, but vague, a monstrous red glare was shining. The bar of the Blue Grin was filled with brown, stifling fog, obscuring faces and promoting terror. Phantoms shrieked and filtered through the stifling pall into the safety of the Black Lane.

THE fighting had left Red Durga—only a surge of scratching, clawing, bawling men for the doorway. A choked sob at his ear: "Get out o' this—that window."

He fumbled for Yalo's hand, and found it as she wilted to the floor. He picked her up in his arms, lurched to the wall and pushed out the window-glass with his hand.

He stepped through the jagged opening into the comparative sweetness of the *klong* bank. He walked hurriedly through the darkness toward the river, and when he reached the slip below Cherernkern Road, he tried to set the girl upon her feet, but she would not stand. She would have sagged to the mud. . . . . So he tossed her upon his shoulder again with a great sigh. The girl on his shoulder rose and fell, with the sigh, as a ship rises and falls when a ground-swell passes under her.

Red Durga carried her to the end of the jetty, where his canoe was tied. There he paused and turned about. Red flames were crawling into the sky and vomiting juicy red sparks into clouds of muddy smoke. The Blue Grin was going, going forever.

Yalo quivered: "I told 'er to go easy wif Dill, I told 'er!"

"You don't need to worry about that," he comforted her.

"Or nothing," Yalo murmured. "I'm through wif 'er. I never want to see 'er again."

"I think you and I will get along very well together," Red Durga said placidly. "I have a fine place in the foothills, and there will be no one but us up there the whole year round. I have got very lonesome up there for some one like you."

Her arms had been hanging loosely over his shoulders. They tightened a little now, experimentally. She shifted her head about until she could see his eyes, glowing somberly with red sparks where the climbing fire above the Blue Grin shone into them. Then she dropped her mouth to his in luxurious surrender.

DR. DILL watched the wine-red stain above the treetops until what had been the Blue Grin had died away to a ruby spark of no more importance than the glowing tip of his foot-long white cheroot.

Papeete Irene found him there, a little Buddha of the shadows, when she stormed into the big house.

"What have you done with Ea-lo?"

"Yalo?" he murmured.

She shuddered. "Ah, you sit there like a little tin god. Where is my girl? What have you done with her? Tell me only that, and I will do what you want. Where did that *mah* of yours take her?"

"Durga is not a dog," the Doctor corrected her gravely. "He is a brave man. You can set your mind at rest. He will treat her kindly. And he will probably make her into a good woman."

"I should have known you would have done something like this!"

"You were very unwise, I think," the Doctor agreed.

Papeete Irene sighed heavily. "You want me to leave Bangkok soon?"

The ruby spark of his cheroot moved slowly in affirmation.

"Well, I'll go," she said wearily. "I think I'll go to Papeete. I have a husband in Papeete, you know."

George F. Worts, author of the dramatic story here completed, has written a thrilling novel of the Orient entitled "South of Shanghai." Be sure to look for it in the next, the July, issue.

Free Lances in Diplomacy

"The Missing Treaty" is one of the most interesting stories of this, one of the longest-sustained and most attractive series ever printed. Be sure to read it.

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

CONSIDERING the momentous events which are handled within their walls, the foreign offices of all governments are disappointing to the tourists whose curiosity, or interest in international affairs, prompts a visit to them. In some instances the buildings themselves are more or less imposing from the outside. But the interior arrangement is generally that of a commercial office-building—clerks at their desks in various rooms, officials in more private rooms of their own, but with the familiar desks, filing-cabinets and safes of a purely commercial office. An ultimatum to the Angora government is merely a sheet of paper—copy of which has been given to the department translator and dispatcher for transmission—which lies with numerous other papers in a certain box-file on a shelf in a safety-vault which any up-to-date cracksman would open within an hour or two. The offensive and defensive treaty between two great powers is merely a few typewritten pages, fastened together at the top, having a few ribbons and seals depending from the bottom, chucked into a portfolio or file and kept in the same way. Of course, the safes or vaults are supposed to be reasonably burglar-proof; clerks and other employees in the building, supposed to be even better protection. But the whole proposition lacks romance. There's nothing spectacular or noticeably different from any business offices in the city, nothing to suggest that one of those inanimate papers, chucked into ordinary files, perhaps almost forgotten for months or years, may be the cause of another world-cataclysm.

The Ministère des Affaires Etrangères in Paris—more familiarly known in the cable-news as the Quai d'Orsay—is a handsome building by Lacornée, dating back to 1845, and comes nearer to what such a building ought to look like than our own State Department in Washington, which shares its outer shell with the War and Navy departments, or the British Foreign Office—the famous Downing

Street. For the Paris building has one frontage on the Quai, facing the Place de la Concorde across the Seine, a longer side on the Esplanade des Invalides, partly obstructed by that portion of the big subway station which is above ground because of the Seine floods—and another front on the little Rue de l'Université. In the center, there is a large open court with the four buildings of the Department grouped around it. As a rule, the place is busy enough—with trivial matters rather than big ones. As far as appearances go, all sorts and conditions of people are passing through its corridors and various rooms; but eliminating such individuals as are connected with the French secret service in one capacity or another, the remainder would be fairly representative of the upper classes, because the Government makes a point of knowing pretty well just who outside visitors to the building are, and what object they have in coming in.

ON a certain afternoon, for example, two well-dressed individuals who had nothing official in their appearance were standing inside the main entrance when a tall, fine-looking man in a perfectly cut gray suit and Fedora hat came in—nodding pleasantly to one of them, and turning up a corridor which led to the minister's suite.

"He? *Ma foi!* Does it make itself possible, *mon vieux,* that M'sieur is not familiar to you? *Non?* Ah, well! M'sieur is not of the conspicuous type, perhaps, until one is attracted by his bearing—the visage most noble, the high air of command, the calm yet piercing look of the eye. *C'est M'sieur Trevor—le plus distingué.* On the waistcoat, inside, if perhaps the wind blow a little, you would see the rosettes and colored strips of fourteen orders conferred by many governments. But a little while gone, the man was an English milord—M'sieur le Comte de Dyvnaint. But to him and la belle Madame, that was as nothing. He is Américain—he prefers always to speak the mind without obligation to any government. He resigns the British Peerage as if it were a suit which did not fit as he liked. A gesture superb—if one considers how most little men value such things! They are now but M'sieur and Madame —the Honorable M'sieur et Madame Trevor—to whom no door in all Paris is really closed. Our government owes them much—will possibly owe them more. So it makes itself that they go where they please, unquestioned. One does not stop either of them if he or she knocks upon the door of M'sieur le Président and walks in—because one knows they would do nothing of the sort without reason. Today his business appears to be with M'sieur le Ministre—yet it may be nothing more than a dinner-invitation or some new trick in photography, which is something of a fad with both."

In the outer office of the suite, the Minister's secretary jumped up with a smile when Trevor opened the door, and said he would see if His Excellency was disengaged. Returning in two or three minutes, he escorted the distinguished American through intervening rooms to the Minister's private office, and drew up a chair at the side of his desk. His Excellency was giving instructions at the moment to one of his subordinates, who presently took up an official-looking document from where it lay on the blotter and went off with it to an inner room containing the files, safes and vault in which papers of importance were kept. As the visitor knew from a previous visit,—when he had been shown all over the place,—there was no access to this inner room save through the Minister's private office, and so the clerk would either reappear in a few minutes or sit down at a desk in the file-room and do some work there. While Trevor was exchanging generalities with the Minister, the clerk did come out—passing through to one of the other rooms, in which he worked at a desk in one corner, and closing the private-office door behind him.

CLOSE observation had been habit with Trevor so many years that it had become automatic—his subconscious mind registering and retaining impressions to be recalled at some later time when chance occurrence or remark suggested them. One part of his mind, at the moment, was full of the subject upon which he had called to see the Foreign Minister—so much so that he wasn't intentionally thinking of anything else. Yet he afterward remembered that the official-looking document which the clerk picked up and took into the file-room had a ribbon and a gold seal upon which the unmistakable device of a "rising sun" appeared in relief—and that there were two or three pages of

Oriental ideographs bound in with the sheets of typewritten French. Furthermore he was positive about two other details: when the clerk went into the file-room, his coat was unbuttoned, the pen and pencils in his waistcoat-pocket showing plainly; but when he came through on his way to the outer offices of the suite, his coat was closely buttoned about him. There was something vaguely familiar about the man's face. He was the typical French clerk—dressing rather beyond his means, yet wearing his clothes with the carelessness noticeable in all government employees and having the seldom-mistakable air of the subordinate politician—the impression of lack in both efficiency and responsibility.

"Er—one of your Excellency's confidential men? His face is rather familiar. I suppose I must have seen him here a number of times."

"Oh, without doubt! Flandreau has been in the Department through two administrations—I find his knowledge of great assistance in regard to the more important papers when there is need to find one which has not been referred to for some time. He has his little failings, one admits—*trop d'absinthe, par exemple*—and is sometimes careless in filing, but less so than the average department employee."

The clerk was nowhere in sight when Trevor went out—though he carelessly glanced about, merely to refresh his memory of the man's face. Now that he definitely considered the question, he was positive that some trivial incident had made him notice the man before in a place which was not the Ministère des Affaires Etrangères or within a mile of it. And by a mechanical method which he had worked out to stimulate recollection, he presently dug up the mental picture of a man talking with a woman, furtively, in the shadow of a stucco wall outside of a garden in one of the narrower streets not far from the old Austrian Embassy. There had been a lamp hanging from a wall-bracket which gave sufficient illumination to distinguish their faces at a short distance, but not details of clothing. That of the woman was striking—handsome, in a compelling way, though one felt that her manner wouldn't be overassertive with strangers.

As it happened, the woman's face had been even more familiar than the clerk's. Now that he was consciously recalling details of their confidential discussion by the stucco wall, it seemed to him that she must be the same woman whom one of his Quartier friends had spoken about during a ball in one of the larger studios—a woman who had achieved the Salon with one of her canvases and was thought to have other activities on the side. Now, the clerk might be her lover—that was the more obvious possibility. Their manner at the time had borne out this supposition. And if such were the case, his being a Foreign Office employee had no bearing whatever upon the incident, a Government clerk having the same right to his little relaxations as any other man. On the other hand, if Mademoiselle happened to be secretly in the employ of some other government and had skillfully managed to get him into her power—well, that was something else again. With such a combination, the unknown other government was almost in position to get information concerning the foreign policy of France which it had no right to, and which the French Government had no idea of letting it get.

EVERY minute of the Trevors' days and nights is fully occupied, as a rule; yet, as with most successful busy people, there are always occupations or engagements which may be put aside when something more important comes up. In this matter of the Foreign Office clerk, Trevor had really no personal or political interest. If certain secrets of the French Government should leak out, it was no affair of his or the American State Department—beyond the impulse of one friend to warn another when that friend's affairs are in some danger. And there was no proof whatever of that. But it presently occurred to the Honorable George that if any information was worth all this trouble to some unknown government, it might be something which Downing Street or Washington would find it advantageous to know. With such knowledge in advance, either power might be able to prevent a European war in some unforeseen emergency. The more he thought of it, the more it seemed worth a little time and trouble spent in learning more about Flandreau and the woman.

Next afternoon—in other clothes, with a typically different manner and slight alterations in his facial appearance which deceived even people who knew him well—he was near the entrance to the building when Flandreau came out, and followed

him without being discovered. By dinner-time he had found where the man lived—also that he occasionally had women visitors who remained in his rooms for several hours. Later in the evening he followed the clerk a few blocks to the studio occupied by a Mademoiselle Julie Deschamps, who proved to be the same handsome girl whom Flandreau had talked with by the stucco wall. And after the clerk left, about eleven, she had another caller whom Trevor knew at first glance—one Bravinski, who lived at a political rendezvous in the Rue Vanneau and was supposed to be a Russian journalist. Here, then, was a definitely suspicious trail from the Ministère des Affaires Etrangères to the lair of several unscrupulous secret agents, some of whom were in the employ of the Moscow soviet—others of the Charlottenburg junta which controls German politics. And yet, either Flandreau or Bravinski might be merely an admirer of Mlle. Julie, having no knowledge of or relations with the other. It was the combination which presupposed a connection somewhere—for a sinister purpose.

What this purpose might be, Trevor couldn't definitely guess. It was supposedly the intention to get certain papers or information from the Quai d'Orsay—but *what* papers? Information concerning *what?* Presumably, if Flandreau was to obtain them, he either had already done so or was likely to make the attempt within a day or two. So, if there were actually grounds for the American's suspicions, any action he might decide upon must be taken at once. After discussing the case with Madame Nan and Earl Lammerford, that evening, at their celebrated Paris home on the Avenue de Neuilly, he decided to establish an acquaintance with Mlle. Deschamps at once and see what he could pick up in her studio.

THIS was a less difficult undertaking than it might seem at first glance. He knew, of course, a number of prominent artists in the Quartier and other parts of the city—most of whom were under obligations sufficiently compelling to make them more than ready to do him any favor in their power. Selecting Boncours because it was in his atelier that he had first seen the girl, Trevor motored across the city for a late call, finding the famous artist at supper with half a dozen friends. Being urged to join them, he proved a distinct acquisition—it was over an hour before he got a chance to speak with Boncours alone.

"I say, old chap!" he said then, "how well do you know Julie Deschamps? Is she by any chance in your debt—socially or otherwise?"

"Well—perhaps I may claim the credit of improving her sense of color-harmony and composition during the last two years. She's amazingly quick to observe and pick up what she needs. The girl has intrigued me somewhat—much too clever, mentally, for the average artist. In fact, I'm of the opinion that painting is by no means her chief object in life—though she'd go far if she concentrated upon it. Is it that you wish an introduction, *mon vieux?*"

"Another time will do for *me*. But I have a friend—an American who has been here a month or so—who wishes very much to meet the girl. He's a gentleman—speaks very decent French, has enough money to live where he pleases, is good company, from what I've seen of him in a crowd. If you've the time and would care to go around with him to her studio tomorrow morning, I'd appreciate the favor a lot—and Evans will do anything in his power to show his appreciation. I think you'll find him a pretty good sort to keep in touch with."

"Case of sudden infatuation, one supposes?"

"Oh—I'd hardly call it *that*. He saw the girl at some affair in the Quartier—liked her looks, didn't exactly want to ask for an introduction at the time, because it was a pretty mixed crowd and he had no way of classifying her. Since then he's found that she really *is* an artist of ability and wants the sort of introduction that will put him in the right light—assure the girl that she can receive him frequently in her studio without risk of anything unpleasant. When he put it that way, I thought of you as being exactly the sponsor he was after, if we may impose upon your good nature to that extent."

"Of course! Of course! It will be a pleasure! He will desire to take her out, I suppose? The little dinner, the theater, the cinema, the opera, perhaps?"

"Well—if you hint to her that he'll be a perfectly safe escort, I think he may have some such idea."

"Ah! Trust me to pave the way! He wont find the girl backward in accepting invitations—provided she likes him. It all depends upon that with any woman,

as you know. Send him to me at nine in the morning, with a letter—we can then go around, establish him for a tête-à-tête with her—and I can return for my classes at ten. I will call her maid on the telephone, that she may expect us. Pouf! It is nothing! Whenever I can be of service you have but to speak, as you very well know."

IN the Mr. Reginald Evans of San Francisco who presented himself at the atelier next morning, Boncours saw nothing which reminded him of his friend Trevor. They were of about the same height and of similar athletic build—but there all similarity vanished. Their taste in clothing was markedly different—Evans was of darker complexion and wore a military mustache. The monocle or glasses which seemed inseparable parts of Trevor's face were absent—giving Evans' eyes unobstructed opportunity to exert their magnetic attraction. Boncours was favorably impressed at first glance. Mlle. Deschamps—who had gotten out of bed in bad humor over being asked to receive callers at such an hour—thawed at once when Evans smilingly apologized, in excellent French, and she suggested that they breakfast with her. The artist drank a cup of coffee as a matter of courtesy—then excused himself on account of his classes and hurried back, leaving Mademoiselle and their new acquaintance tête-à-tête.

Experience with many types of women, through many years, enabled Trevor to guess very closely her tastes and preferences—and he made himself so interesting that it was noon before they realized it. She had never met a man whom she liked as much upon first acquaintance. After an hour or two, she felt drawn to him in a way that vaguely alarmed her—with a sudden realization that here was one whom she would find it difficult to resist. But though she was conscious of opportunities which she couldn't avoid giving him, he never once overstepped the line. (The thought came into her mind that perhaps he would before she got through with him.) He explained at the start that he expected to leave very shortly for the Orient, on his way home—was, in fact, waiting for radio-advices from two business friends who were probably crossing the Atlantic at that moment to join him. He planned to be in Paris again within nine or ten months, but feared that he might lose track of her by that time unless he secured an introduction before he left. Then—as his time was so limited, he hoped she might be able and willing to go about with him quite a lot before he left.

All of this was natural enough, if one stops to consider it. Obviously the man had become interested in her, or he wouldn't have taken so much trouble over being presented in the right way—instead of securing a snap introduction at that studio affair, when she probably would have been disinclined to continue the acquaintance without more acceptable credentials. Having but a few days more in the city, the effort to secure as much of her company as possible was exactly what any man would do in the circumstances. The only question in the whole proposition was whether she proved to be equally attracted—liked him enough at first sight to accept. And after the first half-hour, this was no longer a consideration.

AT noon she suggested that he amuse himself by looking at her collection of props, furnishings and bric-a-brac scattered about the studio, while she dressed in her boudoir, adjoining, to go out with him. The *bonne,* of course, was in her little kitchenette at the end of the suite, and would not come within sight or hearing unless she were called. There was no door that he could see, between the studio and her boudoir—merely a portière which didn't meet the jamb by two or three inches on either side and revealed fractional glimpses of something white passing and repassing behind it every time his glance strayed to that side of the room—and they kept up a fragmentary conversation, back and forth, as she dressed.

The girl was not French—his own accent was far better than hers when he considered it safe to speak the language as well as he could. Probably Hungarian, Czech or Russian—he was inclined to think Czech, in spite of what he knew as to her political affiliations. Her suggestion that he browse about the studio while she dressed gave him opportunity which he had hoped for but didn't expect to get so soon.

"You really mean that you'll not mind if I go poking about the place and look at what interests me?"

"But certainly, m'sieur! One knows

from what he has said that m'sieur is a connoisseur if not an artist himself—if my little collection interests him, I shall be pleased. *Un moment!* I will throw out to you keys for some of the chests in which there are things one does not care to leave about promiscuously. Open anything which they will unlock!"

The supposed "Evans" thought to himself: "Now—I wonder how many minutes? She may be one of these efficient women—a quick dresser. That would mean—say, fifteen minutes? H-m-m—that negligée had no appearance of having been hurried on. Her hair was pinned up in braids, but the braids were smooth. No—for the street and restaurant, she'll take fifteen or twenty minutes to do her hair—probably call the *bonne* to help her. No, that would interfere with her chatting freely with me. She'll take the trouble of doing it alone—a good twenty minutes! Hello! That sounds like splashing! Must be a bath on the other side of the boudoir. Fifteen minutes more at least! H-m-m—I reckon she's good for an hour in there. None too much time for a thorough examination of this place!"

HER action in tossing out the keys made him pause to consider it before going further—she might have been prompted by deliberate intention rather than impulse. Suppose she had some vague suspicion that he was, possibly, an *agent de la Préfecture?* Then, if he went through the chests in the studio and found no stolen documents or articles, or contraband memoranda, it would be fairly strong evidence that she had nothing to conceal—welcomed investigation, if he were really that sort of a *mouchard.* In which case, she might have already handed over whatever she had to Bravinski or some other secret agent—or she might not yet have received what she expected to get, and was blinding her caller in advance so that he would consider it unnecessary to search her premises later on—possibly when she and her maid were out. On the other hand, if she had acted from impulse alone, it was evidence that he had made a strong impression upon her—that she desired to give some indication of her confidence in him.

Considering what he knew about the girl and her associates, Trevor was inclined to think the action *was* partly intended as a test, and partly an expression of confidence—that what he did, the way he did it, would sway her opinion of him one way or the other. With his frequently demonstrated ability as a hypnotist, he knew it would be a simple matter to arouse an infatuation for him. She was, even then, so much attracted that it was difficult for her to consider him in any cold-blooded way. But one little slip, too much eagerness to search the place as he had the chance to do, might arouse so much suspicion as completely to destroy any influence he was obtaining over her.

There are two ways of searching a room for valuables or any specified object. The obvious one is that usually adopted by the average burglar—emptying the contents of trunks, drawers, chests or other receptacles on the floor and hurriedly pawing over the pile in a race against time—each individual moment representing that much more risk. The other, in nine cases out of ten, is likely to produce quicker, more successful results, and it was the one invariably used by the Free Lance. He stood in the middle of the studio and studied every object in sight, as he turned slowly around—the idea being to spot one or more objects in which he himself would conceal something—the place least likely to be searched in case there was a search.

There were five chests and two inlaid caskets in the studio, as far as he could see. There were a dozen keys, tied together with a green ribbon—but only one of them small enough to fit the caskets, and a glance at the lock-escutcheons showed that it couldn't be used to open either one of them. Evidently both caskets were taboo. But the inference was obvious that they wouldn't be used to conceal stolen documents because they were the very first things in the room which any police-agent would break open and search. Even with her permission, the supposed "Evans" would not have searched the five chests with any expectation of finding what he was after. They also, invited police-search merely from the fact of their being locked. But upon an ebony pedestal in one corner, one of the most beautiful and conspicuous objects in the room, there was a bronze duplicate of a Salon Grand Prix in the Luxembourg—the head and bust of a girl looking off with a dreamy smile into distance. The original was marble—solid, of considerable weight. The bronze copy looked equally solid, and the ebony pedestal quite heavy

enough to carry the implied weight. Here, then, was an object in plain sight which very few men or women would ever consider possible as a place of concealment for anything. One would say that nobody save the sculptor, his bronze-workers and the art dealer who sold it, could know that it was hollow—but Trevor would have wagered a large sum upon the fact, and a much greater one upon the certainty that it was the only object in the room which Mlle. Deschamps would consider a practically safe hiding-place for anything she wished to conceal.

THERE was still a faint sound of splashing from the little bathroom at the farther side of her boudoir—he could have lifted the bust and explored its hollow inside with one hand before there was any chance of her coming into the boudoir and glancing around the portière to see what he was doing. But it would have been almost impossible to do this without some disturbance of the dust upon the top of the pedestal—and she would have discovered, afterward, that the bust had been moved. Instead of even touching it, he took a magnifying-glass from his pocket and looked carefully all around the base of the bust. As nearly as he could judge, neither bronze nor pedestal had been dusted for several days. The whole studio had the appearance of being clean and well kept, but with the number of objects in it, no artist or *bonne* would have the time to give it a thorough dusting oftener than once or twice a week. So, then, if the bronze bust was Mademoiselle's place of concealment when she had something too dangerous to be found in her possession, she had received or handled nothing of the sort for at least three or four days—and Flandreau had not yet delivered to her whatever he expected to get.

This started Trevor's mind back to the clerk as he had noticed him when visiting the Foreign Minister. The man had picked up the document from His Excellency's blotter and taken it into the file-room with his coat unbuttoned. He had come out ten or fifteen minutes later with his coat buttoned up, and the American could see no reason for his doing that unless he had something concealed under his waistcoat—something too large for the average pocket. Suppose that he had been taking out some important document and had temporarily shoved it into a drawer of his desk in the outer office, when unobserved? He might leave it there for a week or more upon the pretext that he was studying for the Diplomatic Service—wished to familiarize himself with the provisions of the document—and risk no more than a severe reprimand if it were discovered that he had it there instead of in the vault where, according to the regulations, it should be kept. But—taking it out of the building was another matter.

The man would have to wait for an opportunity when he was the last clerk in the office, before he would risk getting his overcoat from the locker, going back to his desk, taking the document from its drawer, concealing it on him, somewhere, and walking out past the secret-service men at the doors. If the document were too large for the average pocket,—as Trevor had thought while chatting with the Foreign Minister,—Flandreau would have to make a pocket large enough to hold it securely, either in his coat or overcoat, and would have to think up some ready explanation in case some fellow-clerk or secret-service man happened to glimpse so unusual an arrangement. Altogether, he would probably need several days' time for preparation before attempting to get it out of the building. But if a favorable opportunity should occur, unexpectedly,—he might be even then on his way to Mademoiselle's studio with it!

WHEN the girl finally appeared, dressed for the street,—looking her lovely best,—she found her guest examining a number of the smaller canvases which had been stacked against the wall. There was no indication that he had opened any of the chests or was even much interested in them—her keys, on their ribbon, lay upon a Flemish table near the boudoir door.

"Do you know, Mam'selle, I think you have at least three more Salon canvases, here, if you care to put a little more time on finishing them up."

"Finishing, m'sieur? But the one you have placed here upon the easel is merely a study—those other two also! They are not supposed to be finished work. And—how should one finish them? M'sieur is perhaps a critic—*non?*"

"No—I'm no critic. But I've spent hours in all the great galleries of the world. I know nothing of the critic's jargon, but I certainly do know good painting

from bad. Of course, if a person does his own thinking, he knows what he likes. There are many pictures which I know to be great works of art, yet wouldn't hang in my house if they were given to me—one or two of the Raphaels among them. Beyond the question of personal taste, which follows no set rule, I think it self-evident that one cannot examine thousands of pictures the world over and remain ignorant of the difference between good painting and bad. Even with very little cultivation, he would absorb it unconsciously. The quality I like best in your painting is the evidence that you work a good many hours in a conscientious effort to get color as it really is—accuracy in detail, where it is possible to use detail rather than broad impressions—and composition which is thoroughly harmonious. In each of these canvases which I particularly like, the study you've made is pure genius. Leave the outstanding flash of inspiration as it is—but give it subordinate background and minor details, as a foil. The big idea in each of them will stand it—be all the more effective from the extra work."

"*Ma foi!* One comprehends that M'sieur has right! One sees the idea as it might be—as it should be. *Mille remerciments.* But—you did not look at what rests itself in the chests—*non?* You were, perhaps, not interested? *Oui?* I have tapestries and costumes worth the examination, m'sieur—some very good porcelains, as well."

"Truth is, there was enough to fill in the time without opening them. And—possibly the American idea may seem amusing over here—but you see, we Westerners don't like prying into anything that's locked unless the owner is present—seems to us rather lacking in decency. Of course, I had your keys and permission, but I'd rather have you show me the things yourself, at your leisure. Those inlaid caskets interested me, I'll confess—they're beautiful pieces of work—"

"And quite as interesting i n s i d e, m'sieur! In one of them I have some old fourteenth-century manuscripts on vellum, illuminated. In the other, a small but very good collection of coins. We will look at them both when we return—"

"Mam'selle permits me, then, to return before dinner?"

"Why not? You have but a few days in Paris. I am dining with you and going to the opera afterward. Surely, if my studio offers M'sieur anything in return, it is due him! *Non?*"

WHETHER Flandreau had anything to give her that day or not, he certainly didn't see her—unless during the time that the supposed "Evans" was dressing for dinner at his also supposed hotel. And the dust on the ebony pedestal hadn't been disturbed.

Next day one of Trevor's household Afghans watched Mlle. Deschamps and her studio while his master was attending to some of his own personal affairs—with instructions to phone at once if she had a caller answering to either of two descriptions, or if she visited a certain house in the Rue Vanneau. But nothing happened before evening, when she was again dining with him. By this time the *concierge* at the street door had been instructed that he was a friend of Mademoiselle's, and he had duplicate keys to every lock in her apartment, including the outer stairway-door—having taken wax impressions the day before. He had purposely taken a *loge* at the Comédie Française that evening, on the chance that he might want an excuse for leaving her half an hour in a place where she would be reasonably sure to stay until he returned. And before they left the studio for a celebrated restaurant near the Madeleine, he saw—during her momentary absence from the room—that all the dust had been removed from the top of the ebony pedestal around the bronze bust.

This might be nothing more than ordinary good housekeeping—but if the girl was as keen-witted as any secret agent had to be in order to succeed in her work and keep the life in her handsome body, he was quite positive that she had purposely left an accumulation of dust in order to be sure that nobody had touched the bronze for several days, either as a matter of artistic appreciation or the same ulterior purpose which would have put her on her guard. And when it had become necessary to use the bust as a hiding-place, her evident cleanliness in housekeeping would account for the pedestal being freshly dusted once in so many days.

Trevor wondered if it were possible that either Flandreau or Bravinski had a key to the studio? There was, of course, some risk that the Russian might go there during her absence and remove any document

obtained for him—from a place of concealment which he knew in advance. But the more he thought this over, the less likely it seemed. It was too obviously to her advantage that any such hiding-place should be known to nobody but herself—too risky for her personal reputation to give any man *entrée* to her premises during her absence. In order to be efficient as a secret agent, it was a prime necessity that she should be more or less successful in some widely known occupation, with established residence at an equally well-known address, and most important of all, that she should have a thoroughly irreproachable reputation. One does not hastily accuse a person of that sort when searching for those implicated in any particular crime or international offense.

The Free Lance was now fairly positive that Mlle. Julie must have gotten in touch with Flandreau between the time his Afghan left the vicinity and the half-hour later when he called for her to go out and dine with him—reasonably certain that something of international value was concealed in her studio-apartment at the moment, and that nobody was likely to get it before her return.

AFTER seating themselves at the front of their *loge*, he bowed three or four times across the house—presumably to friends and acquaintances. Mlle. Deschamps also recognized people whom she knew—which fell in very well with Trevor's plans, as two of them came into the *loge* to see her at the close of the first act. Excusing himself, he went out, as they supposed, to have a chat with some of the people he had bowed to—as is far more customary in European theaters than American. Instead of this he stepped out through one of the carriage entrances and got into one of his own cars, parked by the opposite curb. In ten minutes—in something more than the legal speed-rate—he reached the building in which Mademoiselle's studio-apartment was located. During his previous visits he had closely studied other occupants of the building,—particularly a tall artist with a luxuriant beard who affected flowing bow-ties and broad-brimmed slouch hats,—so that when he stepped from the car in a similar costume and make-up, he so closely resembled the man that the *concierge*, glancing through her little window, never questioned him.

With nobody on the stairs to observe him, at the moment, he slipped into the studio, made his way softly over to the bust in its corner, with the aid of a pocket flash-lamp, lifted the bronze, took a sealed document from inside the head and concealed it in a secret pocket of his overcoat—replaced the bust exactly as it had been, and dusted the ebony with his handkerchief—ran down the stairs, and out to where his car stood waiting for him around the corner. In just twenty-eight minutes from the time he had left the *loge*, he quietly reëntered it and took his chair by the girl again. The curtain hadn't been up on the second act more than ten minutes—she would have said less than two. As her own friends hadn't left until after it rose, it would have seemed a physical impossibility for "M'sieur Evans" to have gone more than a block from the theater for a cigar, even if he had left the building at all, which never occurred to her.

At the close of the performance, they returned to the studio in a car which "Evans" had hired by the week at his hotel—he had taken a small suite at the Continental in order that letters or telephone-messages might reach him there in case Mademoiselle or some of the acquaintances to whom she introduced him had any communication to make. He suggested supper at one of the popular cafés, but she rather fancied herself as a cook—proposing something of her own at home, instead. During the several hours they had already spent together, he talked so entertainingly, with so much evidence of wide knowledge and experience in various lines, that the girl was becoming more desirous of his company than common sense and the nature of her secret activities would have permitted. Occasionally, she realized that the man was gaining more influence over her than was safe—that she might be running into complications with the crew in the Rue Vanneau which easily could become a matter of life or death unless she held herself more in check and managed to keep him out of it.

When they were tête-à-tête in the studio the *bonne* having gone home several hours before, she knew that she was in a dangerously impressionable condition—tried, ineffectually, to fight against it. Trevor had his own reasons for getting out of the place before she had a chance to leave him alone in the studio for a second—the stolen doc-

ument he had concealed in a secret receptacle behind the back cushions of his own car, even his chauffeurs knowing nothing about it. So he followed her into the little kitchenette while she broiled a lobster and made some delicious coffee. In an hour he managed to leave the place without having been out of her sight, though it had involved being in her boudoir a few minutes while putting on his overcoat. She knew it was safer to have him go—but regretted that she hadn't made him stay longer, because—she had been kissed in a way that made her head swim. ("These Américains! *Mon Dieu!* Such force! . . . . But—*voilà aussi*—such consideration!")

IT was another hour before she even thought of the paper concealed in the bronze bust—and the impulse to see that it was safe was merely perfunctory. When her fingers touched nothing inside, it was so ridiculous that she laughed to herself at the absurdity. Nobody had been in the apartment when she put it there or had the least idea as to where she might keep it. Except for a few moments at the theater, M'sieur Evans hadn't been out of her sight since a quarter before six, and her *bonne* had gone home while she was talking with Flandreau at five-thirty. He had left five minutes later. The paper had been concealed and the pedestal thoroughly dusted before she admitted Evans. This left only Bravinski of those who might know anything about such a document having been temporarily in her possession—and he had never seen Flandreau or known him as the man-on-the-inside at the Foreign Office.

Of course, Bravinski's gang in the Rue Vanneau knew that a woman of her name was affiliated with their secret organization—yet none but their chief executive and the Russian had ever called upon her personally, her case being like that of many other political agents—for safety's sake known to but one or two of the others. Flandreau's stake in the game had been, first, his infatuation for Mlle. Deschamps, and—when convinced that he couldn't stir up anything more lasting than friendship in her—a cash payment of five thousand gold francs.

By four o'clock in the morning, her only definite conclusion was that some one had been shadowing Flandreau, spotted his visits to her studio, had a duplicate key made for her outer door—and was concealed somewhere about the place when she had hidden the paper. That this some one could have been the Russian, she doubted—because the paper would have been given to him in the morning, anyhow. But when it came to speculating upon who else it might or could have been, she was completely up in the air.

MEANWHILE the supposed "Evans" had taken a taxi across the Seine to the Continental, gone up to his rooms, changed his appearance entirely, and sauntered down again as the Honorable George, having watched his chance to slip from "Evans'" room unobserved by the floor-detective. As he went out through the court, he was recognized deferentially by some of the hotel people—who called his car for him but couldn't quite remember who he had been calling upon at that late hour. (In the morning, M'sieur Evans appeared in the breakfast-room—afterward coming down with his luggage, settling his account at the *bureau* and driving away in a taxi to the Gare de Lyon.)

Driving rapidly to his home in the Avenue de Neuilly, Trevor accompanied the chauffeur to the garage in a farther corner of the grounds inside their high concrete wall, and opened the door of the car he had used earlier in the evening. Every man or woman in their employ is absolutely devoted to the Honorable George and Madame Nan—but he couldn't help feeling a trifle relieved when, groping behind the back cushions in the darkness, his fingers touched and drew out the stolen document. He didn't examine it until locked in his sound-proof, electrically protected study on the top floor of the mansion; then his lips puckered in a long whistle of amazed concern:

"The devil! This is a serious proposition! That scoundrel Flandreau must be locked up at once—before he does further mischief! Which means that this must be returned to His Excellency before it is time for him to leave his house this morning!"

A precaution sometimes adopted in the handling of state documents is to tie them up in an outer wrapper or envelope of heavy paper, with broad strips of tape and stamp it back and front with clear impressions from the official Foreign Office seal—this being more frequently done by a

trusted subordinate than by the Minister himself. As Flandreau had the handling of such documents, it was undoubtedly he who had affixed the seals after folding the treaty in its outer wrapper—the object being, of course, to show whether the document had been tampered with and read between the time it was last referred to and the next occasion for doing so.

After the time and trouble spent in recovering the document, Trevor had no idea of parting with it until he knew exactly what it covered. Ethically, of course, he had no right to open it. On the other hand, he had proved himself too good a friend of France not to familiarize himself with its contents — because such knowledge upon his part might be used in a future crisis to avert serious international complications. There was no time to copy its eight pages by hand (three of them in Oriental ideographs!) and the document must be returned, if possible, with no indication that the seals had been tampered with.

Heating a thin palette-knife, he worked it under the wax until it was loose from the paper, then slipped off the tape and seals, intact. Taking the document into a communicating room used for experimental photography, he fastened it upon a piece of black velvet over a drawing-board —stuck this up on the swinging rack of a big photo-engraving camera, turned on a battery of mercury-vapor tubes, and made sharply focused duplicate plates of every page—developing them before he took the document back into his study and sealed it up as it had been when taken from the Foreign Office. By the time this was done, it was after six in the morning. He had had no sleep for twenty hours, and there was no prospect of his getting any for another six or eight, at least.

MAKING himself up as a typical Londoner of the sort who does a good deal of traveling on the Continent, he was driven to the residence of the Foreign Minister at eight o'clock and sent up a message of such urgency that His Excellency came down inside of twenty minutes —considerably out of temper at being jarred from his leisurely routine. His caller, however, had about him a certain air which compelled respect—and got down to business at once.

"Your Excellency," said the caller, "I'm a man of independent means—travel about the Continent a good bit — meet some queer fish in all sorts of places. Got in with a crowd here in Paris whom I found to be a lot more radical than I liked. Finally made up my mind they were dangerous rotters—even some of the women whom I'd rather fancied. Was in an apartment last night when something appeared to be goin' on, under the rose. Hid behind some old tapestry an' overheard certain things that fairly staggered me—what?

"Rotten bad form, I admit, eavesdroppin', but I was in the wrong galley an' wished to know what was goin' on, what I might be roped into if I didn't watch out. Well, d'ye see, chap by the name of Flandreau, in your own office, stole this document yesterday an' handed it over to one of the women. She paid him quite a sum in gold-notes—but I fancy it was a case of infatuation besides. He went out, an' she concealed the document before the rest of the crowd saw him. As I understand it, she was goin' to pass it on to some political Johnny, later. But I saw where she hid it—put it in my pocket an' sneaked out before they missed me. From the typewriting on the outside, it seemed to me that it should be returned to you at the earliest possible moment. As you see, it has no appearance of havin' been tampered with or read—seals intact. Fancy I got it before they had time to look at what was inside at all! What?"

"Mon Dieu! It is a great service you have rendered, m'sieur! One must see that you are rewarded—"

"That's quite out of the question, sir! You can't afford to have the loss of such a paper from your vault known by anybody—so an official reward is quite impossible. On the other hand, I can't afford to be known in any connection with the affair—my life wouldn't be worth a rap, with that gang of radicals after me. If you feel under any obligation, you can even it up by permitting me quietly to disappear an' giving me your word that bounder Flandreau will get what he jolly well deserves within the next few hours! You're not safe a minute with him in your department! This is merely one of those little gratuitous courtesies which you can pass on to some other chap. What? Now —permit me to say *au revoir,* an' just forget that the paper was ever out of your possession. Eh? *Bon jour, m'sieur—bon jour!"*

THE Minister was in doubt more than once, during the next week, whether his not attempting to have his mysterious caller followed that morning hadn't been a serious error—but at the time, the impulse had seemed inexcusable treachery to one who certainly had done him inestimable service. Then again—one doesn't keep a staff of plain-clothes police in one's private residence. He would have found it difficult either to detain the man by force or to chase him through the streets with such servants as might be willing to risk it. The clerk Flandreau was promptly arrested upon another charge—and so artistically "framed" that he is now serving out a long sentence in New Caledonia. As for the stranger, he returned to the Avenue de Neuilly in a taxi which he dismissed two blocks from a famous mansion, came out again in half an hour as the pseudo-American "Evans"—was driven down to the Continental, where he breakfasted and paid his score—again changed his appearance in a toilet-room of the Gare de Lyon—and returned to the Avenue de Neuilly. This time he went to bed and slept without moving until six in the evening, when his friend Senator Brantland arrived unexpectedly with another Senator—the two being persuaded to make themselves at home indefinitely.

Before dinner was served, Trevor went up to his photograph-room and made a print of the last page in the stolen treaty, with the signatures, ribbons and seals attached. There was nothing on this which gave any of the terms agreed to or other indication of the subject-matter—it being merely the official execution of what had gone before on preceding pages.

During the meal Brantland—a trusted and close friend of the Trevors, by this time—and his fellow-Senator, Kinsdale, explained that they had come across as delegates from the Committee on Foreign Affairs to report upon actual conditions in the Ruhr district and the general European situation as far as it could be ascertained. Afterward the Trevors, Earl Lammerford and the American Senators went into the billiard-room for coffee and cigars, continuing the discussion, and Brantland presently asked if there were any foundation for a rumor that France had signed a secret treaty with an Oriental power.

"The thing seems absurd on the face of it, because it's about the last thing France might be supposed to do. Nobody will vouch for any truth in the rumor, but it persists. Have you heard anything of the sort over here, Trevor?"

"Oh—y-e-s. Such a treaty exists—signed within the last few months, as far as one may judge."

"W-h-a-a-t? You really mean it! By Jove! That's serious, if you happen to be right about it!"

"Why so? What is there serious for the United States about it?"

SENATOR KINSDALE almost jumped from his chair.

"Good Lord, Mr. Trevor! Can't you see what a menace that is to us—strengthening, as it probably does, this Oriental power's fighting and political resources? Suppose that power declares war against us and France is bound by treaty to back her?"

"W-e-e-l-l—of course nothing's really impossible in this world, but there are many things so dev'lish near it that they might as well be. That suggestion of yours is one of them. I know the feeling which is persistently hammered into the American people by the yellow press that Japan, for example, is but waiting opportunity for a declaration of war against us—and such a thing is possible if we continue to insult a proud race like the Nipponese. But it wont happen unless we compel it as a matter of self-respect on their part. Such a war would be hopeless from the very start. Japan has neither the men, the resources nor the money to conquer the United States—nobody knows that better than the Nipponese. They need room for expansion—very true. They'll colonize wherever they can, to provide for their surplus population. But all of Japan's political aspirations center in Asia—particularly in China, as they have for the last three hundred years.

"Now, I haven't mentioned, and you don't know, whether the other party to this recent French treaty is Japan, China, Siam or the Dutch Indies—but just for argument, let us suppose it may be Japan. Here we'd have a commercial and protective alliance between the third greatest nation in the world—which is the very least likely of all to involve herself in any war of world-conquest, as Germany attempted to do—and the tenth nation, in size and resources. A combination of five million-odd square miles and one hundred and seven million population—a combination

which forestalls and makes that much more unlikely any Entente between Germany, Russia and Japan in the near future, representing a political force of nearly nine million square miles with three hundred and twenty million people—all destructive to world-peace because of their ambition to dominate. Just get it through your heads, gentlemen, that if Japan happens to be the other party in that treaty, it's the most favorable *coup* for the United States of any in the last few years. With the ten-year naval holiday, our Pacific Agreement with Japan, with such a treaty between her and France, the chance for reconstruction and satisfactory business conditions in America would be just about a hundred per cent better. When you get home again, just hammer that into the heads of any crowds who will listen to you!"

"But look here, Trevor! Where do you get this stuff about France being the 'third nation' in the world? Don't you ever open an atlas and look at the maps? How do you happen to have any such crazy idea?"

"I'm stating facts—not crazy ideas—based upon one of the most extensive collections of government maps and charts in the world, right here in this house. France includes every square mile under the Tricolor—governed from Paris—"

"Oh! You're taking in colonial possessions and mandates!"

"I'm taking in just what I said—land owned and administered by France, every foot of which is potentially productive and a national resource—with the people on it who speak the French language, obey French laws and fight in the French armies during any war! All that constitutes France, just as much as Paris or St. Denis. We are accustomed to consider Belgium, Holland and Portugal little countries—because the great mass of us haven't sense or education enough to look at anything but the infinitesimal specks of territory on the map of Europe. Yet each one of those little countries is bigger—potentially stronger in resources—than either Italy, Japan, Spain or Denmark. The Dutch Indies alone—if laid down across the United States—would stretch from Seattle to the eastern end of Porto Rico. Here! Just as a matter of education that'll be good for your souls, I'll jot down the relative positions of the twelve imperial nations at the close of the German War." He handed over a sheet on which was written:

	Square Miles	Population
British Empire	15,000,000	450,000,000
Russian-speaking area	8,418,000	168,000,000
France	5,000,000	82,000,000
China	4,287,000	421,000,000
United States	3,800,000	106,000,000
Belgium	921,000	23,000,000
Portugal	841,000	16,000,000
Netherlands	800,000	47,000,000
Italy	727,000	40,000,000
Japan	308,000	95,000,000
Spain	203,000	23,000,000
Denmark	105,000	3,200,000

THE two Senators studied over the figures with absorbing interest for several minutes. Brantland knew the Trevors and accepted without question the Honorable George's statement that a Franco-Oriental treaty actually existed; but his fellow-Senator was skeptical:

"If this treaty we're discussing actually does exist, Mr. Trevor, I think, after what you've said, that I should be inclined to agree with you as to its being favorable to America rather than a menace. But I can't see how you can be in a position really to *know* that it exists!"

"Senator—can I safely trust my liberty, probably my life, to you? Think carefully, now! Can you really guard your tongue in any circumstances? I'll willingly take *some* risk for the sake of your influence in the United States Senate when you know exactly what you're talking about—but I'm not in the least anxious to commit suicide."

Kinsdale saw by the faces around him that the question was put with the utmost seriousness—that any discussion with other people of what his host seemed about to do or say might mean exactly what he said—a question of his life, liberty or death. And the Senator was really a man of scrupulous honor.

"You can trust me, Trevor—I wont blab! Ask Brantland!"

Their host nodded with a smile—left the room for a few moments, and returned with a ten by sixteen photographic print, unmounted, which he handed to the Senators for examination. There was a clear inference that he had a complete set of prints for the entire document. But he didn't say so—and they knew that he wouldn't show them.

You will find another of these unique "Free Lances in Diplomacy" in the next, the July, issue.

Blackmail Broadcast, Unlimited

The very modern idea of blackmail by means of sky-writing is the problem given to a young detective in this unusual and exceptionally interesting story.

By ELLIS PARKER BUTLER

ON one of those delightfully warm and sunny January mornings which we occasionally have in New York, I reached Walt Magen's offices somewhat later than usual. The day was so pleasant that I had left the bus on which I had been riding, to walk down Riverside Drive from the Tomb to Seventy-second Street, and it was after ten o'clock when I reached the headquarters of the Walter Magen Detective Agency. Walt never required us to keep any particular "hours," and I had no case in my hands. Since he had decided that I had what he called an automatic brain,—a brain with a somewhat abnormal ability to see clues and by combining them, jump straight to a conclusion another man might only reach by long and arduous thinking, if at all,—he had not used me on any of the ordinary cases that came in.

When I reached his office, however, I saw my "color" on the bulletin-board, and knew he wanted me. I went to his private office at once. When I entered, I found him busily at work with his correspondence, but sitting in one of his comfortable chairs by the window was a woman, handsomely gowned and coated, but with her face entirely concealed by a heavy veil. Walt Magen looked up, and seeing me, dismissed the stenographer. As soon as she had closed the door behind her, he turned his desk chair and motioned for me to draw up two of the vacant chairs.

"Now, Mrs. X," he said, "this is the young man we have been waiting for. If he cannot help us, no one can. Will you explain your matter, or shall I?"

The "Mrs. X" rose and crossed the room. By her lithe movements as well as by her hands—which are an excellent index—I judged her to be young. Twenty-five was the age I granted her. Her garments indicated that she was a woman of very considerable wealth—or of great extravagance. She took one of the two chairs and sat bending slightly forward. I noticed that her hands showed little or

no signs of nervousness, such as women's hands usually do when taking up serious matters with a detective, and I judged from that that she was a woman of considerable social experience, or possibly one who had led a life other than that we call "sheltered." Her very first words confirmed this.

"In the first place," she said in a remarkably sweet voice, "I will say, as I told Mr. Magen, that I went on the stage when I was fourteen."

"An Englishwoman," I said to myself, for her accent was unmistakable. Her next words confirmed this.

"That was in the colonies," she said. "My parents were English, but they left England because of some trouble my father got into. He was not a good man. And my mother was not a good woman—not in any sense of the term. So, as soon as I was old enough, she put me on the stage. And in our colony, the stage was bad—execrably bad! I did not escape the badness."

"Mrs. X has explained to me," Walt said kindly, "that from the stage she slid downward into the worst sort of seaport music-hall, and that her reputation was as bad as it could be. We need not go into it again. It is painful to Mrs. X to dwell on that, of course."

"THANK you," the woman said. "So that sort of thing continued for years—for eight years, until I was twenty-two. Then a man—he is now my husband, Mr. X— came out from the hinterland gold-fields. He was and is a fine man, an American, but he had been living a rough life in the mines, with bad companions, and he had struck it rich; and when he reached the port, he and the other men of his party cut loose to have a wild time. That was how they drifted into the Eldorado Music-hall. All this does not matter much, but there was a fight, and he was stabbed, and I took care of him. For several days he was close to death, but when he recovered sufficiently to know anything, he was through with wild life forever. It was as if he had had a blow on the head that brought him to his senses. All his goodness came to the top again. And then he asked me to marry him and come to America and forget all about all my past life. And I did that."

"She reformed," Walt interpolated. "She never had liked the rough life. She has been running as straight as a string ever since."

"That's it," she said eagerly. "My husband is in business here in New York, and we have a home in one of the suburbs. We have two children, a little boy and a dear little girl. No one knows I was ever anything I should not have been. We are so happy—we have made so many dear friends where we live. I'm not boasting, but we have the most beautiful home in our suburb; we are the center of the social life. We belong to all the clubs. People like us, and we like the people. We did hope to live the rest of our lives there—just live as ordinary folk and be happy."

"And this is what she has received," Magen said, handing me a sheet of paper. I read what was written on it.

THE sheet was typewritten, and at the top, as if in imitation of a printed letterhead, had been typed "BLACKMAIL BROADCAST, UNLIMITED." There was no date and no address. Where the "Dear Sir" or "Dear Madam," and the name and address of the addressee usually appears in a letter, there was an oblong hole in the paper. Mrs. X, leaning toward me, explained this.

"I cut out my name and address," she said, "because I want no one to know it. I thought you might want to keep this letter, to examine it more closely, and I was afraid some one might see it. You will see that it mentions matters connected with my past."

It did, but not in the first two paragraphs. The first two paragraphs might have been cut from a circular advertising the sale of stock in Blackmail Broadcast, Unlimited.

"Blackmail Broadcast, Unlimited," the letter said, "is a close corporation of experienced crooks, organized in the most efficient manner, for the extortion of blackmail. Many of the best crooks in the blackmail business have recognized for some time that far better results might be obtained by consolidating the various blackmailing interests in America than by the present wasteful methods. As a result of many consultations, a combination of the leading blackmailers has now been brought about under one management, and our officers and board of directors include the most prominent blackmailers now liv-

ing. We are now ready to transact business on a large scale, and propose to begin operations immediately.

"In undertaking our widespread campaign of blackmailing," the letter continued, "we have discarded most of the outworn methods formerly employed and still used by our competitors. We have adopted modern methods and appliances. It has been customary, if a husband wished to conceal certain irregularities of conduct from his wife, to threaten to write to the wife. Or if the wife had been indiscreet, it has been the rule to threaten to tell the husband. Often our chance of reward has been lost because the husband or wife immediately confessed to the other, rendering our information valueless. We, however, do not stop there. We own a flock of high-powered and very swift airplanes, and with these and our own 'permanent smoke' we mean to write the guilty secrets on the very sky so that all may read them."

"It has been done in a commercial advertising way," Magen remarked. "You see what a grip it gives the crook on his victim. Think of writing this lady's past on the sky above her home town! A hideous and terrible business!"

"In the case of yourself and husband," the letter continued, "we believe you will be willing to pay a small sum to have your past remain unknown. We ask two hundred thousand dollars. Otherwise we shall, on March 26th, begin writing your history on the sky, using that part of the sky above the suburb in which you live. On March 24th you will receive a letter telling you where and how to deposit the two hundred thousand dollars. And may we call your attention to the fact that, if you seek flight, a forced sale of your fine property would result in a loss of, say, two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. By paying us the sum we ask, you will save fifty thousand dollars."

"Clever crooks," Magen said.

THE remainder of the letter was merely a jumble of names and dates, evidently connected with the past of Mrs. X in the "colony," and the letter was signed "Blackmail Broadcast, Unlimited."

"I have asked Mrs. X whether she suspects anyone in particular," Walt said, "and she does not; so you know as much about the case now as I do. This lady and her husband, when they received this letter, decided to come to me. Their happy life in their chosen home is threatened with destruction. Unless they pay these rascals a huge sum, they will be driven forth as exiles and outcasts. They may be hounded out of America unless they pay."

"And even if we pay, we can never be sure that more demands will not be made," said Mrs. X. "And thousands of others may be blackmailed in the same way. My husband and I have wealth; we can afford to fight this hideous demand. We hoped to live in peace, but if we must be driven from decent society, we would rather go down fighting than otherwise. We would rather fight this out now than live in terror."

"You say your husband thinks that, too?" I asked.

"Oh, positively!" Mrs. X exclaimed. "He would have come here with me to tell you so if his coming would not have told you who we were. A man cannot hide behind a veil; he cannot disguise himself as a woman can. Oh, pray save us from this awful thing!"

"We will do our utmost," Walt said; and then with a smile: "And if we can't protect you, no one can." Then he said, to me: "So there's your job. Get the bunch of crooks, kill this scheme they have worked up, and go the limit with them. The entire facilities of the agency are at your disposal. Anything you want to ask me?"

I turned the letter over in my hand and then held it to the light to observe the watermark.

"You might have some one go through the card-system and pick out all the blackmail cards," I said as I arose. "I'd like histories and finger-prints. What do you think of Zrane? It seems like one of his schemes to me; he has more imagination than most of them."

"Might be Zrane, at that," Walt admitted. "Anything else?"

I told him there was nothing else, but that I might ask Mrs. X a few questions about her colonial days, if she would answer them.

"Take Consultation Room Six," Walt said, and stood while I left the room with the veiled lady.

Our consultation rooms are sound-proof (except when we wish them to be otherwise), and I explained this to Mrs. X.

"I would like you to tell me everything

you feel you can," I told her when we were seated in Number Six, "because my automatic mind works in a peculiar manner. 'Automatic mind' is not my name for it; Mr. Magen calls it that. He discovered it, or thinks he discovered it. I do not often 'follow clues' in the usual sense. I pour into my 'automatic mind' any and every clue and bit of information; and suddenly—in a moment or a week—my 'automatic mind' combines two or more facts, often seemingly most unimportant facts, and in a flash I see the answer I need. I am telling you this, Mrs. X, because I want you to be as explicit as you can. The bit of detail you think least important may be the very bit needed to combine with some other item of evidence."

"I think I understand," she said, and for the first time I saw her hands show a trace of nervousness.

"It would be," I said, "of great value if you could bring yourself to tell me your name, your husband's name, your place of residence, and the names of those you think your friends or enemies in the place where you now live. Not a word spoken here will be repeated."

"I can't tell you," she said. "I'm afraid to tell you."

"Then no matter," I said. "We will get at the colonial matters. And let me say, at once, that I discount this 'combination of blackmailers' idea just ninety-nine per cent. I do not believe there is any 'Blackmail Broadcast, Unlimited,' whatever. The idea is clever, but it is not common sense. Crooks do not form such combinations; least of all do blackmailers. Two or three crooks have gotten hold of the story of your past; one can fly an airplane. They figure that the threat of sky-writing would frighten you far more than a mere threat of vague publicity. They find you living in a quiet community, your thoughts on what your neighbors think of you, and they guess that when you receive this letter you will visualize the airplane in the sky above your own home, and the homes of your neighbors, actually writing out your past history so that all can see. You will imagine Mrs. A and Mrs. B standing on their lawns, their heads thrown back, reading your story in the sky. To this, which is like a modern miracle of crime, they add the mystery of a huge crime-combination of blackmailing powers. On the one hand you see use made of the mighty force of modern commercial union, and on the other the mysterious force of modern science. The thought was to amaze and stun."

SHE said nothing, but one of her hands clasped the other, and her fingers moved nervously.

"But sifted down, what does it amount to?" I asked her. Some man or woman who knows more or less about your past has discovered that you are the girl from that colonial music-hall. He cannot get money out of your husband, because your husband knows everything about your past. So he threatens to tell the neighbors. And how can we prevent him? To prevent him—or her—we must discover who he is. And to do that, I must know as much as you can tell me about the men and women you knew in the colony. In that way I may be able to find a connecting thread that will lead me to the blackmailer. You can see that, I think?"

"Yes," she said, still pressing her hands together. "Yes!"

"Mr. Magen's agency is, as he likes to boast," I said, "nothing more than a great card-system. The amount of information on file here is stupendous. Mr. Magen's cards can tell more about most of the living criminals than they could tell about themselves. As soon as this interview is ended, I shall go through the cards, and some small hint may lead to the man we want. For example, one of the men listed may have been in the colony when you were there. You don't mind answering a few questions?"

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed.

"Then," I said, "what was the colony—what was the town or city?"

She hesitated.

"Need I tell that?" she asked.

"It might help us," I suggested.

"I'd rather not tell, if I need not," she said.

"It might be a great help to us," I said. "If one of our listed blackmailers happened to have been there, it would suggest that he is our man. But of course, if you feel it would be telling too much, I cannot urge you."

She showed neither relief nor disappointment. I did not care much for the name of her colony; I was sure I could guess it from something she would say. But in this I was mistaken. She talked freely enough of her life in the theater and the

music-hall, and mentioned names by the hundred, as it seemed to me, but when she came to mentioning a place, it was always "and in that place" or "and when we were in that town." She did not object when I jotted down the names she gave. Now and then she corrected my spelling of them.

"And on what ship did you come to America?" I asked her.

"I'd rather not tell you," she said.

I was not entirely satisfied with the results of my questioning, but giving a woman in trouble the third degree has never been my best work. I had, at any rate, secured enough names to keep me busy a day or two, checking them against our lists of names and aliases, and it would require hours of close reading properly to study the cards of the crooks in our lists. She left, and in leaving she promised to come again if anything further transpired.

SHE returned the next day. I had sent three of our best operatives to get on the track of Bogdo Zrane, with orders to watch him like a trio of hawks. While I had not specialized in blackmailers, it seemed to me that Zrane's type of mind was exactly that which would plan such a letter as Mrs. X had received. Zrane was an accomplished crook. He had education, and as I had told Magen, imagination. He was growing old now, but I had not heard that he had retired from evil ways. A number of his earlier exploits suggested that he would be just the man to conceive of the use of sky-writing in crime. He had been the first man to use the telephone in bunco-work, and, as one invention after another appeared, Bogdo Zrane seemed to delight in planning a method of using them to trap the unwary. I studied his card and saw, with a smile, that we had no record of any exploit in which Zrane had used an airplane. It amused me to think of old Zrane sitting in his nest somewhere and fretting his old white head because he had not been able to use the airplane in crime, and then of his grin when sky-writing was invented and he saw how he could use it in blackmail. Then our unknown client came for her second visit.

She had brought, this time, a second letter. As before, she had cut out the typewritten name and address of herself and her husband, using a very small pair of scissors, I judged. In fact, when I examined the edges of the hole she had cut, I decided she had used a pair of delicate finger-nail scissors, for the hole had been cut with little snippings of the blades, and under a magnifying-glass the edges of the hole were somewhat scalloped, as they would be if nail-scissors were used. The letterhead matter—"Blackmail Broadcast, Unlimited"—was typewritten as before. Evidently the blackmail trust did not believe in printers.

"In order to impress upon you the fact that Blackmail Broadcast, Unlimited, is able to do all it says," this letter ran, "we shall begin writing on the sky above your home tomorrow or the next day, the letters 'B. B. U.' No doubt those who see these letters written on the sky in white vapor at a height of two miles will imagine it is some advertising scheme, but you will know it is meant as proof that we can carry out our threat. In this connection permit us to say that we are aware that you are consulting the Walter Magen Detective Agency, for our agents saw you enter and leave Mr. Magen's offices. We have no objection whatever to this. In fact, we welcome it. Our newly invented airplanes are so speedy and our hiding-places so secure that we urge you to use every possible means to have our 'planes destroyed or followed. All such attempts will fail, and their failure will only emphasize the fact that our threats will be inevitably carried out on March 26th, unless you agree to our terms."

I read this letter while Mrs. X sat in Room Six with me, and when I laid it aside, she leaned forward in her chair.

"Can you do that?" she asked. "Can you send out airplanes to follow the 'plane and capture or destroy it?"

"We can do almost anything," I assured her. "We are always ready to attempt anything that will help us in our work. I would have to consult Mr. Magen before I went to the expense of an airplane fleet; such things are costly. At the moment, however, that need not bother us. We have fully two months before March 26th, and some other method of quashing this gang's plans may develop."

"I don't think you ought to hesitate," she said, with what seemed considerable feeling. "I have told Mr. Magen I will advance any sum needed to cover any expenses. I don't believe you realize what this means to me—my life ruined, my home destroyed, my children's lives spoiled

forever. I told Mr. Magen I wanted *everything* done—everything possible. He promised me he would use every means. I don't think you are taking this seriously enough. I'd like to see Mr. Magen, if you please."

WE went into Magen's office, and she made the plea for fast 'planes just as she had made it to me, and Magen acceded to her request instantly.

"That will be all right," he said to me. "Mrs. X has deposited enough to cover all expenses. Get in touch with the best flyers in the East, and if they are not the best in America, telegraph for the best, no matter where. If necessary cable Europe. Is there anything else, Mrs. X?"

She hesitated and then spoke.

"I don't like to say it, and I don't want to offend this young man, Mr. Magen," she said, "but I am afraid I do not feel quite satisfied with what he is doing. I thought—"

"Don't feel that you are offending me by what you are saying," I said, for she hesitated again. "I think perhaps you are right. I think perhaps I am not handling the case as Mrs. X would like it handled, Walt."

"Now, that's nonsense!" Walt exclaimed. "This is exactly the sort of case you *can* handle."

"I think so myself," I said, "but what I say is that I am handling the case in the only way I know how to handle it, and it does not seem to satisfy Mrs. X. I'd like to suggest, Walt, that you make an exception of this case and handle it yourself. I mean that you take charge of it and use the whole machinery of your agency."

"Yes," our mysterious Mrs. X said eagerly, "please do that, Mr. Magen."

Walt frowned. His agency now had so many ramifications that he never gave his special attention to any but the most vitally important cases. I closed one eye slowly, the one away from Mrs. X. Walt took the wink as I meant it.

"Very well," he said, "I'll tackle this case myself. I'll drop everything and get at it with both hands. Just give me time to clean up a few things. Can you come in again day after tomorrow?"

OUR veiled client said she could, and Walt told her he would be ready to go over the whole matter with her then. When I had shown Mrs. X to the elevator, I went back to Walt.

"What's the idea?" he asked. "Why the wink? Why are you so eager to give up the case?"

"I'm not giving it up," I said. "I've solved it."

"You have? When?"

"Tomorrow or the next day," I laughed. "Our Mrs. X has beautiful hands, hasn't she, Walt?"

"I didn't notice them," he smiled. "Yes, I did too, now that I think of it. Beautiful firm hands."

"You would not imagine she ever worked in the North Woods, would you—chopping down trees? Or that she shoveled sand in a pit?"

"No! Has she?" he demanded.

"I don't imagine so," I said, grinning at him; "but I'll bet you a good cigar she would not let you take an X-ray photograph of her cranium, even if she does call herself Mrs. X."

"You get out of here!" Walt laughed. "Don't come giving your riddles to me. When are you going to turn in your report, if you really have wound up this Mrs. X case?"

"When she comes in to see you," I said, and I made it my business to be on hand when she came in two days later.

WHEN she entered Walt's office I was already there, and I placed a chair for Mrs. X.

"You had something to report?" Walt asked me.

"A few details," I said carelessly. "In the first place, I think I can tell Mrs. X what she wanted to know."

"You mean who the Blackmail Broadcast, Unlimited, gang is?" asked Walt.

"I don't believe that is what she wanted to know," I said, "but I'll come to that. I'll begin by saying that Blackmail Broadcast, Unlimited, did write its initials on the sky yesterday as it promised. At three o'clock yesterday afternoon an airplane, very high in the air, came from somewhere and wrote 'B. B. U.' on the sky above Westcote, Long Island. The letters were written with white vapor expelled from the exhaust of the 'plane, and were, perhaps, half a mile in length by a quarter of a mile wide, each. It happens that there are only three houses in or near Westcote that are of such palatial dimensions that a forced sale would mean a loss

of anything like two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, or one hundred thousand dollars, or even fifty thousand dollars. While each of the owners of the three houses is married, it happens that each of the three wives are well-known women and their life-stories are known from the day of birth onward. It also appears that one of the wives is an old lady, over seventy years of age; one is quite stout; one is a chronic invalid and at present in Florida. None, I am sorry to say, resemble you in any respect whatever, Mrs. X. None spent her youth in any 'colony.'"

She said nothing.

"MY observers report that the B. B. U. 'plane did not appear above any other suburb of New York," I continued, "and so we may consider that Westcote was the suburb referred to in the first letter Mrs. X received. When I read that first letter, Walt, I noticed that the name and address had been snipped out of it. That emphasized the fact that nothing else had been snipped out of the letter—no name or place-name. Hence, when I read the letter, I noticed that particular pains had been taken to avoid mentioning names. It was 'yourself and your husband' and 'the suburb in which you live' and so on. Mrs. X, then, in Room Six, was as careful to avoid giving any clue to her identity as the letter had been. You must blame my 'automatic mind,' Walt, for putting those two facts together. The strange question my 'automatic brain' threw to the surface was 'Why, if Mrs. X is herself the blackmailer, does she come to the Magen Agency asking us to work on a supposititious case?'"

"Oh!" cried Mrs. X. "Oh, I'll not sit here and hear such things said of me!"

"I am ashamed to say that when Mrs. X left me that day, I did not shake hands in a friendly spirit," I said, "but because I wished to make sure that the palms were calloused. They were."

Our mysterious client involuntarily closed her hands.

"In fact," I said, "they are the hands of an aviator— or should I say of an aviatrix? Am I right in thinking they are the hands of Miss Ray Eckstrom, whose air-exploits were given so much space in the papers before she had that serious fall two years ago? The fall that caused the slight fracture of her skull, which an X-ray would no doubt reveal? And am I right in thinking that perhaps a few scars are hidden by the very heavy veil? Because we were lucky enough to catch a very fair portrait of the B. B. U. flyer yesterday when she leaned over the side of her 'plane to peer down. The telephoto lens is a wonderful invention."

I DREW the photograph from my pocket and offered it to Miss Eckstrom, but she refused to touch it.

"Of course," I said, "you were unfortunate in the fact that we knew that Bogdo Zrane enjoys playing at crime with modern inventions, and that we knew he holds the theory that women are more easily corrupted than are men, and that he would, if possible, seek out a woman aviator for crime purposes. That gave me a hint. I don't know that I have any more to say, but I do want to explain to Miss Eckstrom that I was not neglecting her affair as sadly as she thought. Here is a memorandum of the three times she has met Zrane since her first visit to us. Here is a map showing where she keeps her 'plane. Here is a statement from the wholesale chemist who sold her the ingredients of the 'permanent smoke.' Here is a copy of the three conversations, secured by dictaphone, that she has held with Zrane lately. And here, nicely done, is a chart of the route taken by Miss Eckstrom's 'plane from the time it left the hangar yesterday until it returned to the hangar. So I think we have told Mrs. X what she wanted to know."

Walt said nothing, and Miss Eckstrom said nothing; so I had to blurt out my climax without frills.

"What Zrane wanted to know, and sent Miss Eckstrom to find out," I said, "was whether, if he undertook blackmailing by sky-writing, a first-class detective agency could run him down. The answer seems to be: 'Yes.'"

I don't know what I expected our veiled client to say to this, but what she did say was an utter surprise. She arose, and with a sweeping gesture threw back her veil.

"You're very smart," she said, with no trace whatever of an English accent, "but I'd just like to tell you I don't think much of your telephoto lens if it made me look all scarred up. There! See for yourself!"

I gathered from her words that a temporary blackmailer had become the eternal woman again. And a good thing, too!

The Anthropoid Caddy

A mad tale of frenzied golf in far Borneo, by the author of "Red Eggs," "Golf Comes to the Double O" and other good ones.

By ELMER BROWN MASON

"DAY by day, in every way I'm—I'm getting more and more," Selfridge Winter murmured abstractedly as he returned a card-index drawer to its place in a steel cabinet, and picked up a small tin box neatly labeled "18." He removed the cover carefully, then jumped to his feet with an exclamation of fury as a cloud of white ants swarmed out of the box over his hands.

"How in heaven's name did they get in there?" he asked, speaking aloud after the fashion of men who live much alone. "I closed the box with sealing wax. . . . . That's it, sealing wax! Should have used solder. Well, that makes seventeen instead of eighteen. Have to get an entirely new specimen of *that* hummingbird."

He sat back in his chair and gazed about him. His eyes took in, without seeing them, the meager furnishings: a cot bed standing with each leg in a pan of water, coated with kerosene to discourage mosquito larvæ; a table, its legs also in pans; the large steel filing cabinet; a tin trunk. All these articles, as was the man himself, were inclosed by a thick mosquito-net neatly fastened to the wooden floor and rising in a square overhead like a gigantic birdcage. Beyond and above were the walls and roof of a nipa-thatched hut, the open door giving a view of the sacred mountain, Kina Balu, rising in the distance.

Winter picked up a species of squirt-gun and painstakingly blotted from existence all the white ants that had come out of the tin box. Then, lighting a pipe to take away the sharp smell of insect-powder, he filled the mosquito net with its pungent fumes.

There was the patter of bare feet outside, and a Murut, naked save for a breech-clout, stood in the entrance to the hut.

"What is it?" the scientist asked in the native tongue.

"Major Arlington *tuan* rides hither, Winter *tuan*," the man answered with a

low salaam. "He will be here within the time it takes a fruit to fall from two high trees were one on top of the other."

"Splendid! Splendid!" Winter exclaimed in English. "See that all is ready," he added in the native language, "and call Clementine, also."

The Murut bowed low and withdrew.

WINTER turned to the steel filing cabinet and unlocked a locker-shaped section. From it he dragged out two golf-bags, a box of balls, a bottle of whisky and a siphon, talking aloud to himself as he ranged these articles methodically before him.

"How extremely fortunate! I really needed a little dissipation. The course is in good shape, too. Only hope Arlington is on his game. Wish he'd come oftener—one gets so little practice playing once a week. Oh, well!" he ended on a sigh.

There was the clatter of hoofs outside the hut. A voice called "Steady, pony!" and the entrance was momentarily filled by a figure in the uniform of the North Borneo Constabulary. He was a big man with a pink face, a row of service-ribbons on his left breast, and the pips of a major on either sleeve.

"Cheerio, old thing!" he greeted the occupant of the mosquito net gayly. "May I come inside, what?"

"Shake yourself carefully," Winter warned. "There were two mosquitoes in here yesterday."

"Right-o," the Major answered, brushing himself vigorously and waving his hands about his head; then he opened the slit in the net and stepped briskly inside.

Winter pushed the whisky bottle toward his guest, and the Englishman filled his glass half full, topping off the amber liquid with a single spurt from the siphon.

"Very decent stuff," he announced, setting down the emptied glass. "How is the world treatin' you, old dear? If one may speak of this bally Borneo as the world! Caught any more little dicky-birds?"

"I secured my eighteenth new species no later than yesterday," Winter answered in precise tones. "Unfortunately, in some mysterious manner white ants got into the tin box I was preserving it in and destroyed the skin. It is not an irreparable loss, however. I believe I may secure another specimen from the same clump of fire-trees where I took this one."

"You're an odd beggar," the Major announced, abstractedly helping himself to another drink. "Sure you wont come home with me day after tomorrow? I have my leave, you know, and we could do Lunnon together: beautiful women, music halls, cinemas, beautiful women—er—music halls and—er—beautiful women."

"I'd like to see the South American series of hummingbirds in the British Museum," Winter acknowledged, "but I've set out to bring home twenty new species of *Trochilidæ*. I have only eighteen—seventeen, to be exact, since the white ants got my last."

"And you've been in this country two solid years now!" the Englishman said wonderingly. "And you don't *have* to stay here! Really, it's quite marvelous, what!"

"Yes," Winter acknowledged, "I *should* like to go with you, but I *must* make up my twenty new species."

"Oh, well, we're all of us a little mad," the Major conceded kindly. "Women or drink with some, dicky-birds with you. How 'bout some golf, what!"

"Splendid!" Winter agreed enthusiastically. "And here comes Clementine to caddy for us."

SWINGING itself over the ground by its long front legs, a strange rufous-colored animal entered the hut and paused outside the mosquito-net to lift adoring eyes to the scientist. It was a young female orang-utan, sprawly of legs as a gigantic spider, startlingly human of face.

The Englishman contemplated it without admiration.

"Never understood why you didn't have a native to caddy for you instead of that ape," he volunteered. "Have you cured her of biting golf-balls in two yet? Rotten bad habit, what!"

"She still does it occasionally," Winter admitted grudgingly, "when she thinks I'm not looking. I've only had to muzzle her once this week, though. She really understands perfectly. It's just her playfulness."

"Huh!" snorted the Englishman disgustedly. "Well, I must say, I'm not keen about her." He picked up a bag of clubs. Winter followed him out through the mosquito-netting.

Outside the nipa-thatched hut the sun beat down pitilessly. The jungle, like some tortured animal, seemed writhing in

the heat. The air was full of the flight of insects and the jewel-like flash of hummingbirds' wings. There was one spot of apparent coolness, however. The mighty bulk of the sacred mountain Kina Balu, in form strikingly like Gibraltar, threw a great shadow over the land. And it was in this shadow through the jungle glades that Winter had laid out his golf-course. From the home tee it swept away over a smooth sward to where the round piece of tin, painted red with a white numeral "1" in the center, rose on its steel rod from the middle of the first green.

Up a gentle rise, across a small brook that furnished an excellent moral hazard, the marker of the second hole could be seen. The third hole, the most difficult of the course, ran for a hundred yards along the edge of the jungle, then turned abruptly at right angles across a rocky outcrop, with a pile of tree-trunks acting as an additional bunker. It was such a course as to delight the heart of a golfer and even make him forget the terrific heat of the island of Borneo, an island actually crossed by the equator.

Major Arlington rubbed his hands together as he gazed up the fairway.

"Rippin', actually rippin', what! Oh, yes, indeed," he said happily. "My honor, I believe." He bent down and teed up a ball.

"Clementine, on the job!" Winter directed sharply.

The orang-utan shaded her eyes with one immense paw. The Englishman addressed his ball, glanced up swiftly, then down again, waggled the head of his club back and forth for a moment, then brought it up over his shoulder, down in a clean sweep. There was a sharp crack, and the ball shot true and far up the fairway.

"Right-o," the Major said in tones of deep satisfaction, and stood aside.

Winter got off a good drive, though shorter than his opponent's, and the two men shouldered their bags and walked up the course. Clementine, swinging along on the knuckles of her forearms, went ahead of them and stopped in front of the first ball. Winter used a midiron and made the edge of the green. The Major pitched his ball close to the pin with a perfectly judged mashie shot. Clementine removed the steel stake, which she held in her great teeth, and watched interestedly while the scientist sank a thirty-foot putt. The Major tapped his ball into the hole.

"Thought I had you there, old dear," he said good-naturedly as they walked toward the second tee. "You are wonderful on the greens, what! Yes indeed, quite wonderful."

"Still your honor," Winter answered. "You made a perfect mashie shot, Major."

The second hole was also halved. As they proceeded toward the third tee, Winter had to speak sharply to the anthropoid caddy. Clementine was stealthily raising to her lips one of the two golf-balls she carried.

"I don't see why you don't use natives," the Englishman said testily. "We wouldn't have to carry our own bags then, and it would take off a couple of strokes from your score if you didn't have to watch that bally ape all the time. Would take off three strokes, I dare say."

"I wont allow the natives even to touch any of the golf things," Winter answered, "because if they did, they might break the clubs. As you know, there's not another set within a thousand miles. We've been over that before."

"Yes, we have," the Englishman agreed. "The Dusuns up near Kina Balu seem to look on our golf as a sacred ceremony. They think it makes us fever-proof. You and I are the only men I know who could have endured this bally land for two years runnin'."

"Keeping immune from tropical fevers is only a question of keeping fit, of enough exercise," Winter answered dogmatically. "Still your honor, Arlington. Watch your ball. Clementine cuts across to the fourth tee from here, you know, since there is that family of wild orang-utans living in the edge of the jungle."

AS they drove off from the third tee, both men were conscious of being watched. Winter turned his eyes to the jungle and made out the figures of two big males, a smaller, strikingly red, male, and two female orang-utans clustered in a tree on the edge of the course. He pointed them out to his companion.

"Awfully tame, what!" the Major commented. "They seem to know that the peasantry look on them as sacred, and that we wont hurt them. It's odd how they lie in wait for your pet ape, though. Regard her as a traitor to her caste, I dare say."

"They caught her last week," Winter answered with a sigh. "She came to the hut looking like a badly plucked chicken.

Hair torn out by the roots, you know. I rubbed some vaseline on her wounds, but she swallowed the box when I wasn't looking, so I had to let nature cure her. The vaseline made her quite ill," he concluded reminiscently.

Both men cleared the rocky outcrop, and the tree-trunk bunker, but the Major was short to the green. Winter's approach fell dead to the hole, which he won, four to six.

"It's really too hot to play decently in this bally country," the Englishman said disconsolately as they joined Clementine at the fourth tee. "I'm runnin' up to Prestwick to see some of my people when I get home."

"I've never played over the Prestwick course," Winter answered. "Is it really as good as people say?"

"Oh, better far," the Major stated emphatically, and drove. It was an exceptional drive, actually cleared a small thicket of fire-trees to which it had been customary only to play up.

Winter topped slightly, and his ball fell at the very edge of the thicket. Both men followed to where Clementine crouched above it.

THE course veered out of the shadow of the mountain at this point, and the sunbeams played fiercely among the fire-trees. As the two men approached them, Winter suddenly raised his hand, and the other halted abruptly. Stealing forward, the scientist aimed a small pistol he took from his pocket, pulled the trigger. There was a tiny *pop*, and an iridescent pinch of feathers fell to the ground almost at his feet.

"Eighteen again," he said triumphantly. "I knew I could find another like the one the white ants got. You will note, Major, that the primary feathers are much longer in this specimen than in any other hummingbird species, and the bill is strikingly short. I'm calling it *Trochilus Johnsonis* after 'Pussy Foot' Johnson, as you English have dubbed him. Short bill—can't drink very much! You get the connection?"

"Jolly wheeze, what! Oh, very!" the Englishman said hastily. "Shall we get on with our game? Oh, I say, damn that female ape!" and he pointed.

Clementine had picked up the golf-ball and bitten it clean in two.

"I *did* think that I had cured her of that trick," Winter sighed. "I'll have to muzzle her, for discipline's sake. Come here, Clementine!" he ordered sadly.

The orang-utan looked up into his face with a crestfallen expression as he strapped a large dog-muzzle over her mouth.

"I hate to do it," he said aloud, speaking more to himself than to his companion. "She doesn't like it at all."

"Why not go on with the game, what? It's bally hot here," the Englishman suggested impatiently.

"To be sure," Winter agreed, patting Clementine's head and giving her a last pitying glance. "Let me see! I drop a new ball and lose a stroke. There! Not a bad lie. I'll take a chance and use a midiron."

A BEAUTIFUL midiron shot sent the ball soaring over the thicket and well down the fairway past where the Major's lay. The Major used his brassie and pulled to the right into the rough, striking a tree-trunk and bounding back a hundred yards. His next shot brought him a yard ahead of Winter. The scientist hesitated between brassie and midiron, finally chose the latter club, and struck the ball cleanly, so that it soared straight down the course, barely clearing an artificial bunker and rolling onto the green. Again the Major was short, and finally lost the hole, six to seven.

"It *does* put me off frightfully to have extraneous matters brought into the game," he complained as they made their way toward the fifth tee. "What with you pottin' dicky-birds, and the ape eatin' up the balls I'm—well, I'm all of a twitter."

"Sorry," Winter apologized. "I had to have that specimen, though; and Clementine's no more perfect than others of her sex."

"I suppose not," the Major grumbled. "Couldn't be helped, of course, but—" He left the sentence unfinished. When he spoke again, it was in angry tones: "Thought I was free from that annoyance for the present, at any rate." And he pointed to where some natives were approaching from the direction of Kina Balu.

"Who are they? Can't you leave 'em alone until we finish our game?" the scientist demanded.

"They're Dusuns from the foot of the mountain," was the answer. "Lot of fever 'mong 'em, and they're on the rampage. Want to make a human sacrifice to the mountain, what! Can't have that, y'know. No, no, indeed not, really."

THE Dusuns drew nearer. They were dressed only in breech-clouts, carried *sumpitans* (the deadly Bornean blow-gun), to the ends of which were lashed spear-blades; and even as they approached, it was plain that many of them were shaking with fever. An old, old man, very dirty and wearing a bright leopard-skin cap that somehow gave him the appearance of an ancient beau in a silk hat, stepped forward and addressed the Major in the Dusun tongue:

"The sacred mountain is very angry with us. Our women and children are well, but our men shake with fever from the time of the rising of the sun until the mountain swallows it up. We come to pray you that we may swing the magic clubs as do you and the other *tuan*, so that the fever may leave us and we be not too weak to keep order among our women."

"What about it, old thing?" The Englishman turned to Winter: "Why not let them hit a few balls? It would do them no end of good spiritually."

"I'll see them shake the fillings out of their teeth first," Winter retorted. "You know perfectly well that as soon as a tyro has a club in his hand, he wont be satisfied till he is playing all the time. They would steal every last golf thing I've got."

"You're right, oh, yes, indeed, what!" the Major answered with conviction, after a short pause. "Don't do to encourage the peasantry to ask for things, anyway. I'll have to go up there tomorrow, though, or they'll be spearin' some one as a sacrifice." He turned back to the delegation, addressing them in the Dusun tongue: "Go back whence ye came. This is *tuans'* magic, and too powerful for you. I myself will come to you next sun. . . . . And I hope that satisfies the bally beggars," he added in English.

The savages slowly and mournfully withdrew, while Clementine snarled after them. The two players resumed their game.

"The Dusuns have been watching us every time we went around for the last two months," Winter meditated aloud as they reached the home green.

"Can't very well forbid that, y'know," the Major snapped at him—he was three down. "A cat may look at a king. That is to say—you understand, what!"

In silence the two men entered the mosquito-net cage, and Winter pushed the whisky over to his guest. The Englishman's face cleared as he poured himself a drink.

"Very good of you to go with me tomorrow," he remarked affably. "It would be a beastly lonely trip without you." He hesitated, then spoke again: "I say, old dear, you made rather a slip, though, this afternoon. They *couldn't* shake with fever till the fillings came out of their teeth. Oh, no, indeed, really! You see, Dusuns have no fillings in their teeth, what!"

IT was dark the next morning when Winter methodically checked over his equipment to see that he had forgotten nothing: cartridges loaded with salt for his hummingbird pistol, tin boxes for specimens, arsenic for preserving skins, magnifying glass, head-net, pipe, tobacco, matches? Yes, he had them all.

From outside came the Major's voice: "Be sharp, old dear. We've a long ride ahead of us."

The scientist paused outside the mosquito-net to give some last directions to his Murut servant as to the care of Clementine, then mounted the waiting pony. The Major turned in his saddle and addressed the eight indistinct figures behind him:

"'Shun! Fohm, *fohm* fouahs! At the walk, *'alk*, 'arch!" And followed by the troopers of the North Borneo Constabulary, the two men put their mounts into motion.

"What, exactly, is the trouble with the Dusuns?" Winter asked, not that he cared especially, but it is not good to ride silent in the dark through the murky dampness of the Bornean jungle.

"Bit of an epidemic, what!" the Major answered. "Seems only to hit the men; women and children are perfectly healthy. Yes indeed, quite! The bally Dusuns started out to take some heads from the Muruts—they're all head-hunters y'know; but I got wind of it and gave 'em a talkin' to. Now I understand they're plannin' a *sumunguping*."

"What's that?" Winter asked, reaching around under his head-net to pluck a mosquito that had got inside and was burrowing into the back of his neck.

"Sacrifice to Kina Balu," the Englishman answered. "They tie some poor beggar to a stake and stick spears into him. With each thrust they shout out the message they want him to take to the spirits on the mountain-top—all their dead are supposed to go up there, y'know. Dis-

gustin' performance, not to be tolerated for a moment, y'understand."

"I think I do," the scientist admitted, then added cheerfully: "You'll have to stay around my place today, wont you? We can get in some golf this afternoon, can't we?"

"Yes indeed, oh, quite," the Major agreed happily. "See the bally old sun risin'. I say, it's pretty as the settin' for a musical comedy, what!"

"Quite," agreed Winter, his eyes on the underbrush as some large animal went crashing from near the trail into the jungle.

IT was full daylight before they reached their destination: a single very long, low, nipa-thatched hut wherein dwelt all the tribe. Through the doorway they could see that it was apportioned off by rude railings into sections, one to a family. There was no one outside, no one beneath the broad porch, from the ceiling of which swung many dried heads—emblems of prowess which the Dusun belles claim from their wooers. All these gruesome relics were of the time before Major Arlington had come to Borneo, however.

"Looks peaceful enough," the scientist commented as they dismounted.

"Never trust to looks, no indeed, never," the Englishman reminded him. "There should be men loafin' about and women workin'. I don't half like it." He raised his voice in a peremptory call.

A woman sauntered out from the jungle apartment-house. She was far from being a siren, and her charms were not enhanced by the smear of red about her mouth from the betel-nut that she was chewing.

"Where are all the men and women?" the Major demanded sharply in the Dusun tongue.

"The women go to bathe beneath the waterfall," she answered glibly. "The men, —we women think little of the men since they have grown so weak,—the men go up the mountain to join with the men of the Muruts, who are also sick, in propitiating the spirits, that they may grow strong again. At least so they said—but we pay little attention to them, now that we are the stronger. They dare not even hold a *sumunguping!*" she concluded contemptuously.

"H-m!" ejaculated the Major, then again: "H-m! Don't like it at all," he said to Winter. "In the first place, I don't believe any of it. No Dusun was ever known to bathe. In the second place, they have been forbidden to go up to that Murut village. And in the third place, they haven't gone, for if they *had* gone, the Muruts would collect their heads."

"What are you going to do about it?" the scientist asked.

"Well, I'll have a look through the hut first of all to see if they have taken their weapons," the head of the North Bornean Constabulary answered.

WINTER started to follow, but at the porch he paused. There was a great bougainvillæa vine growing over the hut, and from its crimson mass a flash of gold shot past the scientist's eyes. Eagerly he traced its flight, lost it, then stealthily drew forth his salt-loaded pistol as the hummingbird poised over one of the blossoms *Pop*—and his hand caught the bright bunch of feathers as it fell.

Major Arlington came out of the hut, his face relaxed.

"It's all right," he said. "They've left all their *sumpitans* behind. Perhaps they have really gone up to visit those other head-hunters, made a truce with 'em. In any case, I'll send my men up there under the sergeant-majah, and we'll go straight back to your diggin's and have a round this afternoon."

"*Manus* unusually short," soliloquized Winter. "Smaller even than in Sloan's so-called Least Hummingbird of Jamaica. A new family, possibly a new genus! I'll call it—let me see—"

"Call it Zeke," suggested the Englishman impatiently. But let's get back to your diggin's. You aren't three holes better than I am, no indeed, really. I'll demonstrate it to you this afternoon, even though it's goin' to be bally hot."

"You don't realize how important the naming of a new species is," Winter answered with dignity. "Your suggestion is quite absurd. A name should carry some indication of the characteristics which distinguish the species—"

"Don't see why," the Major interrupted. "'What's in a name?' and all that bally rot! Scriptural quotation, what!"

"You wouldn't call a girl Jim, would you?" the scientist retorted.

"Hardly," the Englishman answered after giving the matter some thought, then temporized: "Not unless she asked me, y'know, and only then if we happened

to be awfully good pals. Very possibly I'd have to know who her people were, and under no circumstances would I think of doing it unless her name really *was* Jim."

"Let's go back and play golf," the American suggested wearily.

THE eight enlisted men of the North Bornean Constabulary, under the command of the sergeant-major, rode up the mountain; the Major and his companion put their ponies to a walk and went in the opposite direction. They did not speak to one another—as much as the darkness of the tropical jungle calls for conversation, the heat of the Bornean day demands silence. That is, they did not speak to one another until they had nearly retraced their early morning ride.

"What kind of a bally apparition is that?" the Major suddenly demanded, and pointed.

Winter raised his eyes from his pony's mane and looked, then threw back his head-net and stared.

Up the path came a figure trailing what appeared to be a long bridal veil—came with uncertain weavings to right and left, abrupt stumblings and recoveries. It drew nearer. Winter sprang from his pony's back with a cry of amazement and anger:

"It's Clementine! She's torn down my mosquito-net. Got all wrapped up in it!"

The figure lurched too far to the left and fell. There was a turmoil of tearing net, and the head and shoulders of the orang-utan appeared from the midst. Slowly she regained her feet and staggered forward toward her master, holding out a small object in one great paw.

"By gad, the old girl's spiffed, quite awfully drunk, y'know. Oh, yes indeed, really!" the Englishman gasped.

Winter did not answer, but took the small object from Clementine's paw. It was a key. He glanced mournfully from it to his pet, then up at the Major.

"She opened my filing-cabinet and found the whisky," he said sadly. "There were twelve quarts in there. Hope she hasn't broken them all." His expression changed to one of horror. "My Lord, I wonder if she has broken any of the golf-clubs? Clementine, how could you?"

Clementine gave an excellent imitation of a human hiccup, then held out her other paw tightly closed, opened it revealing a golf-ball, and with a reckless gesture, carried it to her mouth and bit it in two. Then before either man had time to move, she dived into the jungle by the side of the road and disappeared.

"Thank heaven she didn't get the key to the part of my filing cabinet that holds the specimens," Winter exclaimed, then added hotly: "Ride, Major, ride! Our golf is at stake!"

THE two galloping ponies broke from the jungle into the open about the nipa-thatched hut. As they did so, the Major turned in his saddle, pointed.

"The Dusuns! They've got your clubs, and they've drunk your whisky! We're in for no end of a row. Let's rush 'em before they've seen us."

"Too late," Winter answered. "Oh, dear! *Oh, dear!*" he added in woebegone tones; "look at that!"

The Major, with an oath, pulled his pony down to a walk. The savages had seen them and were clustering together, while out in front stood the old man who had spoken for the delegation of the day before. "Stood" is not exactly the right word; rather he swayed gently and rhythmically, his bright leopard-skin cap over one ear, and holding above his head by its two ends the scientist's pet driver. As the Major and Winter approached, he bent the club more and more.

"Pull up, Arlington, I implore you," Winter pleaded. "Don't you see, he intends to break the club if we don't keep off? Try talking to him."

"Never heard of such a thing in my whole life," sputtered the Major, defyin' the might of the British Empire—and stealin' the whisky, too! It's simply not done, no indeed, really! I'm for rushin' 'em."

The old Dusun began to speak, swaying gently as the words poured from his mouth:

"The fault is not with us, *tuans;* it is the God of the mountain who bade us take the magic sticks and drink the drink of dreams. He it is who sent us his messenger —a fair orang-utan of dancing steps and wreathed in mist—to meet us as we came down from our village to implore that we might touch the magic sticks, strike with them the white nuts that banish fever. The magic sticks she dragged forth for us; the white nuts she scattered to all; the drink of dreams she showed us. We drank, and our hearts grew bold. We play with the sticks and white nuts even as you play, then go back to the mountain free of fever and strong to chastise our wives. Hoop-

hoop-la-la-la!" concluded the swaying savage gayly, and turned away.

"I say, old thing, I don't think they'll hurt the clubs," the Major said. "They would certainly break them if we rushed them now, what! You were quite wrong to suggest that, quite wrong. Let's follow 'em round at a distance, and after a bit collect the clubs. Fact is, we can't do anything else."

"There's Clementine, the cause of all the trouble," Winter spoke bitterly. "She's following them to the first tee. Come on!"

WHAT then took place before their staring eyes was such as to raise the ghost of Colonel Bogey in protest, wring drops of blood from the hearts of golfers. The natives lined up abreast, each one with a club—it mattered not which club. The old savage shouted the signal, and the air was instantly full of golf-balls. Some only rolled a few feet, but many flew to the right and left, while a few skittered straight up the fairway. Each player instantly rushed to what he thought was his ball and frantically swiped at it again. In ten minutes a tight knot of savages were on the first green holing-out as fast as the balls could be dropped or pushed into the hole.

"Unutterably awful!" finally gasped the Englishman. "Horrible, horrible! It's—it's sacrilegious. We *must* stop it."

"Come on!" Winter swung down from his pony. "We'll go after them on foot. This thing has gone far enough. My Lord, look at Clementine! Poor, poor thing, she doesn't understand!"

It was indeed a sad sight. The orang-utan had been taught to watch the golf-balls; but now, as the savages lined up again at the second tee, there were half a hundred white spheres in the air. It was too much for Clementine's nerves, frazzled as they were by whisky, outraged by the mad rushing of the savages about her. Even as the two white men watched her, the orang-utan snatched a club from the nearest native and ran amuck. Right and left she struck, knocking Dusuns in every direction, until the savages cast away their golf-sticks and took to wild flight.

"Noble creature!" exclaimed Winter, starting forward, then pausing at a snort of terror from behind him. He wheeled in his tracks, to see both ponies bolting.

"What! What! What!" cried the Major, and pointed.

Out from the jungle came the entire wild orang-utan family, the two great males leading, while the human watchers stood rooted to the spot. As Clementine collected clubs and balls and piled them on the second tee, the wild anthropoids encircled her, closed in. She raised her head, took in the whole situation at a glance, then crouched hopelessly to the ground awaiting her fate.

"Shoot, Major, shoot!" Winter begged. "They'll tear her limb from limb."

"My gun's in the saddle-holster," the Englishman answered sadly; then gasped: "Look at that!"

PAYING not the slightest attention to Clementine, the two great males hopped to the pile of golf-clubs, gravely selected one each and carefully teed up two balls. The smaller then stepped back while his companion took his stance, waggled his club back and forth in perfect imitation of the Major. Followed the sharp crack of a fairly hit ball.

At the sound Clementine raised her head, shaded her eyes with one great paw and peered down the course.

The other male orang-utan drove, its form exactly that of the scientist.

Clementine gathered together a pawful of clubs and hopped down the course after the two players.

"I say, it isn't true!" gasped the Major.

"Simplest explanation in the world," Winter retorted. "They've been watching us for days. Keep your eye on that largest one. He presses—just as I have told you a hundred times you do."

"The other ape looks up too soon after he has driven," the Major retorted promptly. "I've called your attention to the same fault in your drivin' a thousand times, what!"

The two men glared at each other, then turned back to watch the orang-utans.

The two balls lay very close together. There appeared to be some doubt as to which was which. At any rate the smaller anthropoid attempted to shoulder the larger out of the way. With lightning-like promptness the larger smashed a brassie over the smaller's head. Followed a red whirl of biting, struggling orang-utans. Clementine gave one frightened glance, dropped her armful of clubs and fled toward the jungle.

"This is quite enough! I've had that brassie for ten years," Winter said between his clenched teeth, and ran forward. As he

drew near, the smaller orang-utan snatched up a putter and laid its opponent out cold with one swift stroke; then, a paw held to its swollen head, it dived into the thicket of fire-trees.

SLOWLY the two men began to pick up the scattered clubs. Many were cracked or broken. Some of the balls were bitten clean in two; all showed the marks of Clementine's great teeth.

"This is the end of our golfin', what!" sighed the Englishman. "Lucky I'm goin' off on leave tomorrow. Couldn't have stood it here without a game now and then. It's a bally shame, what! Look at this driver!" He raised a broken club in his hand and glanced about him.

For a moment he could not see Winter at all, then spied him a dozen yards away. The scientist was on his knees, his tiny pistol raised. Came the faint *pop*, followed by a shout of triumph:

"My twentieth!" Winter exclaimed gleefully. "My twentieth! The largest hummingbird ever collected—must be nine inches long! Who cares about the clubs now, Major? I'll go back with you to England! I'll go back tomorrow."

"You will?" exclaimed the Major joyfully. "I say, old dear, that's simply rippin'!"

"That is, if I can find Clementine," the scientist temporized. "I could not leave her here to utter loneliness after all she has been through. She would mourn herself to death."

"Would she?" the Major asked, and pointed.

Winter looked in the direction he indicated. In a tree at the jungle's edge sat Clementine, closely pressed to the side of the very red wild young male orang-utan. Even as he watched, Clementine looked up into its face and held out something in her paw—a white golf-ball. Then she raised it to her lips and bit it in two. Coquettishly she held out one half to her lover, and with a gesture of abandonment, wound a long arm tenderly about his neck.

The Major regarded them thoughtfully.

"I say," at length he ejaculated, "wouldn't surprise me, y'know, if the progeny of that female ape made rather good caddies, what! Providin', always, that one caught 'em young."

"It isn't a matter of age," the scientist said, shaking his head sadly. "Good caddies are born, not made."

Two Times One

HAD anyone predicted back in those days that in ten years I would become a vice-president of a large corporation, I should probably have said: "Don't make me laugh." By "back in those days," I mean when I was on the editorial staff of a leading trade-paper covering the iron and steel industry. It was not that I had a poor opinion of my capabilities, but rather that I believed my bent was studious, not executive.

My particular bailiwick on the paper was the market-department. It was my business to know the current prices of metals and metal-products, from pig-iron and ferromanganese to rivets and brass tubing. I am tempted to explain at length my duties and methods, but Bob Austin warned me that unless I could tell an interesting story, I had better not bother about them.

Austin is my assistant. He is doing well, and is impulsive enough to attribute some of his success to me. A few years ago he was a clerk in the sales-department. I happened to notice him—perhaps because of his wiry blond hair, pos-

By ALDEN W. WELCH

The illuminating story of a young business man whose wife undertook to guide his feet in the path to success.

sibly because of the look in his eyes. It was the same unsatisfied expression I wore in the later years of my editorial experience.

A few days ago, after thanking me for his latest boost in salary, he lingered beside my desk.

"Mr. Wills," he said hesitatingly, "would you mind telling me the immediate cause of your success?"

I looked at him and answered promptly: "My wife."

We had some little discussion after this. I assured him that I was not sentimental, that when I credited Mrs. Wills with my first advancement, it was simple justice. I also confessed that at the time I did not thank her for her efforts, her strenuous course of treatment. She put me to hard, unhappy labor, but she cured me of the insidious and almost universal disease I was contracting—laziness.

"That sounds like a story," said Austin. "Why don't you write it up for the sake of the one or two it might help? Especially at this time when the unemployment situation is so acute!"

WHEN I first met Anna, her father was proprietor of a fairly remunerative drugstore in which he had started as a clerk. He was proud of his achievement, and impatient of failure. If one couldn't make money, one didn't have brains, was his dictum. By that standard he has proved his intellectuality, for he is now a wholesale druggist.

Anna is an energetic girl. In a word, she has red hair. She fascinated me at sight, and soon there were no other girls in my little world. Within the year we were engaged. I was making fifty dollars a week, and her father did not share her belief in my astuteness. She has told me of a conversation she had with him. It was in this vein:

"A man can't lift himself by his bootstraps. What I mean is that a man can't do more than is in him. For instance, a horse can't run faster than his strength will take him. Wills is a good-enough young fellow, but he lacks ambition."

"Direction," Anna corrected.

"It's all the same," said her father. "The point is, he's not a man of action. Now, if he had what I call brains—"

"It takes brains to be an editor," she flashed.

"I'll admit he's got a good mind, only he doesn't use it right."

"He thinks with it!"

"He ought to *act* with it," pronounced her practical father, elaborating: "A man ought to do his thinking in the evening and his acting in the daytime. And once he gets used to acting, he'll think to some purpose."

"Dick will be different after he's married," the daughter promised.

"I doubt it." Then, I believe, he glanced at the resolute face shaped of his own flesh and blood. "Well, maybe he will; you've got the goods, my girl."

ONE evening a few months after our marriage, Anna laid down her work—she was knitting a plum-colored necktie for me—and said in a strange voice:

"The Hoyts have bought a car."

"That so?" I responded absently, continuing my reading.

"Dick!" It was then that I noticed the peculiar tone of her voice. Glancing at her, I found that she was vaguely excited. "Dick, I wish *we* had a car."

I closed my book on a finger and looked at her more keenly. It was plain there

was something she wanted to say. She resumed her knitting, but I knew she would speak in a moment.

"It's been in my mind to ask you—" She was knitting rapidly. "Do you like your little work, Dick?" She did not glance at me.

Though a quiet chap, I was a quick thinker. I replied immediately. "It's not such little work, Anna; your father couldn't do it."

My wife is an extraordinary woman: I mean, she has a sense of humor. She stopped knitting and looked at me frankly, almost mischievously. Then she emitted the little rippling laugh that has always captivated me.

"But really, Dick," she said in a moment, there is a lot in you that can never be used in your present position. Wouldn't you like to really succeed?" I split the infinitive because she did.

"Just what does that mean?" I asked.

She answered promptly and with bewildering astuteness. "To use your full powers and receive payment in full."

I WAS silent, partly from admiration, I suppose. Also, I was thinking.

"Wouldn't you like that, Dick?"

I nodded. "Every man in the world would like that."

"Then why don't you do it?"

"Ah, that's it."

"But you can do it! I know you can do it if—" her complexion matched her hair very prettily, "—if you will let me help you!"

"You do help me." And it was true. The last five years of my bachelorhood had been quietly spent. It had been work by day, and in the evenings reading and thinking—too much thinking on abstract themes, such as death, immortality and altruism. Do not understand from this that a negative existence contented me. To the outer eye, my life was tranquil, but inside I was in a fever of impatience, especially at night, alone. Then I met Anna, and I hoped she would supply the missing letter that would spell *contentment*. After our marriage the evenings were far less dreadful, though they were practically as uneventful as before. My heart was at peace, but my mind—

"Dick, let's have a talk." She placed her knitting on the table, and I did the same with my book. She continued: "You must do something to get yourself noticed. Can't you make some important improvement in your department?"

I smiled. "Dear girl, I've made half a dozen important improvements this year."

"Why weren't they appreciated?"

"They were. Mr. Wayland has said some complimentary things."

"You weren't promoted."

"That comes slowly in my business."

She must have been silent for nearly half a minute. "Do you know what I think?" she said suddenly. "I think the whole trouble is that you are not close enough to the money."

"To what money?"

"To the money your improvements made for the paper. They did make money, didn't they?"

"Indirectly," I acknowledged. "They increased the circulation, and consequently the volume of advertising."

She tossed her head. "And the advertising salesman received the credit."

Her insight surprised me. However, I have mentioned that she has red hair.

"Isn't it true?" she persisted.

"To a certain extent," I admitted.

"There you are!" she cried.

I nodded. "Here I am." Probably my tone implied that I expected to remain stationary for a long while.

"I want to help you," she said. "Will you let me?"

"What's on your mind, Anna? What is the particular way in which you wish to help me?"

"I want you to place your leisure hours at my disposal for the next three months!"

"Why, I spend every evening with you now."

"I know; but I want to make out a program for us both to follow—just for three months." Her eyes were full of pleading.

I was puzzled. "Well," I said slowly, "if the evenings are to be spent like this one, and last, and all the others since our wedding—"

"They'll be different," she promised a trifle grimly.

"You frighten me," I smiled. "Nevertheless—all right."

"We'll begin tomorrow!" She seemed quite excited.

I THOUGHT no more of the matter until the next evening when I entered the house. We lived in a remote part of

Brooklyn. Anna heard me come in, and appeared from the kitchen, to kiss me and announce pleasantly that we were going to the movies.

"*Where?*" I asked astonished.

"To the movies, dear."

"But what for?"

"Why, for fun, of course."

"You're joking."

A funny little grim look appeared. "You wont think so when I tell you that we are going to the movies—*in New York*," she said.

I slipped my arm around her waist, and we walked down the hall and into the dining-room.

"Now, Dick, you needn't assume that tolerant masculine air. In an hour we'll be on the elevated."

She spoke truth. I accompanied her with scarcely a whimper. I realized that we had gone out very little. Set as I was in my bachelor ways, I was sensible enough to know that marriage was a compromise. If there were a fly in the salad, it was the fact that we were going to Manhattan—a journey of some eight miles—when there was an excellent moving-picture theater around the corner from our house.

The picture we saw was fairly interesting. Still better, it was over by nine o'clock.

"We'll be home before ten-thirty," I remarked enthusiastically.

"Do you know, dear, I'm hungry."

"We'll look in the icebox when we get home."

She pressed my arm to her side. "Let's go to a coffee-house."

THE next day I felt much better than I had expected. I had come to believe that eight hours' sleep was imperative to my efficiency. Yet despite our mild carouse, I was in fine fettle all day. Understand, I am not recommending movies, coffee and French pastry as a generator of "pep." It is sound policy now and then to jar oneself out of a comfortable rut; but a steady diet of "gayety" and late hours— What I mean is that when I reached home next evening, I found we had company. Anna met me in the hall. She put her fingers to her lips, then motioned toward the door.

"The Fosters are going to have dinner with us," she said softly. "I forgot to tell you."

Bob Foster was a round and talkative chap, and his wife was a plump and vivacious young woman. They were favorites with those who liked cheerful and rotund persons, but they always bored me. It was not that I was interesting or superior; I was so steeped in my own personality that I resented any colorful intrusion.

"Glad to see you, Foster," I was saying a moment later, "and you too, Mrs. Foster."

After dinner my wife favored us with a few selections on the piano. Mrs. Foster turned the pages for her, while Bob and I smoked in a corner.

"How is the coffin trade?" I inquired for politeness' sake. Foster was a salesman for a leading casket-house.

"A little dull," he said with a pretense of gloominess.

"Foster," I followed up a little more seriously, "how does one set out to sell coffins? *Must* one wear a white necktie and a Prince Albert?"

HE chuckled. "That would be absolutely fatal. For example, I always wear a dark red necktie on a rainy day, and a pale blue one when the sun shines almost too brightly." He clasped his hands over his stomach and twiddled his thumbs. "It isn't *what* you sell," he said oracularly; "it's fitting your method to your prospect's favorite prejudice. A good salesman can sell anything."

Anna ceased thrilling the keys and swung round on the piano stool. Her hearing is abnormally acute.

"Mr. Foster, how does a man go about it to sell his services to the best advantage?"

Foster was as surprised as I. "Why, Mrs. Wills, he does it in just the same way that I sell caskets. He sells to the man who needs the goods."

"Yes, but *how* does he do it?"

"By showing how the prospect can make money."

The Fosters left about eleven.

"Didn't I tell you?" my wife demanded, as soon as we were alone.

"What did you tell me?"

"That you are not close enough to the money. You've got to show somebody that you can make money for him."

"What have you planned for tomorrow evening?" I inquired.

"Wait and see," she laughed.

A HARD day was ahead, and it turned out to be one of those gray days when everything seems to have a kink in it. I had not yet learned that the only way to deal successfully with such a condition is to put on one's hat and leave the office. Indeed, had I possessed the knowledge, I was scarcely in a position to apply it. I was a producer, not an executive. The paper "closed" that night, and sufficient copy to fill four pages was not only expected of me, but had to be forthcoming. Unpleasantness and error seemed to lurk everywhere; by five o'clock my nerves were on edge.

If upon reaching home I might have gone directly upstairs, taken a hot bath and put on different clothes, and then, after a good dinner, been permitted to read myself sleepy, the evening might have passed without hostilities. But where two persons undertake to live as one, good humor is essential to comfort, for irritability is a disease readily contracted by those in its vicinity. Anna met me at the door.

"You're late," were her first words. If only she had said almost anything else!

I hung my hat on the tree.

"What's the matter?" she demanded.

"Nothing," I muttered ungraciously, and then strode down the hall and into the dining-room.

Dinner was a rather solemn ceremony. My thoughts were so far away as to be quite beyond me. From time to time I was dimly conscious of Anna's gaze upon me. However, by the time coffee was served, I was more endurable.

"It isn't anything especial," I said apologetically, "—just one of those days when everything goes wrong."

"One darn thing after another?"

I looked at her, and we both smiled.

"I'm sorry," she said, "because I was going to ask you to take me to a lecture."

I shook my head.

"I know," she said. "It's all right. I wont try to break the camel's back."

HER magnanimity made me grateful and a little conscience-stricken. I went into the living-room, and in half a minute she followed with my smoking-jacket and slippers.

"Make yourself comfy, old man," she said a trifle maliciously, and then went away to attend to the dishes.

I picked up a book, and soon the trivialities of the day were hidden, if not altogether blotted out. When Anna rejoined me, I glanced up with a smile, then went on reading.

"Richard is himself again?" she inquired a little later.

"Feel pretty good now."

"You're a real home man, aren't you, dear?"

"I used to be pretty lively," I defended.

"Before you became lazy," she murmured.

I closed my book and looked at her.

"I mean mentally lazy," she explained, smiling away the sting.

"I don't think my brain is particularly sluggish," I said without joining in her smile.

"No," she seemed to agree, "not *particularly*. Most people's brains are sluggish. That's why so few succeed."

"You mean succeed in the sense of making money."

"Of course."

I glanced at the clock. "If you really want to go to that lecture—"

She shook her head. "But I'd love to take a walk after a while. Don't you think it might help clear the cobwebs out of your mind? I do so want you to feel fit tomorrow night."

I threw a suspicious glance at her.

She was smiling. "We're to call on the Prestons. We've owed them for ever so long."

UNCONTROLLED, this little story might easily run to book length. In the ensuing three months there were innumerable incidents of intimate interest. To sum up the period in a sentence: *occasionally* we spent an evening at home, by ourselves. By the end of the second week I loathed life. It seemed as if I never had a waking moment to myself. By day I labored at the office, and at night mumbled inanities and listened to banalities. During the first month I was sustained by the poetic promise that even the weariest river winds somewhere safe to sea. With Pollyanian philosophy I was thankful that I had not sold my comfort for *six* months.

Had Anna seemed to be drawing the breath of life from our continual mingling with other people, I might at least have had the satisfaction of feeling that I was sacrificing myself to some purpose, but it was obvious that she too found small

amusement in our new mode of existence. And about the middle of the second month, she began to weaken. We had taken the Fosters to the theater, and they had insisted upon giving us supper afterward. Everybody had been talkative, none vivacious. A doleful lack of spontaneity!

In our room Anna and I spoke to each other for the first time in the last hour. She threw her cloak on the bed and sat down in a rocking-chair. She closed her eyes and sighed deeply.

I laid my watch on the dresser. "Not tired already," I said with a shade of irony. "Only half-past one!"

She stifled a yawn, and said wearily: "I release you from your promise, Dick."

I turned toward her. "You mean?"

She nodded drearily. "I thought I was strong enough to carry it through. Anyway, I was willing to try, for both our sakes, and for the sake of what the future might bring us. But—I'm tired."

IT is a blessed thing that a mind is legible only to itself. Hearing Anna's surrender, my mind was suddenly filled with the tawdry words of a popular song, the purport of which was that one wants what one wants when one wants it, but when one gets it, one doesn't want it at all.

Far from feeling elation or a sudden sense of freedom, I was conscious of a new responsibility. It is bad for a firm to have one of the partners fail in a campaign. Anna had started something, and it was up to her to carry it through. So I advised her to go to bed and think no more of the matter until the sun was in a position to color and warm her musings.

Next day was Saturday, and as it was a half-holiday, I lunched at home. Anna was in high spirits, and so was I.

"You were a dear, last night," she said.

"How do you mean?"

"For not taking advantage of my temporary weakness."

"Oh! Then, you've got your strength back?"

She tossed her head. "Why, of course! You don't suppose we're going to quit after going this far, do you?"

"Certainly not," I assured her. "What—"

She anticipated me: "I've laid out our program for next week."

"Good!" I cried, stifling a groan. "Are we to have a single evening at home?"

"Thursday," she replied. "But we'll have company."

AFTER lunch I went to my room, where I remained all afternoon, preparing an article for next week's issue. I was extremely interested in the work at hand, believing that it would prove important both to the paper and to the steel industry. By chance I had recently hit upon an entirely new use for steel-mesh material. My idea would open up a new field for the product. I was full of the fervor of creation.

Anna was good enough not to interrupt me until about four. "What is it all about?" she inquired, coming into the room.

I laid down my pen and ran my fingers through my hair. "I'm describing a new use for a certain steel product," I explained.

She showed interest. "Whom are you describing it for?"

"For the steel manufacturers," I answered.

"Oh! You are going to present your idea to them directly?"

"No," I admitted; "they'll read it in the magazine."

She sniffed. It may not be a pretty word, but that is what she did. Looking at her, I caught an irritating expression of pity in her eyes. "Dick, Dick!" she murmured, and with that, left the room.

I did not pick up my pen at once. Well, I did pick it up, but I only drummed with it on the blotter while I gazed reflectively at the pile of scribbled sheets.

A busy week followed. Each evening brought fresh evidence to prove that Anna's momentary mood of discouragement had been bravely overcome. We attended the theater once, that being as much as we felt we could afford for that class of entertainment. The Fosters had us to dinner on Wednesday, and the following day we did as much for one of the forlorn bachelors connected with the paper. An exhibition of paintings and a free concert rounded out the week very nicely.

Sunday night, while dressing for church, Anna said in a strikingly casual voice: "Oh, by the way, Dick, have you had any more original ideas like the one you wrote up last Saturday?" She was fixing her hair, and though she did not turn toward me, I could see her reflection in the mirror. I purposely refrained from replying at once. She lifted her eyes and searched the glass for me. When she found me and saw that I was looking straight at her,

she colored—the light over her bureau was exceptionally brilliant—and smiled. "Well, Dick, how about it?"

"That Saturday idea is already showing results," I said.

Her eyes did not waver. "You mean you are to get a raise in salary?"

"My dear girl, can you think of nothing but money? Mr. Wayland liked my article, and already several appreciative letters—"

"To whom were those letters addressed?" she interrupted, "—to you or to the magazine?"

"Well, naturally—"

Again she interrupted me. "Dick," she said, turning and facing me, "I want you to promise that next time you have a big idea, you will tell me about it before you tell it to another soul."

"What for?" I asked with deliberate stupidity.

"What for?" she mimicked. "Why, so that we can decide what to do with it. Do you want to be an editor all your life?"

"Well," I said, feigning seriousness, "in a world where there is no standing still, it takes a good man to remain the same thing all his life. I'm much more likely to wind up as a proofreader, or even as a copy-holder."

"Be serious, Dick, and promise to tell me next time you have a paying idea. Now, put your collar on."

OUR three months' contract finally came to an end. Strangely enough, I had kept no account of the days, and was quite startled when one evening, over coffee, Anna informed me that our "night life" was at an end so far as she was concerned.

"Not really!" I cried. "Then this is the last night?"

She shook her head slowly. "Time was up yesterday. That's why we've nothing to do tonight."

I sighed audibly. "So the fever called living is over at last? Well, let us hope it's not too late."

"What do you mean?" she demanded quickly.

"I don't exactly know. Wont you find the evenings rather dull, after all we've been through?"

"Wont you?"

While she cleared away the wreckage of dinner, I made myself luxuriously comfortable in the sitting-room. I put on smoking-jacket and slippers, and slovenly as it sounds, I'm afraid I removed collar and tie. Then I hunted up a novel I had started to read weeks before. In a little while Anna joined me with her sewing-basket.

Oh, I suppose we were preoccupied with our separate tasks for perhaps twenty minutes. My book was disappointing. To be candid, it was a good book; but suddenly I was aware that my eyes were on the clock and that Anna's were upon me.

"The clock ticks very loudly," I observed.

"About the same as before, I should say," was her retort, delivered evenly.

My eyes returned to the book, but I did not pick up the thread of the narrative. One word of Anna's gave me food for reflection: "Before." Yes, doubtless the clock ticked about the same as before. But that time, before we began mingling with our fellows, seemed all at once unbelievably far behind. My mind was alert, eager, and my body was restless. I was already tired of reading, and wanted to be at work or at play. I placed the novel on the table and stared directly at the clock.

"Can it be possible!" I ejaculated. I rose and procured my vest.

"What are you looking for?"

"The right time," I answered. "It must be later than seven-thirty." I consulted my watch, to find that the clock was accurate. "See here, Anna, I'm going to say something that will make you laugh: which would you rather do—go to a movie or look in at the Fosters?"

Somehow, we did not return to what I had come to regard as our old life. That simple, quiet existence seemed to be much farther away than a mere three months, and it became ever more legendary. We continued to spend most of our evenings with other people. Once or twice a month we attended the "legitimate" theater and occasionally we entertained a little more elaborately than wisdom dictated. Then, there were lectures and concerts where the best educational fare was served at nominal prices. With the hearty approval of my wife I joined another technical society. A few months later I became a member of the Machinery Club.

AS may be supposed, despite careful economy, my finances began to show the strain of all this. We were only just

able to get by without debt. A year before I should have been extremely worried, whereas now my feeling was rather of annoyance. I was impatient of the numerous denials we had to make. There were so many things I wanted to do, and every one of them would have cost too much money. We did the best we could, and so skillfully did we learn to manage, that I believe that most of our friends were under the delusion that my income was at least twice the actual amount. Anna and I worked together, for our goals were now the same. We both viewed the present as being an unpleasant strip of road that must be traveled if security were ever to be secured.

The chief reason why I felt little real concern over the fact that we were saving nothing was our increasing circle of worthwhile friends. I was continually meeting men of importance in the iron and steel trade, and in the trades and professions allied with it. I made a practice of lunching once or twice a week at the club, and many valuable acquaintances were scraped there. And one by one I made friends. I attended the monthly meetings of engineering societies, where I listened to the papers and discussions—and made new acquaintances.

A man cannot lift himself by his own bootstraps,—especially in these days when no straps are provided,—but some other chap whom he knows and who likes him may be in a position to stoop and seize those mythical straps. I had already discovered one of the secrets of successful business: One can't have too many acquaintances, nor half enough friends.

It must not be inferred that I went about with the glad hand extended and a conciliatory smile playing on my lips. That may be a way to extend acquaintance, but it brings no friendships. I remained my old self—with one difference. I used to avoid strangers; now I was glad to meet them. I did not seek them individually; I merely frequented those places where I was bound to rub elbows with many men who were vitally interested in the same problems as I.

I wonder if I can make clear the kind of revolution that had taken place in me. It is difficult to describe a subversive change that is accomplished naturally. I ought to have married several years earlier. Living too long alone, I had grown first selfish, then lazy. I had preferred to ruminate over the somber thoughts of my own lonely mind rather than go to the trouble of hunting up my fellows and seeking their views. I preferred letters to interviews, and was in the way of becoming a confirmed recluse when my wife thrust me into the crowd, so to speak. It was not that I was fundamentally averse to social intercourse, but merely that I had got into the habit of doing without it. Had I really disliked society I could never have endured those three months of contact with it. In those three months my habit of solitude was replaced by the habit of being with people. The way to break a bad habit is, not to fight it, but to shape it into a good one.

AT the first of the year I received an increase in salary. When I thanked Mr. Wayland, he remarked that marriage had been a good thing for me. "That means," he added, "that you have an intelligent wife. All that most women care for, these days, is gadding about. I take it that Mrs. Wills is domestically inclined."

"Well, not entirely," I replied. "She is an excellent housekeeper, but I'd hardly call her a home-body."

I was turning to leave his office, when he checked me. "By the way, Wills, I hear about you once in a while outside." He paused, considered, then: "I have been thinking that it might be a good thing for you to report the conventions for the paper. Would it be convenient for you to run up to Pittsburgh next Sunday night? Mrs. Wayland's illness will prevent my going."

There is a danger that the uninitiate may misinterpret this fragment of conversation. Mr. Wayland was a big man, which means that he was bigger than his job—as is the case with most big men. He was accustomed to dealing with the high executives of large corporations. So it was his province to keep in touch with the broad trend of affairs in the industry. He had the mind of a corporation chairman, and the salary of bank cashier.

I was only one of his assistants—a sort of cross between an engineer and a clerk. Toward me he had been invariably courteous, and frequently he had gone out of his way to render me a service. But there had always been a gulf between our positions, and both of us were conscious of it.

The tone of the little conversation that took place in his office on the second of

January was subtly different from the tone of any previous talk. In the past I had frequently had occasion to consult him upon matters connected with my department, but those interviews had always been impersonal. He was interested, helpful, full of pertinent questions and keen suggestions, but he had never seemed to regard me as having a personality. Chairmen of boards, presidents, general managers, chief engineers—these were the men of his world, with whom he laughed, exchanged anecdotes and caught the germs of future editorials.

When I left his office after our chat, it was with the conviction that not only had he received some good reports of me, but that the reports had emanated from good sources as well. That he had intimated that he would like me to attend the conventions held by the associations of our trade meant little. I had reported many conventions. That he had asked me to "run up to Pittsburgh" meant much. The most exclusive and most authoritative society in our field was to hold its annual meeting on the following Monday. This was the first time in my remembrance that Mr. Wayland would not be present in person. He had never before instrusted to any but himself the delicate task of reporting the minutes of that national conference. Plainly, I was coming on.

I THINK it was about two weeks later that I was offered the editorship of the house organ of a large machine-tool manufactory. The salary, tentatively broached, was about the same as I was receiving. I saw possibilities in the position, but after talking it over with my wife, we both agreed that it was not quite what we were looking for.

I had been with the paper a round number of years, and was not only well liked, but *better* liked. In the last year I had gained in both prestige and salary. My superior showed me greater friendliness, while my associates treated me a little more coolly than formerly. If I were to make a change, it must be *plainly* for the better.

At this time my most intimate friend was a young electrical engineer, a designer for a large concern engaged in the manufacture of electrical measuring instruments. Bert Morris was favored by both a genial disposition and a keen mind. We had fallen in friendship at first sight, and had never had a misunderstanding since. My wife once said that I had never given her cause for jealousy except in the possible case of Bert Morris. Whether or not this was a compliment, the fact remained that I thoroughly enjoyed his society.

One afternoon he asked me over the telephone to have dinner with him in the city and then attend the regular monthly meeting of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers.

"Short notice, Bert," I said. "I'll see what I can do, and call you later."

Anna was at first inclined to object. "You can bring Mr. Morris home with you, and *then* go to the meeting." After two minutes' reasoning, she said: "Oh, all right, please yourself." Then, of course, I offered to give up the idea entirely, and come home and sit with her all the evening. "No, no," she said sweetly, "have a good time. Good-by." The last word was followed by a click.

MY first impulse, after that, was to call up Bert and tell him "nothing doing." But I knew that if I should go home, Anna and I would spend one of our occasional ultra-quiet evenings. So I decided to accept Bert's offer and called him back. "That you, Bert? Where shall I meet you? All right."

At six o'clock we were sitting in cavernous leather chairs in the Engineers' Club. We had already shaken hands and agreed that the weather was excellent.

"I'm awfully glad you could come tonight," he said. "I meant to have phoned you yesterday, but it slipped my mind."

"Hereafter, Bert, always invite me yesterday. You've no idea how much simpler it makes life."

"How do you mean?" he asked.

"There speaks the blissful ignoramus known as a bachelor."

He was full of apology. "But I thought that Mrs. Wills *wanted* you to go out a lot. You know you've told me—"

"Oh, never mind," I interrupted, waving a brave hand. "I think she'll forgive us."

His was a sensitive nature. "But really, Dick—"

"You see, Bert," I explained as best I could, "those evenings when I appeared to lack ambition, when I was wont to sit in my armchair and read by the hour, I was given the spur. Familiarity with the rowels finally transformed me into a fairly

spirited creature. Now, from time to time, I feel the jerk of the reins. Perfectly logical. You really ought to get married. It would broaden you."

AFTER dinner we strolled to the auditorium, where we were supplied with copies of the paper of the evening. Turning the pages, I could easily see why Bert should be here, but for the life of me I could divine no excuse for my own presence. The paper was highly technical and appeared to be exclusively electrical: "Iron Losses in Magnetic Cores."

The writer of the paper was introduced, and he presented his thesis with those twin virtues, energy and brevity. I had expected to be bored. Instead, I grew first interested, then inwardly excited. A lively discussion followed. I began to see that this age of specialization had already caused the formation of chasms between the various professions. These electrical experts knew a great deal about magnetic losses in iron, and one or two of them explained in detail the "ideal" iron for use in electrical instruments and machines. What was wanted was a "soft" iron possessing certain peculiar properties. I knew next to nothing about magnetic losses, but I did know that there had recently been developed by the Vineland Steel Company a remarkably soft iron combining at least a few of the characteristics in which these men placed such great store. I had recently written up the new iron. The manufacturers' chemists had been at work for a long while trying to produce a material that could compete with Swedish iron, so long the best welding material. I had talked with both chemists and manufacturers, and none had hinted at a possible market in the electrical industry. They were specialists in iron and steel.

I was so full of the sudden knowledge that I was in a position to direct attention to the very product that these men were looking for that I half rose from my seat in my eagerness to catch the eye of the chairman. Abruptly, within me, the voice of Wisdom bade me be still. I settled down again. Bert glanced at me.

"Is there something you want to say?" he inquired. "Go ahead; it's an open discussion."

I shook my head negatively.

When the meeting was adjourned, Bert remarked that he supposed I would want to hurry home. I surprised him by replying that I wanted him to give me some further information on the subject of "iron losses." He suggested that we have some coffee.

IT was past one when I let myself in at the front door, in Brooklyn. I was so interested in my idea that instead of going upstairs at once, as I ought to have done, I went into the sitting-room and turned on the light. I wanted to go over my notes and fix the various points in my mind. In less than five minutes I "felt a presence." It was Anna in a kimono. Her expression was about as severe as she could make it.

I gave her no time to speak first. "Anna," I said, rising, "I want your advice. It is possible that the Big Idea has come at last. I know it's time we were both asleep, but—let's have a talk."

Of course she relented, and the clock on the mantelpiece chimed twice before we adjourned.

"I don't understand everything that you have said," Anna remarked, when we were in our room; "but I can tell by your high spirits that you believe that our chance has come."

"I hope so. Say, Anna, you have reason to be proud of the restraint I put upon my impulsive nature at the meeting. I was burning to get up and tell those chaps about the new iron."

She smiled. "How *were* you able to control yourself?"

"Well, just in time, I remembered your pitying manner on that Saturday afternoon when I was writing up the new use for reinforcing steel."

Just what to do with the idea, now I'd got it: that was the question. Certainly I was under no obligation to write it up for the magazine. The case of the reinforcing-steel article had been different. I had obtained the latter data by virtue of my position. The work had been done largely on the company's time, and the results did not belong to me. I should not have considered making personal use of information thus gained. Here, however, was a different case, with no question of ethics involved. Indeed, the only question was how to make the idea pay.

I mulled it over for two days without reaching a decision. This is worth noting. The average, or inexperienced, man goes off at half cock. In those days which Anna had called "Before," I should have

pursued the vague course of the inexperienced. A change had come over me, however. Frequent contact with men more experienced and more successful than I had taught me the rudiments of financial advancement. Ideas are invaluable, but not always to the persons conceiving them. Ideas are purchasable; most of them are produced by salaried men. The astute man does not sell an idea; he exploits it.

Naturally, my first impulse was to go to the Vineland Steel Company and dicker with them for a good job in exchange for my scheme for a wider market for their product. Then a canny thought assailed me: one never deals with a company, but with individuals. So I made a careful inquiry into the personnel and policies of the Vineland Company. I learned that it had a reputation for fair dealing, but that its officers were rated "trustworthy, but inconsequential."

Even at that time I had an intuition—which has since become a conviction—that important results can be obtained only by dealing with big men. The bigger they are, the safer. As between a big man and his subordinates, I'll take my chances with the big man, when I can.

MY final decision was to try to see Charles Hammond. He was one of the great figures in the steel industry—the master spirit, in my opinion. It will be admitted that this was a heroic decision. Comparatively, it is a simple matter to meet the President of the United States.

The right-hand man of Charles Hammond was Willard Galbraith. Galbraith was the ultimate filter through which sublimated things trickled to the inner shrine. Mr. Wayland frequently referred to Mr. Galbraith, with whom he appeared to be on intimate terms. After a week's cogitation—I think that is the descriptive word, heavy as it is—I came to the conclusion that my way to Hammond led through Galbraith, who might be accessible through Wayland. An interesting and difficult triangle. I say difficult, not complicated—large problems are rarely complicated. Courage and determination are required to solve them, not a mathematician's brain.

Next morning I entered Mr. Wayland's office. He is one of the most kindly men it has ever been my privilege to know. Believing him to be a gentleman, I saw no reason for secrecy. Following the usual commonplaces I went directly to the point.

My request surprised him, but he was too courteous to ask me point-blank why I wanted an interview with Mr. Galbraith. He played with his watch-charm.

"Something to do with your work, Wills?"

"Something to do with my future, Mr. Wayland." And then I told him the whole story.

When you play with a sharper, or a little man, you hold your cards close to your eyes, and let no one else glimpse them. But when there is a big man opposite, you lay your cards face upward on the table. You do this if you have brains.

When I had finished, he said in his usual friendly tone: "I'll dictate a letter of introduction for you this morning."

A few days later I was granted an interview with Mr. Galbraith. I found him to be very much of the stamp of Mr. Wayland. He was about fifty-five, quiet, courteous, a quick thinker. I liked him at sight, which gave me a tremendous advantage.

Every private office has an atmosphere of its own. The instant that the door closed behind me I seemed conscious of the pressure of large affairs. The gentleman seated at the desk rose and shook hands with me. Immediately we began conversing easily.

We talked of the paper, which Mr. Galbraith declared to be the leader, and of its editor. We exchanged several anecdotes revealing the geniality of our mutual friend. Mr. Galbraith appeared to have illimitable leisure for casual talk—a sure sign of greatness. He seemed to be in no haste to "get down to business." But gradually extraneous matters were eliminated and inevitably we approached the purpose of my presence. I don't know exactly how it came about, but all at once I realized that I had presented my idea.

Mr. Galbraith put several questions, then one more: "May I ask why you have not taken up this matter with the Vineland people?"

I replied that such a course had been my first consideration, but that I had finally decided to go to the font of steel authority.

I left without having so much as mentioned the name of Charles Hammond. Perhaps it was cold feet. I prefer to think that it was because I felt confidence in Mr. Galbraith's judgment. He would know what to do.

Several weeks passed without word from Mr. Galbraith or his office. The first week I was in a fever of expectancy. Another week of silence placed me in a calmer frame of mind. Rome was not built in a day; nor are other large enterprises handled hurriedly, except when the case is urgent. I put the matter out of my mind, as far as was possible.

A letter came at last, but not from Mr. Galbraith. It was on the letterhead of the Vineland Steel Company and bore the signature of Thomas Burton, manager of sales. It was a brief request that I call upon Mr. Burton at my convenience.

I replied at once, Friday, stating that I would call at four the following Tuesday. I selected Tuesday, rather than Monday, because the first day of the week is the busy day in nearly all lines of business.

IN Mr. Burton I found an elderly gentleman with a tendency to peevishness. He was not actually discourteous, but it seemed to me that he rather resented the interview, as if it were in some obscure way an infringement of his autocratic privilege. He grilled me for the better part of an hour, finally offering me a position in the sales-department. The salary was five hundred dollars less than that paid me by the paper.

I demurred. Had the offer been made ungrudgingly, earlier in the interview, I should have accepted it without discussion. At this stage, money was of secondary importance. I hoped some day to make more than a living wage, but first it was up to me to find a job where I would be in a position to show that I was worth it. Therefore my reason for not grasping at once the opening was not merely a question of salary. I had been using my head during our talk. It seemed clear that Mr. Burton was not particularly desirous of securing my services. That being the case, then why bother with me at all? Indeed, why had he asked me to call? *Lord Dundreary* would have said that it was one of those things that no fellow can tell. I reasoned that Mr. Burton had been "urged" to see me.

"What salary do you wish, Mr. Wills?"

"The same as I am receiving, Mr. Burton." I named the figure.

He pondered for a moment, then shrugged—and nodded.

Next morning I went in to see Mr. Wayland. I told him essentially what had transpired in Mr. Burton's office. I even touched upon the salary incident, and he smiled.

"I'll tell you a secret, Wills; it will be in the newspapers tomorrow: Vineland has been absorbed by the Hammond interests." He looked at me significantly.

I nodded. "That explains a great deal."

He grew more serious. "I'm sorry to lose you, Wills; but this is your chance. You made an excellent impression upon Mr. Galbraith. The future is yours."

THIS would be a a fairly dramatic place to stop. It was indeed up to me to make good. And I think I have done so to the extent of my ability. I was put in charge of the campaign to exploit the new iron in the electrical industry. Within the year Mr. Burton retired. He had plenty of money, and was glad to be relieved of the increasing responsibilities of his position. One of the Hammond men was brought in as manager of sales, and I was made his assistant. A few years later he was moved up, and I was given the place he vacated. Eventually I became an officer in the mother company. Mr. Galbraith has remained my friend throughout.

While there is no formula by which business success may be attained, I know of no better preliminary measure than to break the deadening habits that lay hold upon every man. Physical comfort is the greatest obstacle. If you are not ambitious, then by all means take your ease—lean back in your armchair in the evening and read your newspaper, with the cares of the day behind you and the work of tomorrow on the far side of the veil of sleep. Without Anna, that is what I should have done.

I can look back to the evening when I told her that I had been made manager of sales.

"Oh, Dick," she cried, "isn't it wonderful! I knew you had it in you."

"That's it," I said seriously; "*you* knew; *I* didn't."

"Maybe it's the old maxim, Dick—two heads are better than one."

A few evenings ago I came upon something of Chesterton's. "Anna," I said, "here's an improvement on that old chestnut about two heads being better than one. G. K. says that while two times two is undoubtedly four, two times one is not two, but ten thousand."

Easy Street Experts

This latest exploit of our gentlemen adventurers, "The Gamble in Ghi," is one of the most amusing ever described by the famous author of the Winnie O'Wynn stories.

By BERTRAM ATKEY

IT was the Honorable John Brass who, rather idly, had begun the unprofitable discussion in which he and his corrugated-souled partner Colonel Clumber were engaged one evening before dinner.

"It's no easy matter to pick out the champion of 'em when you meet so many," he murmured, following the random train of thought, no doubt, inspired by his second sherry and bitters, and turned to his partner.

"What do *you* say, Squire? Who do you reckon is about the biggest fool you ever met?" he inquired.

It was a question that invited one of those bludgeony responses which the Colonel regarded as airy repartee, and he was inclined to be facetious.

"D'ye want the truth?" he demanded with a hardish grin. "I take it you're asking for the straight truth, aren't you?"

The Honorable John stared fixedly at him.

"Truth?" he repeated vaguely, carefully side-stepped the point and looked serious.

"Sense is what I want, Squire," he said.

"Sense, hey?" the Colonel laughed. "You don't go the right way about getting it, then. Is there any sense in a man—a man of the world—deliberately sitting down to think out who is the biggest fool he ever met? What does it matter who it is? What good is it to you to know? Supposing he—whoever he is—is a fool: what of it? It's *his* worry, not ours. As a matter of fact, everybody is a bit of a fool."

"That's true—you're right there," agreed the Honorable John rather acidly.

"It's the way men are built. But there are all sorts of fools; don't let that fact get past you. They vary. There are good fools and bad fools—and noble-minded fools—"

"Yes, and feeble-minded fools and damned fools," interrupted the Honorable John.

"Yes, damned fools particularly," snapped his partner, and turned to his evening paper.

But the Honorable John was unsatisfied.

"There's a verse in the Bible that says a fool and his money are soon parted," he continued, "and it's about time we made a little money. Does that convey anything to you?" he asked.

The Colonel put down his paper and stared curiously at his partner.

"You're not yourself, old man," he said. "When we want to make money, we don't want to hunt for a man who's a fool—we want to hunt for a man with some money."

Mr. Brass nodded.

"That's true—all of it. I'm not myself. I'm hungry. Pass the sherry."

He constructed another *apéritif* and drank it. Then, apparently feeling more like himself, he settled back in his chair.

"We don't need money—as money," he said. "I know it. But what we do need, Squire, is to keep up the habit of always having a few hooks out after it. The poacher that sets no wires catches no hares; the hawker that doesn't holler out, sells very few wares—dammy, that's poetry, and it's true, too!"

Here Sing, the Honorable John's valet, cook and all-round perfect pack-mule, slid in to intimate that the car was ready to take them to the Astoritz, that yawning waste-paper money receptacle and haunt of fashion and all-but-fashion at which the two old rascals usually dined when they dined out, and so they dropped the matter as a subject of conversation.

BUT that it remained in the Honorable John's mind was evident when, some hours later, they strolled out of the great hotel, and having blandly approved of the weather, decided to stroll quietly home.

"I suppose, taking one thing with the other, that there are very few people in this village of London who need ready money less than we do," said Mr. Brass. "And if it wasn't for the discipline of the idea, I should be the last man of all the millions here ever to allow the thought of it to cross my mind. I'm not a purse-proud man. Few men think less of money than I do—but few men dread poverty more. Money, *as* money, means less than nothing to me. After all, what is it?" He puffed reflectively at a cigar that had cost almost as much as it would have been worth if composed of ten-shilling notes. "What is it, this money? Tokens—just that—mere tokens. Each representing a certain proportion of somebody's labor, skill, thought or knowledge: that's all it amounts to. It ain't *having* it does a man good—though I'll admit it does him no harm, at least not me: it's the getting it that brightens up his wits—polishes him up."

The Colonel stopped abruptly in the middle of Piccadilly, and looked his partner in the eye.

"You are giving me the earache," he said firmly, "with your tokens! Why can't you leave it alone? You aren't hard up, are you? Well, why not *drop* it and leave it alone. I can't understand you. Here you are, getting on, a man with loads of ready money and with no more than about ten years to live, if that—"

"Ten years!" The Honorable John looked excessively startled. His heavy jaw fell—but he said no more, for at that moment two people passed, one of them a lady talking very quickly.

"Your share will be what you like to make it—five thousand—anything—" said she to her companion, a portly gentleman of color.

THE partners forthwith forgot their amiable little discussion and stared after the couple until they were lost in the crowd that forever flutters and flows about Piccadilly throughout the evening.

"Did you get that?" muttered the Honorable John. "It was Mirza Khan."

"Yes, yes. I recognized him, the fat scoundrel! But who was the lady?"

"Why, Mrs. Paradix Dix!" said the senior partner heavily. He pondered for a few moments.

"We must go into this at once," he said. "Why, she was offering him five thousand pounds! Like that!" He flicked the ash from his cigar. "Never heard of such a thing in my life! Five thousand! And Mirza's never so much as rung *us* up!"

He hailed a taxi. Plainly he was extremely disconcerted. So, indeed, was the Colonel, but he concealed it better.

"After all, Mirza may think it's no business of ours. It may be a private deal of his own," he suggested.

"What's that? No business of ours!" snapped Mr. Brass. "Five thousand pounds—like that—offered to a friend of ours for something or other! No business of ours! If Mirza thinks that, I guess the sooner he slips whatever he thinks with

into reverse gear, the better for all concerned! I'm surprised at the man. I've always considered him loyal to us—but I don't understand this. I don't understand it at all—and I don't like it."

He leaned back, rather sulkily, thinking. The Colonel chuckled in the shadows. He knew his partner too well to argue. It was evident that the very idea of Mirza Khan's getting "five thousand—like that" —cut the Honorable John to the quick, particularly when it was coming from, or *via* a lady who, as the partners were very well aware, was as crooked as the street called Straight.

It was true that Mirza was a friend of theirs, and that on various occasions he and they had engineered certain little *coups*, but they had no control over him; nor did they own the copyright in him or the royal master for whom he worked as confidential body servant, secretary and private fetcher-and-carrier—the sportive, London-loving Rajah of Jolapore.

But then, Mr. Brass was a sensitive man. And nothing hurt him more than to see five thousand sliding past him so silently and swiftly that he could not slip the gaff into it before it got out of his reach.

"WHEN I think of what we have gone through together, Mirza," said the Honorable John sadly through the telephone a little later, "when I turn over in my mind the little affairs that we have doped out together, when I recollect the good turns I've done for you and the Rajah, I don't mind admitting that it hurts me—and my old partner—to see a man we regarded as a close friend and a pal we thought was loyal for life—yes, I say loyal for life—plotting and planning to deliberately skin us for five monkeys—two thousand, five hundred good bones! Our share of this five thousand! Still, that's how it goes, Mirza, my lad. Turn down your old pals when they're no further use to you—yes, turn 'em down, I say—can't you *hear?*—turn 'em down and keep 'em down! And skin 'em out of their share! That's the way of the world. *We* know. Everybody's doing it."

His voice was very bitter indeed. "I suppose we're old-fashioned, Mirza. Can't keep up with these modern ideas. But—wait a minute, let me speak—we're loyal to you, my lad. And it wasn't so much to reproach you about this five thousand that I rang you up; it was to warn you to be careful how you mix yourself up with these professional crooks. I don't suppose you're aware of it, Mirza, but as we don't want to see you soaked for five years or so in Portland Prison, I've really rung up to tell you that the lady you're negotiating with is wanted by the police on certainly one serious charge of kidnaping,—she and her husband,—and no doubt a good many more. That's all, Mirza. I've no doubt you were shadowed all the evening by a regular Scotland Yard man—but that's your own affair, like the five thousand. Only I thought it would be the right thing to warn you. Well, good-by, Mirza, old man—we wish you luck; we quite understand you want to keep these little plums to yourself, but— Hey? Don't talk so fast. You don't want to get excited. Hey?"

FOR some time Mr. Brass listened in silence. But presently, with a brief word of agreement, he rung off and turned to his partner, beaming.

"He's coming round as fast as his feet can push him," said the old rascal. He's nervous and anxious. Dame Dix is after a concession from the Rajah. She's acting for somebody who wants to create a *ghi* monopoly in Jolapore."

"*Ghi?*" said the Colonel. "What the devil is *ghi?*"

"It's a kind of native butter—pretty awful stuff, I understand. It's about the only kind of fat they get. Must be a sort of margarine substitute."

"Well, but who's going to eat that? The consumer—in this country—can eat most things (the poor devil's got to), but this *ghi* will about finish him off!" said the Colonel. "Margarine substitute! There's no such thing! How can there be? *Margarine* is a word that's as big as the sky—it covers a multitude of garbage—everything from ordinary electrified, solidified castor oil upward. What hope is there for any substitute for that?"

Mr. Brass reached for the brandy.

"You've got me guessing, Squire. Perhaps Mirza will know."

And Mirza did.

WITHIN a quarter of an hour he arrived—as blackly glossy as ever.

"How do you do yourselves, my dear sirs?" he greeted them. "By thee gods, my dear misters, you have put winds up veree breezily. There iss pretty serious

misapprehension between us fellows, yess, indeed, sars. Yess, thanks, I will partake of little brandy. Then I will explain whole situation. There iss not any cause to look asquince att my loyaltee to you. Thee transaction is onlee att stage of preliminary negotiations! I was extremely well aware off necessity to consult you—later on, I assure you, oah, yess."

He took a cigar and settled down to tell them his version of what he obviously believed they already knew. It was a plain tale devoid of any serious complexity.

It appeared that a certain Major Vernon Haigh-Vernon and his wife (for so the couple of whom the partners had recognized one as Mrs. Paradix Dix appeared to have rechristened themselves) were anxious to secure from the Rajah of Jolapore a permit or concession to have and to hold in the state of Jolapore the sole rights to establish a business dealing with the edible fats produced there. Merely that and nothing more! The concession-seekers represented by Mr. Dix were prepared to purchase at a fair price all the *ghi* or native butter produced throughout the state, refine and purify it, and in its vastly improved condition, resell it to the consumers. It looked, on the face of it, to be the sort of proposal which one might expect from a moonstruck philanthropist with a large sum of money in the bank and a considerably larger sum in his mind.

But since it was so very plainly a scheme which would benefit the natives of Jolapore far more than the promoters, clearly it was not reasonable that much money could be offered to the Rajah for his consent. Indeed, the pair offered no money to the Rajah, who, they pretended to believe would, for the sake of his people, welcome the arrival of the philanthropic fats-purifier and his machinery with open arms. But by an odd chance Mrs. Dix had recently come into possession of some tolerably vivid love-letters written to a friend of hers, one Miss Lesly Larchmont, a year or so before, by the Rajah, who was a lover of love—as was only to be expected from the descendant of a long line of kings whose two aims in life appeared consistently to have been to fight all men—so great was their courage—and to love all ladies—so tender were their hearts. And since the lady in question had left England permanently for America, there was no reason why the letters should not be returned to the Rajah, who probably would like to have them back.

The Rajah, Mirza explained, would be glad to have them back—his affections were centered upon quite another lady at the moment; and rather than run any risk of the letters getting into the hands of the Lady of the Day, he would quite readily submit to the comparatively mild blackmail and grant the concession in return for the letters to the Lady of Yesterday. Indeed, it would be a good act—for he would destroy the slightly erotic evidence of a somewhat hectic episode, and like a human and benevolent king, he would secure a never-failing supply of pure and toothsome fat for his folk. Mirza, of course, had not allowed the Dix couple to imagine things were so easy. He had carefully kept them apart from the Rajah, and had made difficulties—great difficulties. He had shown them that the granting of such a concession was totally impossible, unheard of, unimaginable and—again—impossible. He had explained to the Dixes that, undeniably a brave man though he was, he dared not put such a proposal before his master.

So that night Mrs. Dix, with an offer of five thousand pounds for himself when the concession was granted, had endeavored to stimulate his undeniable bravery sufficiently to interest himself in the matter. He had promised to give it his consideration; and, as he carefully explained, had always been his intention, he had come round to chat the matter over with his old friends and comrades.

HE concluded his story and his brandy almost simultaneously, and deftly replenishing his glass, lay back in his chair beaming upon the partners and permitting them to do the thinking which such a curious state of affairs clearly called for.

The Honorable John summed up.

"Evidently the concession is valuable to somebody, for no man is going to go out of his way to erect a *ghi*-purifying factory in Jolapore for amusement. It's not an amusing business," he added, with truth. "And anybody who'll hand the Rajah those letters can have the concession—that's clear, isn't it, Mirza? So we'd better make a note that we shall require those letters. We can see to that—a job for Sing. You know where the Dix birds roost, I suppose, Mirza? I've no doubt they stole the letters, anyway—they're a

very sharp and shifty pair of crooks, Mirza, with a weakness for pictures—painted ones, not movies. Then we've got to find out how valuable the concession is, get it ourselves, and sell it to the person who wants to buy it."

He frowned.

"Though how the devil it can be valuable, I—" His face cleared as he thought of something.

"That'll be all right, Mirza," he said. "Forget it, now. Just keep the Dixes dangling along, and we'll see to the rest. We shall be wanting their address, and that'll be about all."

They stared a little, but John did not explain further.

"*I* will dope out this little strategy," he said spaciously. "Let it go at that, and—pass the brandy, Mirza, my lad. It's a good brandy, and it's a pity to let it stand idle."

ON the following day, at an hour just comfortably in advance of the midday clangor of the luncheon-gong, the limousine of the partners rolled smoothly along the great avenue leading to Brillingham Castle in Hampshire, once the property of Lord Brillingham, but no longer so. It had passed into the possession—per mortgagees—of the great American lard king, Mr. Henry Le Hay, who, with his wife, was a friend of Messrs. Brass and Clumber—the partners having rendered them very great, though expensive services on more than one occasion. And the description of what this money-mammoth was, as furnished to the partners by his wife when they first met, being crisp yet comprehensive, may bear repetition.

"They call him 'Lard' Le Hay in the States because he *is* lard, really. He's quite the lard czar. Probably there is never a time when he owns less than seventy per cent of all the lard in America. I don't know what your cook pays for lard now, but I do know that if my husband cared to say 'Sky lard!' to his people, the price would rise throughout the world."

It was Mr. Le Hay, a small, laconic, unobtrusive man, whose advice concerning *ghi* the Honorable John proposed to collect.

The Le Hays were in residence, though without guests, and welcomed the partners in their usual hospitable way.

There was a brief *séance*, with *apéritifs*, in Lard Le Hay's study, pending lunch; and straightway Mr. Brass put his problem to the expert in fats.

"There's a little thing we want to learn something about, Le Hay," said he, looking fondly through his glass against the sunlight.

"Shoot!" said the little man.

John shot.

"A great friend of ours, the Rajah of Jolapore, is being bothered by some people for a concession which will give them the control—both buying and selling—of all the native butter produced in Jolapore—his kingdom. *Ghi*, they call it—though why the devil they should I don't know. Now, the Rajah would let us have the concession for a reasonable figure, but before we buy it,—for resale,—we'd like to know something about it."

HENRY LE HAY nodded approval, and the Honorable John proceeded to give details of the nature of the concession required by Mr. and Mrs. Paradix Dix, presumably for some "client" or other.

"What we don't understand is this: if a man buys *ghi*, which is pretty cheap, how the devil can he clean it and purify it and sell it back at a profit to people who can hardly afford it in its first condition?" demanded John.

The lips of the lard czar twitched a little.

"Well, how can a firm afford to sell lard in the can for less per pound than it costs them on the hog?" he asked.

The partners reflected, and their faces cleared suddenly.

"I see," said Mr. Brass, frankly. "You add fifteen ounces of paraffin wax or some inexpensive dope of the kind to one ounce of hog-lard, stick it in a can and label it 'Refined Lard.' Very refined—huh? Haha! Must make a note of your lard, Le Hay. Steer clear of it, hey?"

Henry Le Hay flushed slightly.

"*We* don't do that," he said. "I was thinking of another firm. But you can take it that as a general rule there's a lot more in a can of lard than ever came out of a hog."

"And a good deal that came from a horse, hey? Not to mention other things!" chuckled Mr. Brass. "Well, well, that's the maker's funeral—or the consumer's; anyway, it's not ours."

But Mr. Le Hay did not appear to hear him. The lard czar was thinking—thinking hard. They saw that, and left him to

think while they constructed further *apéritifs*. In a moment he rose, and with a word of excuse, left them for a moment. He wished to see his secretary, it appeared.

He was back almost at once.

"This concession—" he said. "The figures relating to *ghi* and *ghi*-authorities are small—small but interesting. With the right plant, a clever modern firm could buy *ghi* for *X* money per ton, refine it, and resell it for *X* money per ton."

"Well, but there would be no profit in that."

Lard Le Hay smiled.

"No, but there would be a surplus of about twenty per cent pure *ghi* left in your hands out of each ton. With treatment, this could be transformed into delicious dairy butter—American, Canadian, English, Danish, any kind of fresh butter for which there is a high-priced demand. Or lard, or anything else."

Mr. Brass turned a little pale.

"A man never knows what he's eating, nowadays," he said. "Damn this science, I say. However—business is business."

"Yep," said Le Hay. "I will buy the concession. I wish to take hold of the *ghi* industry. It might be made worth while. The modern fats business is a very intricate business, and there's a place for *ghi* in it. How much?"

"Twelve thousand pounds, and a few shares in the company—say nine thousand," said John promptly.

LE HAY nodded.

"It's a deal," he said, and forthwith dropped the subject and began to talk about his little godson Victor Beauray—that same laddy whom Messrs. Brass and Clumber had retrieved when he had been kidnaped by none other than Mr. Paradix Dix.

But the Honorable John seemed strangely, even morbidly, fascinated by fats.

"You know, Le Hay," he said quite sincerely, "I've got a great admiration for a man like you. You've got such a lamp out for possibilities. You do things in a *big* way. You don't haggle. There must be a heap of money in these fats."

Le Hay nodded.

"Yep," he said, "there is. You don't need to be afraid I've paid you too much for this concession." He smiled, a dry little smile. "It will pay me hundreds of thousands sterling. Fats are like wheat—vital. *That's* the joker. They call me the Lard Czar—but lard's only a branch of the business. All fats interest me. All I want is the fatty base—and I don't care whether it comes off a tree, or off a hog, out of the ground or out of the sea—I don't care whether it grows foliage, fur, fins or feathers: I can make anything you like of it, from pure full-cream dairy butter, right down to cart-grease—including explosives."

"Good Lord!" said the Honorable John, shocked. "I've been paying three shillings and sixpence a pound for dairy butter, specially made. What guarantee have I got that it's genuine?"

"None," said Mr. Le Hay with quiet satisfaction. "The base for that butter—unless you saw it made—may have come out of a whale or a petroleum-well or grown on a vine or coconut palm. You never know!"

"Well, let's change the subject," said the Honorable John.

"Sure—lunch is ready."

They went to it. Mr. Brass quietly but firmly declined butter at lunch, but did pretty well otherwise—pretty well.

PROVIDED, by Mirza Khan, with the address of the Dix pair—a quiet, though small and unobtrusive flat in Westminster—it was a matter of the utmost simplicity for the partners, aided by Sing, to call round one afternoon, watch the couple go out, and then quietly to "make an entry," find the letters and finally to make an exit, leaving no trace.

Nor did it appear likely to prove anything but an easy task to exchange the letters for the concession. The partners contented themselves with handing the letters to Mirza and informing the dusky crook that four thousand pounds cash and three thousand shares in Le Hay's new Indian Ghi Company awaited him upon receipt of the concession.

"Thatt will be matter for speedee completion, my dear sars," chuckled Mirza, and departed, no doubt to slip a sharp spur into the Rajah's legal representatives.

"A little bale of the happiest money we have collected for some time," said the Honorable John cheerfully, as Mirza departed. "And though I say it myself, it reflects great credit on my talent for neatness."

For once the Colonel good-humoredly agreed. There was nothing the Colonel liked better than a little "happy" money now and again—provided no personal effort on his part was needed to get it.

But it was not to be quite so easy as they fancied—a fact which was made clear to them some four days later when Mirza Khan, extremely agitated, rang up to warn them of an impending visit from "a gentleman off veree aggressive manner named Barnard Croucher, who," gabbled Mirza, had just put him in a shockingly comfortless position—"positive bed off thorns, oah yess,"—by calling on the Rajah with a packet of letters identical in every respect with those acquired from the Dix brace, saying that he had found them in his wife's possession, and that he had come from New York with the fixed resolve of collecting one of two things—either:

(1) A satisfactory explanation of the circumstances which caused the writer to write them; or,

(2) The last drop of blood in the writer's body.

"Thee Dix letters are forgeries off most reprehensible nature," said Mirza, "and His Highness will be angeree—"

"That'll be all right, Mirza," said the Honorable John, who feared not man nor devil. "I'll take care of B. C. Did he see the Rajah?"

"Certainlee not att all," cried Mirza, horrified. "That would be peretty calamitous dénouement, by Jove! I should lose my job with extremely swift rapidity iff M. Croucher were ever permitted to make scenes with His Highness—I exercised diplomatic trick, and told thiss man that *you* were the writer of thee love-letters to hiss wife—and he is now coming in swift taxi to see you. I am perfectlee confident that'll be all raight," said Mirza.

"Why, damn your eyes—" began the Honorable John furiously, but Mirza had intelligently rung off. He knew, none better, that now Mr. Brass had the particulars of that love-affair of the Rajah's at his finger-tips, he was to be relied upon to deal with the situation. But also he knew that probably he would be in no very pleasant mood until the affair was concluded.

"It's all very fine," grumbled the Honorable John as he made his way to the sideboard for irrigation materials, "and Mirza's a very good sort—so's the Rajah; but why the devil I should be saddled with all the results of his love-affairs—and none of the love, mind you,—I don't see."

The Colonel laughed heartily.

"Well, you always were a full-blooded flirt—" he began. "If not with this particular mignonne, with some other—and—"

BUT here Sing, his eyes glittering, entered to announce Mr. Barnard Croucher, a thin, tall, fair young gentleman, with pale hair and hot eyes. A careless observer would have decided that the gentleman was dangerously angry—but Mr. Brass, who, on these occasions, was far from being a careless observer, decided he was merely simulating anger. In his hand he held a bundle of letters.

"Your name Brass?" he demanded with a rasping accent and a scowl. He slid his disengaged hand into a side pocket in a most menacing manner.

"I am the Honorable John Brass," said Mr. Brass, with dignity, "—to *you*," he added.

Mr. Croucher caused something within his pocket to stick out toward Mr. Brass like a man aiming a revolver through the cloth.

"Yes, yes," said the Honorable John. "I see it, Barnard. Give yourself no anxiety—I notice it. It doesn't distress me, but if it amuses you at all, all right. My servant—the laddy who let you in—has a forty-five trained through the service-hatch on the exact middle of your spine, Barnard, and I don't recommend you to open any bombardment today."

Mr. Croucher flinched a little, removed his hand with a grunt, and glanced over his shoulder. It was as the Honorable John had said. Sing's unlovely visage loomed behind an immense revolver trained through the serving-hatch.

"Did you write these letters to my wife?" demanded Mr. Croucher. Without letting them out of his possession, he showed them to the Honorable John, who examined them carefully. He was anxious to assure himself that they were replicas of those they had taken from the Dixes—which they were.

"Yes," he said finally. "I wrote them—and very well written letters they are. Very literal and loving, but I wrote them to Miss Lesly Larchmont, who was working in the revue *"Tu-whit! Tu-whoo!"* then putting people to sleep nightly at the Fantasieum—not to Mrs. Barnard Croucher."

"Lesly Larchmont was my wife," growled Mr. Croucher.

"She didn't advertise it," replied Mr. Brass. "What are you going to do about it?"

"I want satisfaction!"

"Help yourself," said John.

Barnard seemed slightly nonplused.

"She oughta told you who she was," he complained.

"Have you come all the way from New York to tell me what ladies *ought* to do, Croucher?" inquired the Honorable John. "Good Lord, my lad, I know what they ought to do—and I know what they ought not to do. Dammy, man, don't you ever read your prayer-book? It's in one of the collects for the day—" he went on rather hazily. "We have left undone those things we ought not to have left undone, and what we have done cannot be undone, and so on. You want to *read* more my lad.

"Now, look here, the best thing you can do—if you will take the advice of an older man—is to forget it. Lesly was a very nice little dame, perfectly well able to take care of herself. Unless I am very much mistaken, she took out of England some thousands of pounds, a good deal of jewelry, some valuable experience, a tame cat called Viscount Ethelred Cynche, son and heir of the Earl of Lopacre, and the fixed intention of divorcing the husband she left in the States—you, I suppose, though we've only got your word for that."

His keen old eyes were photographing every flicker of Croucher's face, and he had seen enough to relegate him correctly to the class to which he belonged. As he had suspected at the beginning, the man had not come for revenge but for cash. He wanted satisfaction, it was true, but it was the kind of satisfaction that one keeps in one's note-case. In short, Mr. Croucher (though his were probably the Rajah's original letters) was carrying out a little scheme of blackmail, though unfortunately for him, he had chosen the wrong kind of blackmailee.

"And, anyway, *are* you Lesly's husband?" demanded the Honorable John, suddenly menacing. "If so, let me have a look at your marriage certificate. That's it," he bawled with vague memories of the theater, "show me your marriage lines."

He advanced a step. Mr. Croucher, slightly agitated, but scowling, retreated two steps.

"Keep your hands out of your pockets, my lad," warned the Honorable John. "I'll teach you to blackmail *me*."

His hand shot out and gripped Mr. Croucher by the throat, not too harshly, but sufficiently so.

"And now, you amateur blackmailer, we'll have the truth," he observed. "Don't struggle or you'll strain your throat against my hand. Are you Lesly's husband?"

"No."

"Her maid's husband, hey? That's more like it, hey?" Mr. Brass had hit the nail unerringly upon the head.

"Yeh," gurgled Mr. Croucher.

"Where did you get those letters? From Miss Larchmont's maid?"

"Yeh!"

"Give 'em up!"

Meekly enough Barnard gave them up—also his revolver—and Mr. Brass released him.

"Give him a drink, old man," he said good-naturedly to the Colonel, and surveyed the limp Croucher.

"You're a damned fine blackmailer, Barnard, my son," he said. "Take my advice—go home and get a steady job in a laundry. Hey? Sounds good, hey?"

MR. CROUCHER was understood to say that it was good enough.

"Y'see, laddy, you aren't crook enough for blackmail. Honesty, my lad! Stick to honesty. You can't beat it. East, west, honesty's best. That's my motto—and I don't mind your sharing it. It's big enough for two. That's it—in a nutshell! Honesty's best. Be honest, and you will eat well and sleep well. Be a crook, and you'll be miserable all your life. Why, I wonder they let you come away alive from the Rajah of Jolapore's house. I am amazed. It's a dangerous business putting these skin games over on dark parties like that, Barnard. And you're only an also-ran, anyway. There's been a better man than you on the business—and he fell down on it, too. D'you know him—a crook named Paradix Dix?"

Croucher nodded sullenly. "I've heard of him."

"Who is Paradix Dix?" continued the Honorable John. "He had a set of letters like these. Forgeries, hey?"

"Yes sir. Mrs. Dix is Miss Lesly Larchmont's sister."

"*I* see. And I suppose Miss Larchmont

showed the letters to Mrs. Dix, who copied them for her own purposes!"

"Search me! I guess so."

"Right. Now you can slip it."

But Mr. Croucher lingered. "Say, how'm I gona get home?" he asked, rather feebly.

Mr. Brass stared at him. "D'ye mean to say you're broke?"

"If liners were two cents a dozen, I couldn't buy as much as a rivet," wailed Barnard.

The Honorable John handed him a pound note.

"There, my boy," he said generously. "That'll buy you food for a week—stroll down to Southampton and get a job on a boat going across. A little work will keep you from brooding." He signaled Sing, who promptly ushered Mr. Croucher out, and as far as they were concerned, into the Never-never.

CHEERILY the two old wolves settled down to a little refreshment. As Mr. Brass put down his glass, the telephone-bell rang.

It was Mirza.

"Helloah! Iss thatt thee Honorable John Brass? Thee concession has now been signed by His Highness, and if it is perfectlee convenient to you, sars, I am now proposing little visit with same in my possession—if thee correct letters are available."

His voice was blander than cream.

"Come on then, Mirza," said the Honorable John. "That crook Croucher has gone—for good. There will be no scandal on his account, tell the Rajah. And we've got both sets of letters—forgeries and originals. Rub that well into His Highness. A little extra sign of his gratitude would be very graceful—very graceful indeed!" hinted Mr. Brass.

"Assuredlee! I am world's champion at massage of thatt description!" laughed the black rascal.

AND subsequently he proved it—for an amount which, if it did not double Henry Le Hay's little contribution, made an admirable pendant to it, and left the partners well satisfied. As the Honorable John said: "I regard it as useful money—not too much—in fact, to be frank, rather on the low side. Still, there's plenty more where that came from, and in these matters it doesn't do to be too greedy. I shouldn't care to be a hog about it."

"No—you wouldn't. I've often noticed you practicing how not to be a hog!" said the Colonel sarcastically.

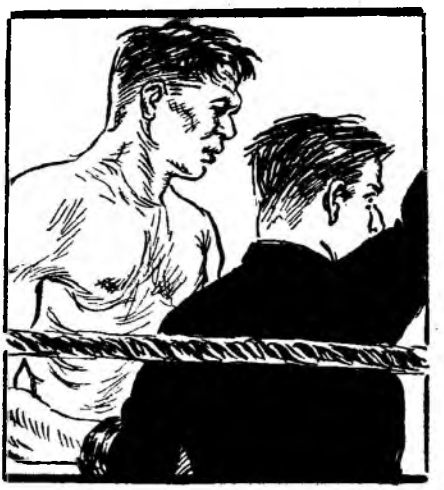
But the sarcasm passed unnoticed in a sudden anxiety which had suddenly invaded the soul of Mr. Brass.

"And now," he said, "now what are we going to do about butter? I don't mind admitting that what Le Hay gave away about butter has got me guessing."

"Ah, well, guess again," said the Colonel unfeelingly. "You'll have to take what's coming to you—and I shouldn't be surprised if you get a percentage of this *ghi* in it!"

But he was wrong there—for the Honorable John promptly installed a couple of cows at their country house at Purdston, and regardless of cost, fitted up a personal dairy there that rendered the wares of Hog-Products, Ltd. (President Henry Le Hay) a matter of supreme and permanent indifference to him.

The Honorable John may have been no hog (as he claimed), but he certainly was a gentleman of infinite resource.



The Troglodyte

A really different prize-ring story—the saga of a cave-man battler who had his own code and packed a devastating punch.

By HAMILTON CRAIGIE

AS if it were yesterday I remember the occasion of my first introduction to the Troglodyte. A year is a longish period in the fight-game, and perhaps you'll not be able to place him by the appellation, but it fitted him then even if today he wouldn't answer to it—in words. For he has another name now, and it's a good one, because it's his own.

Together with our star man, Boots McAuslan, I had been sent by the *Standard* to get a story from the Troglodyte, or rather from Trego, his manager.

"It ought to be good for a double-column spread right now, Norton," our city editor, old Parson Kelliher, had told me, "—especially as he fights the Saginaw Kid just two weeks from Saturday. Benson'll bring his camera, and you can shoot two-three poses of Ingerson." (That was his other name.) "Then you fix up the story: 'Trego's Troglodyte Terminates Test for Ten-Round Tilt'—'From Cave-man to Champion'—and all the rest of it."

The Parson grinned. McAuslan had handled an A. P. wire at Reno—afterward coming to the *Standard* just in time to cover the Dempsey-Carpentier bout; he was an old hand at the game. It was good copy, of course,—the Saginaw Kid was the champion,—and it was all in the day's work; but there was something about it that held for me a more than perfunctory interest.

For Ingerson had come far since as a preliminary fighter he had joined forces with his present manager. There was no doubt of that. But parallel with his increasing reputation, and even beyond it, there loomed the devious Trego; he was the brains of the combination, and something more; for if the Troglodyte was a little less than human, as the phrase went, it was Trego who had made possible a series of victories which had brought his "meal-ticket," by easy stages, within one step of the championship, and all that it implied.

Men said—and they had been saying it for the past six months—that it was

Trego who had been responsible for Ingerson's upward march, that it was Trego who did the fighting—Ingerson was his executioner. I can think of no better word, and as a matter of fact, that was one of the names by which he was known.

Trego's Executioner! In the picturesque and fertile imaginations of the sporting writers, Ingerson had been christened variously—"Behemoth," "Cave-Man" and so forth; but the phrase "Trego's Executioner" stuck; it was suggestive not merely of the brute power that lay in those mast-like arms and heavy shoulders, but of the power that lay behind, the power that, some men insisted, was hypnotic.

It was all very effective publicity.

THAT day, as we were ferried across the inlet to the shack on Catalina which Trego had fitted up as a gymnasium, a phrase—a chance comment which I had heard with reference to Ingerson—recurred to me, now doubly significant:

"Something like wireless control of a torpedo-boat."

Well, perhaps that was the explanation; anyway, I had come to see for myself—to report Ingerson's condition, not to speculate, to theorize, to build extravagant nonsense for a Sunday supplement blurb.

Afterward, I was not so sure.

Trego met me in the doorway. I had been wearing rubber-soled shoes, and these and the damp grass—but Trego must have *felt* my coming.

I had never liked the man; I liked him less, I promise you, as he stood fumbling and peering in the doorway, his pale, avid face with its traplike mouth, eyes of a curious ophidian brightness. There was a repellent fascination about the man, as I have said; for a moment I was conscious of the suggestion of an unclean bird: the yellow face, the high-arched, broken nose, the straight, cruel mouth, eyes with a fixed, unwavering, unwholesome brightness.

"Ah!" he greeted me, smiling and rubbing his hands; he looked more like an undertaker than a manager of prize-fighters. "Ah—Mr. Norton—you've come to geev us thee once-over, heh? Well—you will see sometheeng—I promise you that."

For a moment I did not answer him, staring at the man in a kind of wonder.

Early in his career Trego had been a "magician" back in the sticks—you know the sort: card-palmer, disappearing-coin manipulator; probably he had worked with a medicine show before he had "discovered" Ingerson. Anyway, it was with the manner of a cheap showman that he flung wide the door, gesturing inward across the long room, just now echoing to the thud and shuffle of sliding feet, the spank of a clean-cut blow, the drumming impact of a lightning exchange, rising in the still air like the rolling rattle of machine-gun fire.

AT first I could not see clearly; I was conscious merely of a shifting tangle of swift motion, like a weaving shuttle; then, clean-cut like a cameo, the lean head, the sloping shoulders, with their sliding ropes of muscle—Dorgan, trial-horse of champions, circling, feinting, footwork dazzling in its sheer splendor of perfection. Grinning, he ducked under a heavy right even as I looked, slipping inside a long left by the proverbial eyelash; for six rounds, say, he would have carried the champion, even, to a hair-line decision.

The man who faced him was grim, unsmiling, with heavy head, massive shoulders, salient jaw, blue with a two days' growth of stubble. More than ever he seemed the cave-man, the throwback,—Trego's Troglodyte,—the dull, slow, ponderous behemoth without a brain.

But today it seemed to me that there was about him a terrible earnestness—an almost painful concentration.

With Dorgan it was a game, a job—it was all in the day's work. His was the careless ease of the master-workman, mechanical almost in its sheer smoothness of perfection—unthinking, one might have said. But with Ingerson it was a fight rather than a workout; it was a part of his instinct; it was all that he knew; it showed in his eyes, in his head, the forward-thrusting tilt of his jaw.

I heard Trego's voice at my shoulder:

"Dorgan'll give him the speed. His punch, now—he couldn't dent a cream-puff with it, Mr. Norton; but he knows the Kid's style—the Kid's a sucker for an inside left—he sure hates crowdin'. . . . . Look at that, will you—ha!"

His voice had risen a note—and I noticed that he spoke now in the argot of the prize-ring, the hissing sibilants and soft vowels of his earlier accent replaced by a crisp, incisive utterance. And then, so swiftly that I could not follow it—the action had quickened to a blurring circle of flying fists.

As Trego had said, Dorgan had been the Saginaw Kid's sparring partner; there was little of the Kid's style with which he was not familiar; and back of his engagement by Trego to work out with the Troglodyte there was another and a more potent reason than the stipend he would receive for it. The reason was an old one, and it was primitive enough, just as, despite his blasé manner of an age-old sophistication in the manly art, Dorgan was himself a primitive—an animal—in his way as atavistic as the Troglodyte.

For his motive, as it appeared, had been the elemental one of revenge—revenge for that memorable evening when, confident that he had acquired possession of the Champion's whole "bag of tricks," he had challenged the Kid, supremely confident of the result.

And the result had been history—an overwhelming defeat which rankled in Dorgan's breast until it had flowered in malignant hate. That, at any rate, had been the story as I had heard it from McAuslan.

Trego, with an eye to the main chance, as always, had wondered mildly over Dorgan's lack of haggling—and then, understanding, he had welcomed the latter with open arms. He was paying the blond-haired fighter not more than a third of the sum which he had expected to pay and which he had mentioned casually to Ingerson as "reasonable." And that he pocketed the difference with a canny forehandedness (to call it by no harsher name) was characteristic of the manager. As a matter of fact, it was a detail which he had never mentioned to Ingerson.

I WAS, of course, acquainted with Dorgan's record; but as I watched, I wondered. His boxing was a thing of beauty—for rhythm it was a poem, an effortless grace of movement, a deliberate yet lightning synchronism of hand and eye, the very perfection of a fighting form beside which the ponderous attack of Ingerson appeared by contrast inept and slow.

And I wondered that even the Saginaw Kid had prevailed against that turtlelike defense, the infinite variety of that bewildering attack. Hooks, jabs, uppercuts—they volleyed in from every angle in a perfect timing. Master and pupil, in a boxing-lesson—that was what it was. And then, as suddenly, I knew.

In my absorption in Dorgan's exhibition I had neglected Ingerson somewhat. Benson, with his camera—McAuslan—Trego, even, I had forgotten. Now, as I looked, beside that absolute, blank impassivity, the face, broad, brutish, dull, I saw again that terrible earnestness—the strained, almost painful concentration: eyes narrowed to slits, lips drawn backward from the teeth in a soundless snarl. And even as I looked, behind me a voice, McAuslan's, I think it was, in a low-voiced wonder—there came that sudden flurry, too lightning-swift for eye to follow it—and then the sodden impact of a heavy blow.

There followed a straining clinch, out of which, as I looked, there sprang the face of Dorgan, lips twisted in a savage sneer. I heard it, the spoken word, dripping venom in filth of speech untranslatable:

"You—"

What followed happened with the speed of light. I heard McAuslan's excited curse—Trego's voice, high, strained, imploring, fearful:

"Ingerson—Ivor—Ingerson, I say!"

And then a heaving grunt, a feint, the boxer high on his toes, poised like Discobolus, on his stiff lips the shadow of that sneering speech—the cave-man just across, swart, hairy, grim, and yet, as to the eyes—

For a moment, as sparks fly from an anvil, I could have sworn to a sudden leaping flame in the eyes of Ingerson. Then—

Crash!

I had not seen the blow; at the moment Dorgan's back had come between me and the line of vision. But with the impact of that socking punch he stiffened, swayed, sagged slowly at the knees—then in a loose-jointed fall plunged forward on his face.

Trego's gaze held a queer look as he struggled with the prostrate Dorgan. Between us we lifted him to a chair, Trego hovering in the foreground, anxious, disturbed. To lose the sparring-partner at this juncture would be a calamity, the balance of the "stable" being of ordinary caliber. Good sparring-partners were rare, and they were frequently as temperamental as the principals themselves.

Dorgan's eyes opened in a blank stare; then, abruptly, he grinned. Ingerson, arms hanging at his sides, stood silent, impassive. Dorgan spoke:

"Some wallop, I'll tell a man, Ivor. A

regular Mary-Ann, wit' trimmin's, *I'll* say."

He turned his head toward Trego, his eyes still blinking with the blow, but his expression whimsical. He jerked a thumb at Ingerson.

"Yuh got some fighter, Ben," he said softly. "The next champ, if you ask me. That wallop—zowie—some piledriver! It smashed right through my guard. . . . ."

"Well—that'll hold us for today, anyway," cut in Trego, nervously, I thought. I saw him glance sidewise at Dorgan. The latter seemed in no hurry to depart; nor was it apparent from his manner that he was about to be inflicted with an attack of temperament. He seemed already to have forgotten the knockout.

BUT as we left the ring, following the shooting of a few stills by Benson, Trego and Ingerson in advance, I caught a sidelong flash from the dark face of Dorgan. Cunning was in that look, and an infinite craft,—just a flash it was, and that was all,—a fugitive glimmer like the sun on water. I could not tell whether it had been directed at the contender or his manager, but I had, too, seen that look in Trego's face: the narrowed eyes, the understanding, almost apprehensive grimace, with Dorgan for its object.

I wondered—and I must have shown this a little in my face, for upon the instant, as my eyes sought his, Dorgan's expression changed as by a lightning shift to normal.

"Ingerson—he sure can sock, Mr. Norton," he said easily, but it seemed to me that he waited for my word. There was nothing in my tone, however, to show that I had seen.

"Do you—think he's got a chance with the Kid, Dorgan?" I asked, jerking my thumb in the direction of Ingerson, who, having stepped out from under the shower, was submitting to the ministrations of a pair of husky handlers. I thought I had never seen so magnificent a specimen of sheer fighting bulk: great chest like a barrel, legs like iron columns spread wide, torso ridged and barred with the superdevelopment on the deltoids and paradeltoids. I eyed Dorgan narrowly as I spoke.

"A chance, Mister?" he said snappily, his pale blue eyes boring into mine and then dancing away, in their depths a hot, avid spark. "A chance, hey? You said it, Mr. Norton! My money goes on Ingerson, if you want to know. A guy with a sock like that! W'y—he packs a kick like the left-hind wallop of an army mule —and there aint no horseshoes in his glove, neither. A second Dempsey, if you ask me. Any guy wit' a punch like that'd have a chance to be champeen, any time. Nossir—I sh'd say he's got a hell of a swell chanst wit' the Kid—an'—an' no questions asked."

I made no answer. I did not like Dorgan; he had a shifty eye. But even with the remembrance of that sidelong look, coupled with that gesture of Trego's, I felt that the man was sincere. And yet—there had been that muttered word, the vicious, snarling syllables—Dorgan's reputation had never been too good. . . . . I wondered. There had been the Gibbons fiasco, the malodorous Martin match; there had been others. No—Dorgan's reputation was most certainly none of the best. The knockout—it had been a part of the day's work; a sparring-partner would reckon such a contingency as nominated in the bond; anyway, it seemed unlikely that Dorgan would harbor malice for it.

But somehow, despite the latter's eulogistic comments, I had a strong sense of something brewing, deep down—some turgid undercurrent—a something hidden that would not brook revealment. Dorgan and Trego—it was a combination, a plus which meant a minus for something or somebody—or I was wide of the mark. But there was nothing I could put my finger on.

PRESENTLY, then, Dorgan, wearing a violently decorated bathrobe, in the lead, we walked over to where Ingerson, a dirty white sweater thrown over his shoulders, slouched on a low stool.

I thought he seemed more than ever the cave-man, with his great shoulders, bullet head, the chest with its stiff crop of hair, the great arms like iron bars, the massive fists, fingers curling inward even now as if in answer to some thought behind the eyes.

But the eyes, I noticed, were dull, lifeless; beside that restless, snakelike brightness of Dorgan's, of Trego's, they seemed shuttered windows, opaque, dull, lifeless, the somber-staring, bovine quiet of an animal's.

Almost it seemed as if they were unnaturally glazed; and I saw, too, that the pupils were dilated, the iris a pinpoint of

black against a dead-white like the belly of a fish.

I heard Dorgan's voice:

"This is Mr. Norton, Ivor—Mr. Norton, of the *Standard*—he's come to give you the once-over."

Ingerson raised his head, and again I had the impression of a man asleep, of a brain fettered to that vast bulk of body. If it had not been for that whispered obscenity of Dorgan's and the unbelievably swift reprisal of that mighty blow, I should have said that he was an automaton rather than a man—a dull, slow, ponderous behemoth without a brain.

"Yass," said Ingerson, in answer.

The single syllable. I stared; then I remarked, with an intentional sharpness:

"You—expect to win, eh—you'll beat the Kid, ha?"

All this time I had been conscious of Trego's white face in the background, hovering behind Ingerson like an uneasy ghost. Now, suddenly, he seemed about to speak, to forestall, as it seemed, the words of Ingerson. At least, it seemed to me that he had been about to speak—as if he wished to terminate the interview before it had well begun.

And then there happened a curious thing.

There came an eager whine and the quick *pad-pad* of running feet. A lean, dun shape thrust into the circle; passing Trego, the hound backed off, stiff-legged, snarling, then, made straight for Ingerson. He had seen none of us before—of that I was certain.

Ingerson put forward one huge hand, ruffling the animal's ears, and for a moment I could have sworn that into his face there came all at once a wistful, almost eager look, transfiguring it as if lighted from within.

The dog, after the manner of his kind, as suddenly departed, and again, like the drawing of a curtain, into the cave-man's face there returned that stony, impenetrable calm. But for a moment I wondered, doubting that I had seen. I saw the giant turn his head as if he sought for guidance from that pale-lipped mentor who was his manager. And, it seemed to me for a moment that in that look there was a trace of fear. Then, as if hearing my question for the first time:

"Ay beat him sure—yass—you betcha, young faller," grunted Ingerson heavily.

Well—I confess it was beyond me. I had wanted a story for my paper, and I had it, but as I turned to go,—McAuslan and the camera-man had been waiting for me at the door,—I was wondering if it was one-half or one-tenth of what I might have had if Trego—

Then—and I could have sworn to a mocking quality in the voice:

"Ivor—shake hands with the gentleman," ordered Trego.

THE fight between Ingerson and the Saginaw Kid was but a week away. And as the time drew near, again I found myself wondering, speculating, interested in spite of myself, in a man-brute who was yet human enough to find favor with a—dog. It was a small thing, if you will, but I have always held that as an infallible appraisal of character, four-footed instinct is ages in advance of mere human *judgment*. Anyway, to this I added another curious incident, meaningless, perhaps, in itself, and yet, as later events proved, charged with meaning: I refer to my meeting with Salvation Joe.

I remember—I was going home along Sutter, about three of a gusty morning—when I felt a twitch at my sleeve as I was turning the corner into Market. It was Joe. He's a sort of privileged character—an old actor, some say—anyway, a derelict with a reputation, of sorts. I suppose I've been—well, decent to him once or twice; and this time I stopped dead. I was tired.

"Well, Joe—what is it now?" I asked him.

He gave me an owlish look.

"Say, Mr. Norton—about that fight."

"Yes," I said. "Well—what about it?"

He eyed me solemnly for a moment; then he spoke low, out of the corner of his mouth. (You know where they get that habit, or don't you? State's Prison—Leavenworth.)

"There's something rotten in the State of Denmark," he whispered, and was gone.

Well, anything was possible; and Ingerson, as it chanced, was not a Swede—he was a Dane. But at the time I gave it little thought.

But somehow, inconsequentially perhaps, I kept remembering the words of Salvation Joe. And recalling them, and recalling that Ingerson was a Dane, I recalled also that look of fear in the Behemoth's eyes when he had turned to Trego. Now, I have a bit of a stubborn streak—and they had made me stakeholder. I con-

ceived it my duty, then, to follow this scent, if I could. And I remembered, too (for otherwise I would not have thought of it), that no one knew where Ingerson lived. Well, there was nothing remarkable in that, but it came to me that perhaps if I searched long enough, I might find—that which I sought.

There is a Danish colony (it is not known as such) across the bay—in Oakland; it is a small one, perhaps half a hundred families, altogether. Thither I went on a Monday afternoon, but all my inquiries drew blank. They had never heard of Ingerson, the *fighter;* in fact, I made no direct reference to his profession, as such. But after a little discreet questioning—yes, perhaps it was Mrs. Ingerson I wanted—her husband was mostly away. She might be able to tell me—

To be brief, then, I found her; it had never occurred to me that Ingerson might be married. It was a small house, neat, with a good garden at the back. But as I knocked, the talk that I had heard behind the closed door fell silent. I knocked again, and presently there came a voice, a woman's voice, thin, fearful:

"Who is it?"

I answered, as reassuringly as I could, but I had time to note that the voice bore no trace of accent. Then the door swung inward slowly, and framed in the opening stood—Ingerson's wife.

For the moment I was dumb, for no greater contrast could be imagined: this slim, dark loveliness, and him whom I had come to characterize as Pithecanthropus Erectus, to borrow the phrase of the Sunday supplements.

"Madam," I said, clumsily enough, "my name is Norton—from the *Standard*—the newspaper, you know."

She seemed to shrink. "I—I was afraid of it," she half muttered. Then: "But come in, will you not, sir?"

BEHIND her the room was dusky, but as I entered, I could have sworn to a presence like a vast and brooding shadow, a presence which, when my eyes became accustomed to the semi-gloom, I saw could have been nothing but the fire, the table—a trick of the light and of the leaping shadow-figures on floor and wall.

"I—I thought you were an off—" came from the woman. She bit her lip in confusion, her color mounting. I spoke without preamble:

"You—your husband—" I began, and then, in a lightning flash, the truth, or part of it, hit me between the eyes as the woman spoke:

"My husband—he works—in the quarries. Always he is late; sometimes he—travels. I am—often alone."

There was no doubt of it. There was Ingerson's picture on the mantel; there was no mistaking it; and of course his wife was ignorant—ignorant of the fact that was known practically to everybody else: that her husband was—what he was.

"You are—from the newspaper?" she was saying. Then again she blushed. "I do not—I cannot read—the newspapers."

I wondered: the clear speech, without a trace of accent, the obvious intelligence, though of a lowly grade; and then, abruptly, I knew, and my heart lifted and then sank down with the pity of a great understanding.

She turned from me, facing the light, which shone full upon her face. And with the movement suddenly I knew.

She was blind.

I MADE an inarticulate sound in my throat. Was this what Joe had meant? But no—it was impossible. And—and why had she never been told? But, I reflected again, there could have been many reasons for that. And presently, as we talked, I think I gained her confidence somewhat, so much so that on rising to leave, she stopped, hesitated, gathered courage:

"I think you are a good man," she told me. "The—blind know. Tell me—do you know—Tobias Trego?"

I stood silent. "Why—yes," I said slowly. He—"

The woman roused at that, her face working.

"Promise me, then, sir, you will not tell this—Trego, where stands this house. Perhaps he knows even now, but Ivor, Ivor has ordered me never to admit him—he will not tell me why—never never to *listen—*"

She paused.

"Yes," I said gently. "I promise."

Again the girl spoke, low:

"Ivor—he is a good man, sir. He is big and strong and gentle—he works hard —*with his hands.*" Her voice rose. "And —he is honest."

I made my exit in a mental fog; a commingling of pity and concern and a queer

bafflement at the root of which, try as I might, there moved a slow current elusive as quicksilver. The woman was genuine—no doubt of that; her beauty and her helplessness took one by the throat. But that word bitten in mid-speech—the warning as to Trego—it was a queer business.

Evening had fallen as I walked down the gusty, ill-lighted street. And I could have sworn, as I turned the corner, to a slinking shadow-shape hugging the far curb like a bat—a shadow that as I turned thrust for a brief instant its three-cornered visage to the light.

And the face was the face of Salvation Joe.

IN his training-camp de luxe, an entourage which boasted every *fin de siècle* prop, the mere mention of which, ten years in the past, would have evoked hoots of derision—rubbers, handlers, assistant trainers and a small army of sparring-partners—the Saginaw Kid reclined in a royal state.

The training was over for the morning. Later he would put on the "afternoon show" at a dollar a head; just now, however, he was conversing in languid monosyllables with a young man with a hawk-like countenance—flat black eyebrows shielding eyes of a chill, wintry blue, a sharp, acquisitive nose, and a mouth like a straight gash above a chin barbered to the blood.

The champion's secretary—for it was he, last touch to an ensemble of truly regal magnificence—turned his elegantly tailored person in a supple gesture.

"Now, looka here, Harvey," he stated aggrievedly, "yuh gotta cut out them there reporters—yuh have, f'r a fact. Ike Ferns"—Ferns was the Kid's manager—"has told you the same; and as f'r them Panhandle Petes that keep bustin' in here f'r a quick touch—"

He ceased, his well-manicured hands spread outward in a flicking, almost delicate gesture of disgust, his eye, for a moment, resting in a resentful glance on a hulking, dark-faced individual in a tattered jersey who reclined somnolently at a corner of the porch.

But as the rest of the chapter is the dark-faced individual's own story, I report it in his own words, as nearly as I can recall them. For the black-browed sparring-partner was and is my very good friend and associate Jack Benson,—he of the camera,—and it is his story, as I have reconstructed it from his report:

THE champion frowned; then he grinned—the wide, mirthless, spasmodic yawning of a tiger, as he glanced appreciatively at the secretary's garments. The Saginaw Kid was good-looking in a hard, aggressive fashion—until he smiled. Then you noticed that he had a small, rather cruel mouth and eyes set too close together. He stretched, and there was something feline in the movement, the slow, supple grace that hid thews of whipcord and steel. His somewhat heavy face, with its straight black brows meeting above a well-formed nose and high cheek-bones like an Indian's, broke into a wider smile:

"I'll say you're some nifty little dresser, Freddy," he remarked irrelevantly. "You got 'em all faded. I'll tell the world."

His tone hardened on a sudden to a steely rasp: "This Ingerson—it's less'n a week now—"

He broke off abruptly as the secretary, Freddy Rees, a strange concern upon his pallid features, turned with a swift, nimble movement. In his day he had been a lightweight of renown. Now:

"*That* guy!" he proclaimed with a Jovian tolerance. "It'll be a shame to take the money, fella—a shame. W'y—he aint exactly a set-up, Harvey; but he'll be a sucker for your left, pal—he aint got no de-fense a-tall. He'll be in there f'r th' loser's end, bo—you take it from little Freddy."

He smiled benignly at the champion, exposing his crooked teeth, the sole flaw in an otherwise impeccable ensemble. The Kid *was* drawn a little fine, now that one noticed it: it was apparent in his manner, in his sudden restless movements, in the quick acerbity of his speech—straws in the wind. Well, they must keep him on edge now—slow and easy. . . . .

The Saginaw Kid had half risen in his seat, his eyes narrowed to slits, his hands balling into fists, his expression fixed on a sudden to an almost savage concentration. A man was coming up the walk. Straw-hatted, dapper, he walked with a lilting, swaying step, but even at that distance you could see there was a something violent in his face—a smooth bleakness. One sensed it, somehow, in his walk, his carriage, the forward-thrusting tilt to his jaw.

The secretary, his back turned to the

roadway, had not seen. Now, at the single, explosive monosyllable from the champion, he wheeled swiftly, to face:

"Dorgan!"

Dorgan halted when but a pace or two away, as if uncertain of his welcome. Removing his hat with a subtly ironical flourish, he thrust his right hand into the pocket of his fashionably tailored coat, swaying easily, balancing himself on his heels, lidless gaze fixed upon the champion in a brooding, speculative stare.

FOR a moment a silence held, strained, expectant. Then the visitor's fingers came away, holding a monogrammed cigarette-case. Flipping it open, he selected a cigarette, lighted it.

" 'Lo, Harvey," he said easily, ignoring the secretary. "How's tricks?"

The champion relaxed, if by the merest trifle, in his chair.

"'Lo, Joe," he made answer, a certain wariness in his tone, in his eyes an odd inward, questioning look.

Dorgan teetered a moment on his heels. The situation was not without constraint. The champion knew, and Dorgan knew that he knew, that the latter had openly declared his intention to get even for that knockout. Usually it had been all in the day's work, but there had been currents within currents, wheels within wheels—and the sure-thing gamblers and con-men who batten upon the prize-fight game had had a finger in that particular pie—or at least it was so rumored.

It was fairly common knowledge, too, that Ingerson's sparring-partner had on occasion consorted with certain individuals who did their fighting with other weapons than their fists, denizens of the underworld who struck swiftly, like adders, from the dim depths of hallways, in darkened alleys, from the safe shelter of milling crowds—for a price, and always from behind.

Dorgan finished his cigarette in three long inhalations, did a sort of dancing step—then:

"Well—no hard feelin's, Harvey," he said.

The Saginaw Kid observed him with a sphinxlike countenance. He did not offer his hand. Instead he vented a noncommittal grunt.

"No—hard feelin's, Dorgan," he said slowly. But his words were as much a question as a statement of fact.

Dorgan felt the challenge; it was at once apparent in his tone, the expression of his eyes. His lean, dark face, with its predatory jaw, glowed suddenly as if lighted from within.

"Now, looka here, Harvey," he began, "I'm giving it to you straight." He lowered his voice to a harsh whisper. "I got no hard feelin's. I admit I was sore—once—but I'm bettin' on you—to stop this bird Ingerson—"

He paused, his dark face as if with recollection.

"I left 'im today, the cheap tin-horn—him an' that egg Trego, the pikin' nickel-nurser! Wanted to high-jack me out of a week's pay. . . . . But lemme spill it: this boy is good. He's got no brains, but he's got a double-barreled sock that's sure the works, Harvey. You'd beat him—easy; but I want t' make it a sure thing—see?"

HE ceased. The Saginaw Kid turned his head, but Rees had disappeared. He glanced sidewise at the recumbent figure at the corner of the porch, opened his lips to speak, thought better of it. The man, practically a hanger-on, was obviously fathoms deep. He shrugged his shoulders. After all, perhaps Dorgan was telling the truth. Well—it would do no harm to listen.

"Yeah?" he said, his tone careless, but his eyes boring into Dorgan's. "Yeah?"

Dorgan glanced swiftly to right and left, his gaze observing the tattered figure by the porch with a casual regard. His face tightened.

"Well—he'll be borin' in, see—swingin' like a gate—he'll maybe be crowdin' y' some—"

He spread his fingers in a deprecatory gesture.

"Well, o' course, Harvey, you'll likely knock him off early, good as he is; but—anyway—say—you're givin' the pictures a run, see? An' this bird maybe crowds you a little—there's a clinch, see? An' you tell 'im—you—"

His voice fell to a hissing whisper:

"You just say to 'im: 'You—' "

The words were inaudible, murmured in the Saginaw Kid's ear.

Dorgan straightened; then he grinned.

"That's the one thing he can't stand," he continued. "He can't stand it nohow. You take it from me—he can't. It'll get

him—sure as Gawd made little apples. You see. He'll leave himself wide open. Then all's you got to do is—one on the button—an' good *night!*"

For the first time the countenance of the Saginaw Kid evinced a trace of animation.

"Thanks, Joe—I'll remember," he said.

For Dorgan's words had carried conviction, because—and this is the incredible part of it—he had meant every last one of them, even to that whispered warning. For it is the truth beyond cavil that the children of darkness are wiser in their generation than the children of—well, you know the rest of it. And the Saginaw Kid, at any rate, was an undeniable blond.

THE evening of the fight broke in an undercurrent of tension—of rumors, vague and ill-defined. Men whispered together on street-corners, in hotels, wagging heads and tongues, bruiting the news of this or that development: the champion had gone stale; he was overtrained; he was fit and ready to make the fight of his life. Ingerson was a set-up; he was made to order for the champion; he wouldn't last beyond the third round. He was hard as nails; he'd win eased-up; the Saginaw Kid—everybody knew he was soft from easy living; Ingerson'd take him before he could get going. Anyway, Ingerson'd show them something; hadn't Trego said so? And so on.

But this was merely the usual surface froth on a current which, in deep eddies here and there, reflected the actual betting.

There was something in the wind; the wise money had not as yet appeared, save in scattered wagers on the champion. But with the fight not an hour away the odds, which had held steady at eight to five, lengthened to two to one.

In the huge arena, now rapidly filling up with an increasing crowd, men appeared here and there, furtive-eyed, moving with a swift assurance, bills folded lengthwise between their thrusting fingers, their voices raised in a raucous chorus.

Ingerson money had made its appearance; the contender's backers made no secret of their preference—and it was with these that the sleek, slim, swift-moving commissionaires of Isaac Ferns unloaded their ammunition.

Serene in a ring-side seat, the Saginaw Kid's manager sat and gloated. Every cent of his not inconsiderable store he had wagered on the champion—most of it in a last-minute flurry at five to one. It was like taking candy from a baby, he reflected; he'd need an expert accountant to figure up his winnings.

One with the crowd in a serene indifference to the first of the preliminaries, Ferns, an expensive cigar stuck at an angle in his mouth, again congratulated himself on the smoothness and speed with which it had been done. Trego, now, he was smooth as oil—he had done his bit. At five to one he stood to win fully as big a stake as the champion's manager.

Yes, it had been a workmanlike job. Trego had done his bit; and the public—wasn't it always the goat? And serve it right, if anybody should inquire.

It had been most carefully devised, and it had been mostly of Trego's devising; rumors, chance-sown, as it appeared, had been deftly circulated: the fight had been fixed for Ingerson to win; the Kid was off his feed, trained down. The odds, soaring, had reached their peak, and at the peak the conspirators had unloaded.

And after that—the devil take the hindmost.

THE last of the preliminaries had been disposed of when a short, sharp, barking roar proclaimed the advent of the champion. Sleek, slim, hair roached back in the latest mode, his shoulders were yet broad and powerful, the long, ropelike muscles of his back and arms sliding under the dull pink of his smooth skin.

The Saginaw Kid had timed his arrival to follow the contender—an ancient device; but as it chanced, he was the first to show.

Cries of: "That's the stuff, Kid." "You got his number, Harvey, old-timer." "Oh, you, Saginaw Kid!" greeted him as he vaulted lightly over the ropes, going to his corner with the nonchalance of a man to whom it was an old story. Veteran of a hundred ring-battles, the Saginaw Kid did not look like a veteran, for he was singularly unscarred, a proof, if proof were needed, of the uncanny legerdemain of hand and eye which had brought him up from the ruck in three short years to the throne which now was his: the heavyweight championship.

Sitting on his stool, arms along the ropes, he grinned widely, in evident enjoyment of the roaring chorus which proclaimed him: "the greatest heavyweight

since Jeffries," lifting a hand in greeting to friends about the ring.

In the press seats typewriters clacked in a sudden frenzy; a battery of camera-men struggled with their instruments; and high over all, from towers erected for the purpose, the picture-operators were grinding furiously at their machines.

There came a sudden hush, a ripple, a mutter—then a roar as Ingerson clad in a tattered bathrobe, climbed into the ring.

Almost immediately he dropped it, and a gasp, a vast, collective suspiration, seemed to rise upward to the rafters, involuntary tribute to his sheer fighting bulk.

Ingerson was not especially popular; there was a grimness, a ruthlessness about him which made no bid for the favor of the fickle fight-fans. A behemoth in bronze he seemed, a throwback, a caveman in very truth, as he stood, legs wide, great hairy torso, arms like iron bars, testing the ropes, eyes fixed, unseeing, in an intense and sullen concentration. One might have thought that with one lifting surge of those tremendous shoulder-muscles he could have ripped rope and stanchion from their moorings—but Ingerson was not thinking of that.

By contrast with the champion's pink-and-brown coloring, his grace, the Troglodyte appeared apelike, brutish, his skin, burned and blackened by the sun, of the color and texture of mahogany. This was what they saw, and seeing, they did not see the look in the fierce eyes, the struggle, the fear, almost a wistfulness, strangely in keeping with that frowning face. That look—there were but three who could have read it, and only one was there to see.

"He aint human." They were saying it now; after that first astonished tribute a murmur like a restless sea ran round that wide circle rising tier on tier against the lights.

The referee, immaculate in evening dress, his white shirt-front dazzling under the lights, was calling them to mid-ring for the final instructions. His voice came hurried, low:

"Break clean. . . . . No hitting in the clinches."

Clang!

WITH the sound of the gong there fell a sudden silence in which, somehow, for an interval, breathing seemed difficult. The champion, on his toes, guard held high, the shadow of a sneer edging his rather cruel mouth, stepped in delicately to meet the sudden onrush of his antagonist.

A straight left sent the latter's head back with a snap; there was a brief flurry of flying fists; the champion cool, unruffled, moving in and out with the effortless ease of a boxing instructor in a gymnasium, blocked, countered, led with the mechanical precision of a machine, content at the outset to sustain that whirlwind attack by the perfect science of his defensive skill.

For a heavyweight the champion was a ghost, a phantom, but a two-fisted fighter with a pile-driving wallop in either hand. Now he came in wide open, careless, as it seemed, supremely confident. It would be just a workout, and that was all. In the sixth, the seventh, say—that would be about the time to finish it. This fellow, Ingerson was just a dub—a set-up; it was too easy. . . . .

But the fellow had a way of boring in—yes, he could take it—there was no doubt about that; but as a boxer—oh, lady, lady!

TO watch the Saginaw Kid as he worked was a privilege and a delight. So far, Ingerson had not so much as laid a glove on him, and it was not for want of trying. Dazzling footwork, boxing skill that was a revelation, uncanny judgment of speed and distance—the champion had them all. So far, the fighting had been at long range—lunging rush against a bewildering versatility of defense and attack for which there seemed no adequate answer.

"Gad!" exclaimed Porter, of the *Star* to a companion in the press seats. "He's got the Troglodyte handcuffed—he can't untrack himself. After this round there'll be a lovely betting mix-up. You'll see—you mark me! Why—it's just a boxing lesson!"

That was what it seemed. And as the round progressed, a silence grew, tense and strained. Here and there, through the drifting smoke-layers there sprang faces, avid, white-lipped, scowling.

Ferns, an unlighted cigar in his mouth, smiled his appreciation. Trego, pale eyes aflame, sat in a sort of brooding, dynamic calm. Farther back a dark face, with inscrutable gaze and traplike mouth, surveyed the unequal contest with a sphinx-like gravity.

It was Dorgan. Abruptly he leaned forward in his seat as a short, deep, ex-

plosive roar burst in a low thunder from the crowd.

PERHAPS the champion had grown careless; blocking beautifully along the ropes, he had leaned sidewise, as was his wont, to fling a jesting comment at the toiling scribes. He was not above a gesture of this sort—a little grandstand play, but this time it brought down the house.

Perhaps he had forgotten that Ingerson could hit; perhaps, his caution for once in abeyance, he failed, by the merest fraction of a second, to gauge that lifting uppercut. The blow traveled a scant eight inches, but there was power in it. Straight through the champion's guard it smashed—full of the point, a lifting punch with the full weight behind it of the contender's mighty muscles.

The Saginaw Kid gave a gasping grunt, his eyes glazed, he buckled inward at the knees, falling forward in a desperate effort to clinch, to hang on somehow, until the whirling mists of his sick brain should steady. But Ingerson, backing nimbly for all his bulk, evaded those clinging arms. Then, as the champion fell forward on his face, the bell clanged for the ending of the round. And it was all that saved him.

The house was in a pandemonium. This was the unexpected. Ingerson's backers were in a frenzy of reaction. Ferns' face was a study in composite emotions; Trego, with a fixed, mechanical grin, fumbled his loose lips with plucking fingers. Dorgan, saturnine as usual, alone appeared oblivious, but there was an odd gleam in his eyes, the shadow of a smile on his stiff lips as he looked toward the champion's corner, where, busy with towel and bucket, the Saginaw Kid's handlers were working furiously.

Trego's voice, in a hissing whisper, reached Ingerson on his stool. There was anxiety in the tone, and a certain fear:

"Now, Ivor," he exhorted, "you know what to do. You be careful, hey? *Por Dios, sí*—you be—careful."

A chance listener would have found nothing amiss in the hissing admonition, the pallid face, the haunted eyes. But Ingerson seemed not to hear, his gaze, brooding, somber, burning, eyes narrowed upon the Saginaw Kid.

Across, by the press seats, a reporter glanced casually at his watch, turning a blank face to his companion:

"It's funny, Jim," he was saying. "That round, now—I make it ten seconds short. Funny!"

He frowned thoughtfully. But as a matter of fact, Ferns could have told him—and Trego, likewise the timekeeper, if he had been so minded. As for the referee, wasn't he known as Honest Jimmy Alsopp, and as such above suspicion?

BUT all such considerations vanished with the opening of the second.

The Saginaw Kid was young, with a splendid reservoir of youth and strength as yet undimmed by dissipation. His handlers, laboring like fiends, had brought him round, working desperately with towel and bucket, so that, with the clang of the gong, he met Ingerson's rush with his accustomed heady generalship. It had been a lucky punch, he told himself, but there was a visible respect in his manner—it showed in his eyes, keen, crafty, narrowed to slits as he circled and ducked, countering with an occasional long left the slugging rush of his antagonist.

But the Saginaw Kid was sore—the blow rankled: as much was it a blow to his prestige as to his confidence, his belief in his star. Gradually, as the round progressed, he began forcing the pace, sharpshooting for openings with a deadly deliberation that was a part of his plan. Another man, less sure of himself, less hardy than was the champion, might have attempted to regain prestige and points by "grandstanding," playing to the gallery, forcing the issue by a desperate, whirlwind attack from the beginning of the round.

But the Saginaw Kid was an old campaigner—at twenty-six he was a veteran of a hundred battles; he knew how to subordinate his personal grudges, or rather, to employ them to his material advantage. Ingerson could hit—his jaw still tingled from that uppercut, a haymaker that had nearly if not quite brought home the bacon.

A master of defense, the champion presented now an impregnable front to the two-fisted thunderbolt who crowded him along the resin with a concentrated fury of attack before which a lesser man would have dogged it out of hand. And the contender showed no indication of tiring—that he had shot his bolt with the slugging frenzy of that first, furious round.

"He can't last," men told each other; but with the passing of the second round, the third, the fourth, there appeared no

abatement of his attack. "He can't last," they said—and again, in the fifth, as a solid smash over the heart was followed by a ripping right-cross to the chin, the house rocked and roared in a tremendous stridor of sound as Ingerson, walking in steadily against that devastating cross-fire, got home a bone-smashing right-hander to his opponent's midriff.

THE champion grunted, falling into a clinch, his face, over his opponent's shoulder, twisted in a frozen grimace of pure agony. That blow had rocked him to his heels, but he was game—as a wolf or a tiger is game. But all his art, his cunning, his craft of mind and hand was called on to sustain him in that desperate need.

"This boy is good," Dorgan had said. Well—he was finding it out.

"Gawd!" came in an awed whisper from Carty, a veteran ring-fan who was a walking encyclopedia of fights and fighters. "Did you see it? The Kid—he hit him with everything but the bucket!" And then, with the phrase which had been bestowed aforetime upon a champion famous for his endurance: "He aint—human!"

The Troglodyte had always borne a reputation for toughness; "a good tough boy," he had been called; but now he was fighting as one inspired. Not once, as of old, had he looked to his corner for advice or encouragement, but one looking at his eyes might have sensed a—difference.

Whereas before his eyes had been dull—now they flamed as with a sort of Berserk madness. But to one who saw, it was a madness, not of the flesh, but of the spirit—a look as it seemed, curiously exalted, indwelling, remote.

With the ending of the sixth round Trego, his face working, fingers plucking continually at his chin, exhorted his fighter in a thick whisper:

"Ivor—lay off, I tell you—you hear me? Are you crazy? This round—you hear me? It's got to be this round. Hell's hinges—are you deaf?"

But Ingerson, silent on his stool, gave him no answer.

Trego's face darkened; he glanced once at the white face of Ferns, his ruddy color drained to a pasty grayness—at Dorgan, with his sardonic smile; then he slumped backward in his seat as the bell clanged for the opening of the seventh.

BUT with the beginning of this round, by one of those sudden shifts common enough in the squared circle, the champion's stock took a sudden upward leap. Class was telling, as it seemed; the Kid was coming into his own; Ingerson had shot his bolt. And as a matter of fact, the contender appeared to slacken speed, to tire visibly even as the champion appeared to summon from some unsuspected reservoir a new lease of life.

"He's shot his bolt," ran the ringside comment. "He'll fold up like an accordion." "He's in—the Kid has got his number!"—as in a sudden flurry of fighting in mid-ring, the champion got in three lightning lefts without a return.

So far, Ingerson had not taken a backward step, but now, as a bear wounded in a dozen places gives back sullenly before the yapping hounds, so now the Troglodyte retreated slowly in the face of the champion's attack. A short-arm jolt to the wind—a driving left to the face—a lifting uppercut, followed by a wicked smash over the heart—the wonder was that he was on his feet at all.

Trego, mouth set in a mechanical grin, waited for the end—it was coming now—it had to come. He had no doubt that it would be genuine—but the stage was set; he had coached the contender carefully enough. But that near-knockout of the champion—it worried him more than he was ready to admit. Suppose, just suppose—but that was impossible, of course.

The round was nearly over, and still Ingerson held his feet, but for a man who had taken the terrific mauling to which he had been subjected, his legs did not betray it. Solid as iron columns, there was no tremble in them, the surest indication of a fighter's condition. And when the round ended in a neutral corner, with Ingerson holding his own in the exchanges, his backers took heart of grace.

Trego had disappeared; the referee, with a queer look in his face, glanced at the place where he had been—then across at Ingerson, seated on his stool.

"Snap into it, you!" he ordered in a low voice to the handlers who were attending Ingerson in a somewhat too obvious listlessness.

THE eighth round was a repetition of the seventh—the ninth the same, save that Ingerson, mostly on the receiving end for a varied assortment of hooks, jabs and

uppercuts, lashed back on occasion with right or left at the dancing mockery before him. He was taking three punches to land one, and mostly he was short with roundhouse swings that missed sometimes by a foot.

"A glutton for punishment," was the consensus, but it seemed merely a question of time now before the finish. Trego had resumed his place; he sat now in a dull apathy, like a stone Buddha, his gaze inscrutable, fixed straight before him in a kind of sightless stare. But for a split second his glance quickened as a handler, with a side-glance at the manager, passed up a black bottle to the Troglodyte, his manner solicitous.

BUT with the opening of the tenth there seemed to come a change, an indefinable impression as of an electric current vibrating in the humid air.

"Now, boy—go get him!" had been Ferns' low-voiced injunction to the champion, but his eyes were strange, his expression harried, his mouth slack with a curious dead lifelessness.

The Saginaw Kid was fresh—he had gotten his second wind. Arm-weary from the punishment he had administered, the rest between rounds had heartened him. Ingerson could not stand the pace—he was "punch-drunk," reeling on his feet; flesh and blood could not endure it.

The Kid, once more careless, confident, sneering, feinted his laboring antagonist into knots; grinning in the clinches, he whispered obscenities before the break, but Ingerson appeared oblivious.

The champion, if it suited his inclination, could be a dirty fighter when he chose; he was a master of innuendo, of biting quip and phrase which had on occasion operated to his advantage.

Now, on a sudden, as he circled to right and left, seeking an opening in that turtle-like defense, words recurred to him: the whispered suggestion of Dorgan, the very words. Well, it was worth a trial, at any rate. He'd make him open up, and then—

The thud and shuffle of sliding feet had grown curiously loud in the stillness; for a moment, under the twin arcs, there seemed to grow, to expand, the fine wire of a sudden tension, singing at a pitch too low for sound.

The Saginaw Kid, circling before Ingerson like a drifting shadow, spoke, low, out of the corner of his mouth:

"Say, you—come on an' take it. Why don't you open up? Damn you—you—"

IN the sagas of the Northland there is a tale of Grettir, grandsire of him of Drangey, and of how, indentured to Einar the Serpent, which is the Mother of the World, he labored a thousand years and a day in the caverns of the Bergensfjord, until the word which must not be spoken was uttered to the everlasting hills.

Ingerson had done the bidding of Trego, serving his time in a blind, dumb, insensate obedience—the fixed idea, the dominating influence of his life, to fight—and nothing else. He had to fight—he must fight—or else—

He had received his orders to "lay down" to the champion; but before that his one and only gospel had been to fight, and to keep on fighting. Because, if he did not— But there was one other element, the spark in the clod.

"As lava rises, as glaciers move—"

"Damn you—you—" mouthed the Saginaw Kid again. Ingerson did not answer—in words.

And then it came.

AS an adder strikes, soundless and swift, but with the weight of two hundred pounds of iron-hard sinew in his lifting drive, Ingerson struck—muscle and mind and body, in one furious projectile.

It was the famous Fitzsimmons shift. Straight through the champion's guard it crashed, as if that had been paper.

The Saginaw Kid whirled, the force of the blow turning him sidewise in a long, slumping fall, over and through the ropes, into the press-seats.

Then—bedlam. The referee, his voice lost in the tumult, began to count. Men shouted, yelled, standing upon the benches, the seats—their mouths open, individual voices lost in a bellowing crescendo of roaring noise.

The gong clanged—but it was lost, swallowed up in an inferno of oaths, catcalls, supplications:

"Attaboy, Ingerson!"

"Oh, you—Champion!"

"Hell—it's a fake, I tell you—a fake. He got a short count."

And in an eddy of the roaring chorus:

"Fake—fake! Robber—robber—"

Here and there in the crowd, milling now in the cross-currents set up by the confusion, minor fights arose. A hoarse

bawling began, and ended in a strangled oath and a single cry:

"Police—po-police!"

Then, out of the swirling eddies a face appeared, contorted, raging: the face of Trego, behind him Ferns, in their wake a half-dozen hard-bitten individuals of a wolfish cast—"strong-arms," knights of the knuckle-duster and the blackjack, hirelings of the gun-hand on occasion, latter-day bravos, to be hired for a price.

A swirling eddy marked their progress through the crowd; oaths followed them, objurgations, curses loud and deep. Trego in the lead, they swept up and over the ropes, into the ring, where Ingerson stood alone, head sunk, under the twin arcs.

"You—" spat out Trego, his face a livid mask, behind him Ferns and his following, massed in a solid phalanx.

A police whistle shrilled somewhere in the crowd as Trego, halting a scant yard from Ingerson, mouthed out his epithet:

"You double-crossing hound!" he grated. "You'll settle with me for this, you—"

It was out—Trego himself had said it.

Ingerson, lifting tired eyes, surveyed the man before him; then from their depths a spark leaped out in sudden challenge, like a thrusting sword.

TREGO'S face purpled, then faded to a pasty gray. He got no further, save for the final word. Something smote him on the point of the chin with a devastating impact—Ingerson's fist; and the second knockout of the evening was registered as Trego, arms and legs asprawl, was catapulted from the ring.

The rest was a confused medley of swirling bodies, of oaths, of the sudden impact of fist on flesh. The face of Ferns, appearing for a moment from the press, was blotted out.

Ingerson, his face aglow, seemed to the onlookers as a bear among jackals; he was laughing now, in a roaring bellow, as one after the other he picked off his attackers with short-arm swings, right and left, hurling them headlong from the ring in an aimless huddle of sprawling limbs.

For a brief interval there was a lull. Then, re-forming beyond the ropes, they came at him in a roaring flood—guns out, knives gleaming under the lights, faces bestial, avid, contorted, voices screaming oaths. A knife whizzed past Ingerson's shoulder, to drive into a ring-post with a sullen clang; a gun cracked.

Then, with a swift, silent rush, there came the charge of the police.

AGAIN I found myself in the small white cottage across the Bay. But this time the light burned clear of shadows. Ingerson, at ease in a huge winged chair, gazed steadily at his wife. Salvation Joe, in a new suit, shone resplendent by the fire. I had come at Ingerson's invitation, which had been in the nature of a surprise, and now, as I listened, his wife spoke:

"My eyes, thanks to God, they will be open—soon." She pointed to the bandage about her forehead, smiling over at the huge man in the great chair. "And"—she smiled—"my husband, he is not tongue-tied, only bashful. Is it not so, Ivor?"

The big man grinned; then he frowned. Her face darkened as if at the passage of a swift shadow. She turned to me. Salvation Joe fidgeted close at hand, his thick fingers fumbling at his hat.

"We owe you an explanation, sir. This paper"—she exhibited an official-looking document—"with this there is no more to fear. It—it has to do with Joe, my brother, and with Ivor. I—I did not know this. But—ask him, sir."

I nodded, without speech, looking at Ingerson. The champion smiled—a curiously boyish grin; then his face hardened with a sort of rugged sternness. I listened then, rapt, to the recital of the fight, and what had led up to it: the explanation of that strange form-reversal—that curious sluggishness—Trego's momentary absence from the ring—the bottle—it had been the manager's final, desperate cast for the stake for which he had played—and lost. These things Ivor Ingerson told me, with a simple directness—you have read about them—all the papers carried a full story.

But there was that other thing: the word, the dynamite. For a moment I hesitated. Finally I said, low:

"But what was it he whispered to you—the Kid, I mean—just before the knockout?" I asked. "Tried to get your number, did he? Well, that was an old trick, of course—as old as the bottle stunt. But—it was a boomerang, and then some, I'll tell a man. But—what was it he called you?"

Ingerson's face grew abruptly somber, the mouth like flint, eyes chill, with a bleak, filmy look.

"He—ban call me Jail-bird," he made answer with a simple finality.

The Flaw

A crime conceived cleverly, carried out with daring and nerve. And yet—consider the way it turned out! An unusual and deeply interesting novelette by the noted author of "The Four-fathom Wallop" and "Drill Proof."

By CARL CLAUSEN

THE idea occurred to Hurley with the suddenness of inspiration, when Sargent and he were smoking their after-dinner cigars in the raftered living-room of the mountain lodge. The room was large and spacious, with a fireplace at the north end and a wide plate-glass window in the southern exposure, beside the front door. The door was thrown wide open, and through it and the window there were lovely vistas of pine-clad ridges falling away toward the San Gabriel Valley, and on very clear days, an occasional glimpse of the Pacific Ocean, thirty miles distant.

During a wind-storm a month or so earlier, a falling branch of the great pine tree which grew on the south side of the house had broken the window. Sargent had placed his order with a Los Angeles glass firm for a new pane at once, but the remoteness of the lodge from the beaten trails, and the fact that everything had to be carried into the mountains on the backs of pack-animals, had been responsible for the delay of replacing the broken window.

The glazier and his helper had just left, after spending all morning removing the shattered glass and fitting the new pane. The fact that the thing had cost Sargent a pretty penny—nearly a hundred dollars—had not disturbed him. Hurley reflected upon this with some bitterness. Sargent had made out a check for the amount without a question, and on top of it had given the glazier and his helper a tip of five dollars. Sargent's generosity in money-matters infuriated Hurley, notwithstanding the fact that he himself was the recipient of more benefits from Sargent's generosity than any other man.

FOR nearly a year, now, Hurley had been living upon the bounty of this man to whom he had never been anything more than a college associate. Some twenty years earlier, the two men had attended Hanford University together. Their positions at that time had been re-

versed. Jacob Hurley, only son of the well-known physician, had given every promise of reflecting honor upon his Alma Mater. Richly endowed both physically and mentally, he regarded the world as his oyster. Walter Sargent, on the other hand, a slight, anemic-looking youth with kind, bashful eyes, seemed doomed to failure. His hobby—wild birds and animals—stamped him as a dreamer. He came of a family of poor farmers in the southern part of the State.

Hurley, brilliant and energetic, took to law as naturally as a duck takes to water. His father's influence secured him a junior partnership with Hastings & Huddleston, a prominent firm of lawyers. For two or three years he forged ahead. He gave every promise of becoming, some day, a great lawyer. Then something happened.

It was not a question of legality, but a moral right was involved. It is often hard to determine right and wrong in their relation to law, for one often overlaps the other; but it is not hard to determine right and wrong by the good old-fashioned measure, the Golden Rule. Hurley chose to ignore this on the twisted plea of business versus sentiment. In the resultant scene between himself and his partners, bitter words ensued. Hastings and Huddleston were lawyers of the old school. Their reputation had been built upon honesty and fair dealing, and they told their hot-headed young partner so in no uncertain terms.

Hurley, angered by the imputation, furiously demanded an immediate release from the partnership, with the return of the sum his father had invested for him with the firm. His demand was complied with on the spot, before he had time to cool off and withdraw it.

The following month found him in business for himself. He did fairly well at the outset. He had already established a reputation for agressiveness. Soon it began to be whispered about town that Hurley was a man with a price. For a while everything went well; what he lost in legitimate business, he made up for in business of a shadier sort. But little by little he began to lose caste. Men of the better sort shunned him. The avenues of legitimate investment were closed to him, one by one. He was forced to dabble in what other men passed up. The result was disaster.

His father died about this time, leaving a depleted estate. In one last desperate effort to retrieve his fortunes, Hurley overreached himself. He got away with a certain small sum of money, and the scandal was hushed up because of the prominence of other men involved. But Hurley's career as a lawyer in the State of California came to an abrupt end.

For years he flitted about the country, living on his wits. He became a promoter of sorts. Once or twice his activities were investigated by the Federal officers, though nothing definite was found against him. His fortunes varied: in the golden months of 1919-20 he made large sums, but greed, his Nemesis, again destroyed him, and the post-war depression of 1921 wiped him out, utterly.

IN his last extremity he bethought himself of his old college friend, Walter Sargent. Fortune, the fickle, makes fine sport of mortals: on the barren acres where Sargent's father had toiled himself into a premature grave, oil had been struck. In the space of two short years Walter Sargent, an underpaid and still dreamy-eyed, old-young professor in ornithology at Hanford University, found himself in possession of over half a million dollars.

He did the characteristic thing—endowed his Alma Mater with a miniature ornithological museum and a chair in ornithology for his successor at twice the salary he himself had received. Then he built himself a modest mountain lodge in the Sierra Madre, in the midst of the haunts of his friends the birds, and gave himself up heart and soul to his hobby.

His money gave him unlimited latitude in enjoying this hobby to the fullest. There was no modern appliance appertaining to photography which he did not possess himself of at once. He loved to lie for hours, with his camera, hidden in some deep leafy cañon, and watch the birds at home, and record their simple doings upon his films. He'd travel miles for a picture of some rare songster.

When Hurley came to him with a story of hard luck, Sargent believed him. He was himself still so recent from poverty that he found it easy to sympathize with a fellow-being in distress. He did not know that Hurley's predicament was of his own making, and his gentle, tolerant heart went out to his old college chum. He not only gave him food and shelter, but hired him as his secretary.

Jacob Hurley took his friend's generosity with an outward show of ostentatious gratitude. Inwardly he despised the man for his weakness and envied him his good fortune. For months he brooded over it, nursing his fancied wrongs against society and chafing under the inertia of their sequestered life in the lodge, and scheming—scheming. As Sargent was paying him a regular salary more than sufficient for his needs, he could not very well ask his friend for a large loan—such a request might cause his dismissal.

The idea of forging Sargent's name to a check occurred to him, but his fear of imprisonment deterred him. Still, the idea had come to his mind again, this morning, when he noted the bank balance on the stub of Sargent's check-book, when his friend paid the glazier.

His eyes narrowed, momentarily, as he thought of that balance of six figures of uninvested capital, and of the monthly addition to it from the flowing wells on Sargent's barren acres.

He also thought of another matter.

DURING the morning, Len Pascoe, a cow-man grazing several herds of cattle on the meadows back of the Divide, had called upon Sargent to repay him a certain sum of money. Pascoe had borrowed the money—ten thousand dollars—a month earlier, to buy a herd of Herefords, which was being driven through the mountains by an outfit from the Owen's Valley country. Len Pascoe was a shrewd bargainer. He had resold the herd at a fifty-per-cent profit in small lots to his neighbors, and in repaying Sargent his loan, he had handed him a thousand-dollar bill for the use of the money.

Sargent had refused emphatically to accept such a large bonus, but Pascoe had ridden away his pinto leaving the bill on the table with the rest of the roll of large bills; and with characteristic carelessness, Sargent had tossed the money into the drawer of the library table. Hurley's eyes now strayed to the drawer; and Sargent, noting it, said without the slightest trace of suspicion:

"Funny fellows, these back-country cattlemen. They carry rolls of money around in their pockets as if it was plug tobacco. Can you imagine a man like Len Pascoe, owner of a thousand head of cattle, doing business without a checking account? He's a hangover from the old Spanish days when a man's saddlebag was his safety-deposit and his gun his burglar-protection. Just the same, I wish he hadn't left all that currency here." He smiled ruefully. "I'd hate to be murdered for an insignificant sum like that."

"Yes," said Hurley hoarsely.

"I suppose I ought to take it down to the city tomorrow and bank it," Sargent went on, "but I've been planning a trip to Alpine Meadows to get those pictures of the Mexican crossbill. They'll be moving south soon, and it's my last chance to study them before they begin migrating. I have a request from *Black's Magazine* for a paper on the subject, and I don't want to disappoint the editor."

Hurley took a long puff on his cigar. When he spoke, he chose his words carefully.

"I had planned to go after trout on the headwaters of the San Gabriel myself while you were gone. But if you insist, I'll take the money to the bank for you."

"You'll do nothing of the sort, Hurley," Sargent replied quickly. "I wont have you riding alone over fifteen miles of mountain trails with eleven thousand dollars in your pockets. There've been too many hold-ups lately. You run along to the San Gabriel with your rod. I'll leave the money in the house until we return. We can take it down together, then." He frowned, mildly. "Confounded awkward of Pascoe to bring it to me like this, with the whole countryside knowing of his deal. I'll leave the money in the drawer there. I don't want a thief tearing the house upside down hunting for it. It'll be as safe there as anywhere."

Hurley glanced at the burning end of his cigar.

"You ought to have a wall-safe installed, Walter," he said.

Sargent shook his head.

"That would be inviting disaster. I am known to pay my bills by check. That's the best safeguard of a rich man living alone in a place like this." He smiled. "I'm not a dead shot like our friend, Pascoe," he said. . . . . "Hello! What's that burning smell?" he exclaimed, sniffing the air and looking about him.

HURLEY turned his head, then sprang out of his seat and dropped to his knees on the woolen Navajo rug beside the chair, and brushed his hand over the rug.

"Must have dropped some ashes from

my cigar," he said apologetically as he arose and rubbed the sole of his shoe over a small smoking spot on the rug. "Sorry. Careless of me," he added as he returned to his chair.

Sargent leaned forward and glanced at the tiny blackened hole in the Navajo. He said nothing for a moment, but sat regarding the burned spot on the sun-flooded rug with a curious intenseness. Hurley looked at him out of the corner of his shifty eyes.

Sargent raised his finger and pointed to the spot. "Look, Hurley," he said, under his breath.

Hurley's gaze followed Sargent's finger, inquiringly. "What," he exclaimed, rising, "—still burning?"

Sargent held up his hand. "Watch!" he said.

Hurley stood staring at the spot, from which a tiny column of smoke rose. The odor of burning wool began to fill the room. He took a step forward to stamp out the fire, but Sargent restrained him.

Arising without a word, he crossed to the plate-glass window and examined it briefly, then returned to the rug, where Hurley was stamping out the fire.

Sargent pushed him aside and held his hand, palm up, directly over the burnt spot. A moment later he withdrew it with an exclamation of pain. Then he led Hurley to the window and pointed to a large air-blister the size of a dime, in the middle of the glass.

"That's what did it, not your cigar," he said. "The blister acts as a burning-glass when the sun shines upon it at a certain angle. Good thing we discovered it before leaving. The house would have burned up while we were gone."

Turning, he took a metal ash-tray from the table and placed it over the burned spot on the rug. Then he took an old photographic film from the drawer of the table and laid the film upon the tray.

"Now watch," he said.

Soon the highly inflammable film began to curl up under the heat. A few seconds later it burst into flame.

Hurley stared at it, wide-eyed with astonishment.

"I'll be damned!" he muttered, drawing his breath in sharply.

THEN, with the suddenness of inspiration, the great idea occurred to Hurley. While Sargent crossed to the window and pulled the shade down, he returned to his seat. A curious, veiled look crept into his black eyes, as he glanced at the small heap of ashes in the metal tray upon the rug; and when he picked up his half-dead cigar, his hand trembled slightly.

"Be sure to remember always to keep the shade pulled down below the blister until I can have the glass replaced," Sargent said. . . . . "Oh, hello, Sanderson! Come on in," he called out through the open door as a tall figure in riding-breeches and a broad-brimmed hat stepped up on the porch.

The man removed his hat and wiped the perspiration from his forehead with his handkerchief. His hair was sandy and crisp, and his eyes very blue and direct of gaze. He shook hands with Sargent and nodded to Hurley.

"Thanks, no," he said, refusing the chair Sargent offered him. "I'm on my way to Switzer's. Just stopped in to say hello."

He did not tell Sargent that he had met Len Pascoe on the trail, and that Pascoe had told him about the cattle-deal and its successful culmination.

"Going down the trail today?" he inquired of Sargent.

"Why, no." Sargent replied. "Both Hurley and myself are leaving for a trip into the mountains tomorrow. I'm going to Alpine Meadows to get some pictures of the Mexican crossbill. Hurley is going to try his luck fishing up on the headwaters of the San Gabriel. We'll be leaving about daylight."

"Oh," said Sanderson. He wondered about the money. He decided that he would make it his business to keep his eyes on the house during Sargent's absence. It was just like Sargent to go away and leave his money lying around unprotected.

STRICTLY speaking, protecting the homes of the mountain people did not come within Sanderson's duties as a U. S. forest ranger, but he was the kind of man who believed in always doing a little more than his duty. Besides, he and Sargent were friends—a good deal more than friends, in fact. His wife came from Pomona, the same town where Sargent had been born and raised. She and Sargent had grown up there together. There had been some sort of a romantic boy-and-girl attachment between the two at one time, Sanderson knew. He also knew that Eileen's folks

had opposed the match strongly. They were old settlers—not rich, but solid folk, and they had looked with great disfavor upon their only daughter keeping company with the son of a poor struggling farmer, as they had looked with disfavor upon her marrying him, two years later. Sanderson knew that his wife's heart was his own, absolutely, just as he knew that Sargent had never forgotten, and that Eileen was the reason that Sargent had never married.

The ranger, with some misgivings, had accepted Sargent's offer of sending his son to Hanford and paying for his tuition. Sargent had overcome his objections by asking him to consider his son's welfare rather than his own pride. The friendship between the two men had been clinched upon this argument, and Sargent had neither in word nor action violated the pact. If he still loved Eileen, he gave no outward sign.

"You came just in time to witness a peculiar phenomenon, Sanderson," Sargent said. "Get the ash-tray, Hurley, and let's show him."

The forest ranger looked from one to the other, as Hurley placed the ash-tray with a bit of photographic film upon the rug, while Sargent ran the shade up. When the film burst into flame, a moment later, Sanderson stepped back involuntarily.

Sargent laughed. then explained.

"But wont the blister burn the window-shade?" Sanderson asked.

Sargent shook his head.

"The shade is too close to the pane. The focus has to be just right to produce the result we've witnessed—just as the focus of a camera lens must be adjusted to the film in the camera. There is no danger, as long as we remember to keep the shade pulled down below the blister during the afternoon."

"Well, be sure you don't forget it," Sanderson admonished them, "or you'll come home some day and find nothing but a concrete foundation where your house used to be." He pulled out his watch. "I must be on my way. Got to make Switzer's before dark. So long!"

Hurley shot the two men a sidelong glance as Sargent escorted his visitor to the door; and as he watched the ranger, through the window, swinging himself into the saddle of his waiting horse, a curious smile flitted across his cynical face.

Luck seemed to be playing into his hands.

AFTER an early breakfast the next morning, the two men packed their burros with provisions for a week, blankets and other paraphernalia, and struck into the mountains. Hurley carried an automatic pistol strapped to his belt. Sargent went unarmed, as was his habit.

Early in the afternoon they separated, Hurley taking the trail to the San Gabriel River, by the way of Mount Wilson, and Sargent going east through Bear Cañon to Alpine Meadows, twenty miles distant.

Hurley did not proceed very far on the trail. In the dense undergrowth on the high divide which separates Bear Cañon from the Millard, he unpacked his donkey and made camp. From the top of a boulder commanding a view of the entire length of the Cañon, he watched Sargent's progress, through a pair of binoculars. At four in the afternoon, when he saw Sargent lead his burro over the last ridge into the high meadow country beyond Bear Cañon, Hurley put away his glasses, fed and watered his pack-animal, tied the beast to a tree, and started back to the house.

He walked swiftly, increasing his pace as he noted the approach of a thunderstorm from the north. Brief electrical storms were frequent at night in the mountains at this time of the year, when the cool sea-currents of the Pacific Ocean met the hot air of the desert after sundown, at the five-thousand-foot levels.

It was already dark, and a few large drops of water were falling when Hurley inserted the key in the door of the lodge. As he pushed it open, a flash of lightning illuminated the pine-clad ridges to the north. Stepping hastily inside, he shut the door behind him and pulled down all the shades, lest his light should be observed from the trail below.

For the same reason he did not turn on the electric light, but went into the dark-room, lighted the red-shaded kerosene developing-lamp and carried it into the living-room. It gave him sufficient light for his purpose. Sargent used this lantern in an emergency, when the electric current went off, as was frequently happening in the mountains during storms and floods.

The first thing he did was to cut with a pair of scissors a small circular hole the size of a quarter in the drawn window-shade. Then he adjusted the hole to the blister in the pane by manipulating the spring roller of the shade a few times.

Next he went into the dark-room and took from a shelf a box of new eight-by-ten films. Tearing the lid off the box, he placed it on edge on the floor a few inches in front of the burned spot on the Navajo rug. Behind and about the box he piled an armful of excelsior and film-trimmings from the waste-basket under the trimming table in the dark-room.

The whole mass he sprinkled copiously with kerosene.

Putting the kerosene can away, he surveyed the result with satisfaction. Sometime during the following day, when the sun was in the right position, the blister in the pane would ignite the films and the oil-soaked excelsior, while he himself was twenty miles away, whipping the San Gabriel River for trout, with Sargent's eleven thousand dollars safely hidden away.

He smiled to himself as he thought of how Sargent by his "scientific" demonstration had played into his hands. With one stroke he would possess himself of a snug sum of money and cover up his crime completely. The lodge would be burned to the ground long before anyone could reach it. Sargent would, of course, think that the paper currency had been consumed in the flames.

CROSSING the floor swiftly, Hurley opened the drawer of the table and took from it the roll of money. He was just stuffing the bills into his pocket when he heard the hoofbeats of a horse outside. Blowing out the lamp quickly, he reached for his gun and stood still, listening.

A peal of thunder reverberated through the distant cañons, and on the heels of it came the sharp rattling of the handle of the door. He raised his gun and waited breathlessly in the pitch-dark room. The rattling was repeated. Above the patter of the rain on the roof, Hurley heard the pawing of a horse on the hard earth, then a man's half smothered ejaculation of surprise.

For several moments he remained motionless, pistol in hand, listening. He heard the man walk around to the rear door and try it, then silence again.

For two full minutes he waited; then, hearing no further sound, he put the lamp back on the shelf in the developing-room, then opened the front door cautiously and stepped outside, closing the door softly after him.

There was no time to be lost. It was necessary for him to be in camp on the San Gabriel before daylight, to make it appear that he had been there all night; so, stepping off the porch, he turned the collar of his overcoat up against the rain, and hugging the dark shadow of the house, felt his way, gun in hand, along the wall.

In front of the plate-glass window he had paused to assure himself again that the hole in the shade was adjusted properly, when a voice hailed him from the darkness, on his right.

"That you, Sargent?"

Hurley recognized Sanderson's voice, whirled about in the direction of the sound, and made out the dark figure of the ranger seated on his horse, silhouetted against the sky, upon a rocky ledge above the house.

With a savage oath Hurley slung up his pistol and pulled the trigger. As the gun spat fire, a tremendous bolt of lightning tore out of the sky. He got an instant's glimpse of the rearing horse, and of his victim reaching for his gun with one hand and clawing the air wildly with the other, like a drowning man. Then man and horse went tumbling backward over the edge of the cañon, as the half-drawn gun in the man's hand exploded.

After a hasty descent into the cañon to assure himself that both man and beast were dead, Hurley hastened up the trail, with the rain pelting in his face.

It was nearly midnight when he pushed the branches of the dense undergrowth aside, untied his donkey and led the animal back to the trail.

He felt very safe now. The stars were out once more. The thunderstorm had passed to the south. Before daylight he'd be in camp on the San Gabriel. Sometime the dead body of the ranger and his horse would be found at the bottom of the cañon, but he did not feel any uneasiness on that score.

He knew that the bullet of the high-powered automatic had passed entirely through the man's body. They always did. That was the boast of the manufacturers of the gun. His alibi was perfect; there'd be nothing to connect him with the crime. After cleaning his gun and substituting a new shell for the discharged one in the cartridge clip, he smiled. Luck seemed to be coming his way.

THE thunderstorm overtook Sargent halfway between Bear Cañon and Alpine Meadows and forced him to seek shelter behind a rocky ledge near the trail. As he was less than ten miles from his destination, he decided to camp until dawn, and so he lit a fire and then began unpacking his burro. After ranging his wet blankets up to dry near the fire, he looked through his photographic paraphernalia to assure himself that the rain had not injured any of it, and was chagrined to discover that in his absent-minded way he had forgotten the most essential thing of all—his box of new eight-by-ten films.

He had bought the films in Los Angeles a week earlier, on the recommendation of a friend. They were the last word in sensitiveness, sensitive to the entire spectrum, including deep red. They were, also, specially prepared with reference to color-separation, and therefore particularly well adapted for such work as his, where the correct representation of light values were desirable.

He had looked forward for years to a film of this nature—a film that would separate the colors of his subjects distinctly. While the manufacturers did not in any sense claim color-recording for them, they guaranteed absolute faithfulness to color values. Sargent was very anxious to test this film upon the brightly colored plumage of the Mexican crossbill, and was very much put out at his inexcusable absent-mindedness.

The curious discovery of the blister in the window-pane and its resultant effect, had occupied his mind during his packing. Even now he felt a vague uneasiness about it, coupled with his disappointment at having forgotten his films. Of course, he had plenty of other films in his pack, but he had been particularly anxious to see what these new ones would do.

As he crouched before the fire, warming his chilled hands, a terrific bolt of lightning flared across the sky, followed by a peal of thunder that shook the ledge under which he sat as if it had been jarred by the blow of some giant hand. It suddenly occurred to him that a peal of thunder like this, or a blast of some kind, might jar the spring of the shade-roller and cause the shade to fly up. How foolish of him not to think of that! He ought to have tacked the shade down to the window-sill before leaving.

The more he thought about it, the more it worried him. He could not rid himself of the notion, and the desirability of taking his pictures with the new films decided him. So after making himself a cup of cocoa, he put out his fire and started back to the house. He arrived there an hour before dawn. When he inserted his key in the door and pushed it open, a strong smell of kerosene assailed his nostrils. Closing the door behind him, he pressed the electric button on the wall beside the door, but the snap of the switch was unaccompanied by light.

He concluded, and rightly so, that the thunderstorm had blown out the fuses. Fumbling his way along the wall to the dark-room, he found the shelf where he kept a box of matches and the red-shaded emergency lamp.

LIGHTING the lamp, he returned to the living-room. His amazement at what he discovered there almost petrified him. At first he could not believe his eyes, but stood there with the red-shaded lamp held high above his head, staring at the fiendishly ingenious firetrap.

Instinctively his eyes traveled to the window-shade. With a gasp he noted the hole cut in the shade around the blister. On the floor lay the small green circular disk cut out of the shade. Picking it up, he placed it, absently, over the hole, and noted how perfectly it fitted it.

He suddenly bethought himself of the money—Pascoe's eleven thousand dollars. Crossing the floor, quickly, he opened the drawer and found that the money was gone. Shutting the drawer, he slumped into a chair.

It was characteristic of him that he should refuse to admit a suspicion of guilt against either Hurley or Sanderson. Both men were his friends. He refused to entertain the suspicion for a moment. It was clear that some one knowing about the money—perhaps one of Pascoe's own riders—had followed the cattle-man to the lodge and had watched the house, had overheard the conversation and had witnessed their experiment through the open door.

Far-fetched as this presumption seemed, he still clung to it desperately, rather than suspect either of his two friends.

Rising wearily, he picked up the box of films. His first concern was that they had been exposed to light and ruined. On sec-

ond thought, however, he considered it likely that only the one on top had been exposed, and so he put the lid on the box and carried the box back to the shelf in the dark-room. Then he set about cleaning up the oil-soaked excelsior and film-trimmings, carrying the whole mess out to the incinerator on the rocky ledge at the edge of the cañon fifty feet distant from the house.

Striking a match, he applied it to the inflammable mass, and in the resultant blaze of light noted a dark object on the ground beside the incinerator. Stooping, he picked it up.

It was an automatic pistol. He held it up to the light. Upon the handle of the pistol were stamped four letters: *"U. S. F. S."*—"United States Forestry Service!"

He ran his hand over his eyes as if to brush away some unpleasant vision. The gun was Sanderson's! He had seen it too often to be mistaken.

He stood staring at it in the light of the leaping flames, which rose out of the incinerator six feet into the air, and filled the cañon below him with an eerie, malignant radiance. Glancing about him, he noted that a large piece of rock had been broken off the ledge near the edge. Craning his neck over the rim of the cañon, he was startled to discover what looked in the uncertain light like the body of a horse at the bottom of the gully two hundred feet below him.

It was the work of less than five minutes to reach the spot where the horse lay. The animal, Sanderson's, was crumpled up with its head under its body, its neck broken. Not far distant lay the body of a man. In spite of the bruised condition of the man's face, Sargent recognized him at once as his friend the ranger.

Turning the body over half-dazedly, he discovered that the man was quite dead—that he had been dead for several hours. The body was almost cold.

When the first shock of his horror had passed, Sargent did some quick thinking. What had happened was too evident to admit of any doubt. Sanderson had stolen the money and in his hurry to get away with it in the darkness, had ridden over the edge of the cliff by mistake, and had met his death. It seemed inconceivable, but it was too plain to be questioned.

Sargent thought of the youth, his protégé at Hanford, and of a woman, no longer young, but with friendly, understanding eyes, in the little cottage at the mouth of Rubio Cañon. They must never know that their husband and father had died a criminal.

Replacing the automatic pistol in the gun-holster of the dead man, he searched his pockets hastily for the roll of currency. When he did not find it, he extended his search about the spot for a radius of a hundred feet, with no result. Then he concluded that the dead man had hidden the money somewhere before riding over the cliff.

Giving up his search, he returned to the house and called up the Los Angeles Police Station by long distance and reported. He said nothing about the firetrap nor of the loss of the money. The thought that was uppermost in his mind was to save Eileen Sanderson and her son from humiliation and disgrace.

The sergeant at the other end of the line asked a few quick questions, then rang off. A couple of men from the coroner's office would leave for the lodge, immediately.

When he had hung up the receiver, Sargent proceeded to remove every last trace of the firetrap; then he hastily pasted the little green circular disk of shade-cloth, which he had found upon the floor, over the blister in the pane. Then he ran the shade up so that the hole was hidden by the roller.

R. W. THAIN, of the Metropolitan Squad, was a soft-voiced, roly-poly little man with small, black, intensely bright eyes and a gentle, humorous mouth. His manner was as gentle as his mouth.

You'd never have suspected him of being a detective. He never appeared to be in a hurry, yet there was a certain alertness in his movements that was reflected in his bright eyes, and behind those eyes, a mind that worked like chain lightning.

He was not your deductive paragon of fiction. He was merely a perfectly balanced mechanism of flesh and blood, kept at a maximum pitch of working efficiency by a minimum of bad habits. His knowledge of human nature was the result of years of careful observation, and of the storing away of these results as they were gleaned bit by bit, labeled and classified, in the filing-system which was his brain.

He was just about to close his desk for the day in the little cubbyhole of a place on the top floor of the Central Station

which was his office, when the telephone at his elbow rang.

"This is Thain," he said in response to the inquiry on the wire as he took the receiver off the hook.

"Coroner's office speaking, Mr. Thain. Can you step over for a moment? Doctor Shale would like to see you. It's about the man we brought in from the mountains this afternoon."

"Be right over," Thain replied briefly, and hung up. He never asked questions over the telephone.

Doctor Shale, the coroner, looked up from his task as Thain entered. He drew the sheet back from the still form on the slab in the middle of the small room under the cluster of incandescents. Briefly he explained the circumstances connected with the man's death.

"The fall would have killed him, all right," he said, "but he was dead before he hit bottom." He drew the stained shirt aside and pointed to a small wound no larger than a dime just below the fifth rib, slightly to the left. "Shot through the heart," he said succinctly. "High-powered bullet. Went clear through him. Emerged half inch below the left shoulder-blade."

Thain leaned forward and examined the wound.

"H'm!" was all he said. He glanced absently at the man's uniform, then drew the lapel of the coat back. "Forest ranger," he commented as he noted the small badge pinned below the pocket of the flannel shirt.

The coroner nodded.

"His traps are over there," he said, pointing to a table in the corner, upon which several objects lay.

Thain crossed to the table. He noted the objects one by one. An automatic pistol with holster and belt, a hunting-knife, a waterproof match-box, a cheap pipe, a rubber tobacco pouch and a small pile of silver coins. He stood regarding the objects for some moments without touching them, seemingly lost in thought. Then he reached for the gun and drew it gingerly from the holster with his thumb and forefinger. He subjected it to a quick scrutiny, turned it over, noted the initialed handle, then took out the clip of cartridges.

"H'm!" he said, "one shell's been discharged." He squinted through the barrel. "Recently," he added. "Anybody handle it?" he inquired.

Doctor Shale shook his head.

Thain dropped the clip of cartridges into his coat pocket. He held the pistol up to the light, then raised it to his nose and sniffed at it.

"Positive nobody handled it?" he asked again.

"Positive!"

Once more Thain raised it to his nose, then replaced it in the holster and crossed to the dead man's side. Raising the right hand, he smelled the finger-tips, one by one, then let the hand drop back upon the sheet. He seemed to be thinking. "Got an ink-pad and a sheet of paper handy, Doctor?" he asked.

"Sure, in the next room. Shall I get it?"

"Please," said Thain.

A moment later when the coroner returned with the ink-pad and a sheet of paper, Thain took the dead man's finger-prints, by pressing the fingers of the right hand, one by one, on the pad and transferring them to the white surface of the paper.

"I'm going back to the station," he said as he folded up the piece of paper. He picked up the gun, holster and all, and slipped it into his coat pocket. "I'll call you in an hour or so and let you know if I discover anything. So long."

"JIM," he said, as he walked into the photographic bureau at headquarters, fifteen minutes later, and handed the pistol to the man in charge, "make me a picture of the finger-prints on this gat."

"Yes sir," the man replied.

"Hustle. Important. Bring the print to me as soon as it is developed. Also the gun. Don't handle it more than you have to."

Thain waited till the prints were finished and brought in, with the pistol, to his desk.

"Anything else?" the photographer asked.

"That's all, thanks," Thain replied.

When the door had closed after the man, Thain picked up the photographed finger-prints. There were a good many of them on the sheet and some of them were very distinct. Unfolding the paper upon which he had taken the imprint of the dead man's fingers, in ink, he compared the two, lips pursed.

"Thought so," he said softly. He picked up the gun, raised it to his nose and smelled it again. "H'm, coal-oil! Thought it was funny there was

no coal-oil on the dead man's fingers." Then he dropped the weapon into the drawer of his desk, together with the two slips of paper.

Leaning back in his chair, he closed his eyes and sat for several moments drumming on the edge of the desk with the tips of his short, stubby fingers, apparently lost in thought. At the end of that time he opened his eyes, reached for the telephone and asked the operator to connect him with the coroner's office.

"Thain, again, Doctor," he told the coroner. "The finger-prints on the gun are not the dead man's. Better hustle a jury together in the morning, while I run up to see this fellow Sargent, who reported."

"You wont need to, Thain," the coroner replied. "I talked with him on the phone less than five minutes ago. He's on his way here with Sanderson's widow. They'll be here in fifteen minutes."

"Fine," said Thain. "When you get through with them, send them over. I want to question them."

The coroner said that he would, and Thain rang off.

WHEN a man and a woman were ushered into Thain's office an hour or so later, he arose from his desk and shook hands with the man.

"Mr. Sargent, I assume," he said, pleasantly, as he held the man's gaze for an instant, then dropped his eyes with a disarming smile. "Educated man," was his mental observation.

Sargent nodded.

"This is Mrs. Sanderson, Mr. Thain," he said, gravely.

Thain acknowledged the introduction with a bow, noting the traces of recent tears upon the woman's face.

"Be seated, madam," he said, drawing a chair close to his desk for her. Indicating one on the other side for Sargent, he dropped into his own before the desk and leaned back. His tone when he addressed Sargent was pleasantly interrogative. He put his questions with consideration for the dead man's widow.

Sargent answered them all frankly, and in a clear, steady voice. When once or twice a sob arose in the woman's throat during the recital, Thain paused before going on.

His quizzing was more of a kindly, impersonal chat than a questioning—his usual procedure. He never stooped to bluster. It was bad ethics and poor business. So he let Sargent do the talking, and by a hint or two, a question here and there, an intercepted look between the man and the woman, gleaned the information that the two were, or had been, a good deal more than friends.

He considered this for what it was worth.

His next question was more direct, and he watched Sargent's face closely through half-closed lids as he put it to him:

"How much time elapsed between the time of your arrival at the lodge, Mr. Sargent, and your discovery of Mr. Sanderson's—what had happened?"

"Not long—twenty or twenty-five minutes, perhaps half an hour—certainly no longer," Sargent replied.

"It was still dark?" Thain prompted.

"Yes. I was burning some refuse in the incinerator on the bluffs overlooking the cañon. In the resultant light I discovered Mr. Sanderson's dead horse at the foot of the bluffs."

"Refuse?" said Thain in surprise. "Wasn't this rather—er—unusual, burning refuse at three-thirty in the morning?"

There was no hint of challenge in his voice, but Sargent's face changed color, and Thain was quick to notice this.

"I had neglected to empty my waste-basket, before leaving," Sargent replied stiffly. "When I went into the dark-room to get the box of films I had forgotten, I noted that the basket was full, and so I carried the inflammable refuse out to the incinerator and burned it up."

"I see," said Thain. He dropped his eyes as if in deprecation, but he chose his next question carefully: "Inflammable? How? Paper, you mean?"

"No. Film-trimmings—mixed with excelsior," Sargent replied shortly.

"Oh!" said Thain. He leaned forward in his chair slightly. "Not rags soaked in oil—coal-oil, for instance?"

He asked the question idly, but his small bright eyes regarded Sargent intently, and the sudden tensing of the man's features as he replied, "What do you mean—coal-oil?" did not escape him.

Mrs. Sanderson glanced from one to the other inquiringly. She was a small, slight woman, of the blonde Scandinavian type. Her coloring was still girlishly vivid, and her hair was the nearest thing to spun gold Thain had ever seen. Twen-

ty-six or -eight would have been his estimate of her age, instead of thirty-eight, which she was.

Her hair, he decided, was responsible for this. The graying process in extreme blondes like Mrs. Sanderson comes much later than in people of the darker types, he knew. Also her eyes, when she turned them upon him, were clear as a child's and of a deep violet blue.

She turned them full upon him now. The inquiry in them was half a challenge. She was beginning to sense an air of hostility in the man before her, and woman-like, and without pausing to consider, was preparing to fly to the defense of Sargent, her friend. That she might be incriminating herself, in view of what had occurred, and of what Sargent had admitted about their past, did not seem to occur to her.

Thain was getting worried. He wondered if he had been too hasty, and so he said, in a tone of conciliation, addressing the woman, rather than Sargent, but keeping his eyes on the man's face:

"You will excuse me if my questions seem impertinent. But there are certain things which I must know."

The woman's gloved hand closed about the arm of her chair.

"You mean—that—that something is wrong?" she asked.

Thain nodded.

"Your husband was murdered, shot to death, madam," he said, as gently as he could.

He watched Sargent out of the tail of his eye as he said it. The effect upon the man was not at all what he had expected. Sargent's face, instead of betraying fear, was a study in blank amazement.

"I—I don't understand," he stammered.

Thain was worried in earnest now. Still, he had one more card up his sleeve. Opening the drawer of his desk, he took from it Sanderson's automatic pistol and laid the gun on top of the desk.

"You recognize this as your husband's, of course?" he asked the woman.

"Yes," she replied in a low tone.

"And you, Mr. Sargent?"

Sargent leaned forward and stared at the pistol, his face white as a sheet. He seemed to be wetting his lips before replying. "Certainly—yes," he finally managed to say in a voice half-defiant but steady and distinct.

"When did you last see this gun?" Thain asked.

Sargent seemed to weigh his words before replying, then said:

"When I found Mr. Sanderson in the cañon. The gun was in his holster."

"You are sure of that?" Thain asked mildly.

"Yes—sure."

"You didn't handle it—take it out of the holster, or anything?"

"No, I didn't take it out of the holster."

Thain drew the photographic print from the drawer and handed it to Sargent across the desk, watching the man's face with his small, ferret-like eyes.

"These are finger-prints taken from the gun," he said. "You'll note they are very clear and distinct. The reason for their distinctness is that the man who made them had some sort of oil upon his fingers." He paused impressively. "Not a single one of them are Mr. Sanderson's."

"I see," said Sargent in a dry, hollow voice. Almost involuntarily he glanced at the tips of his own fingers, as he remembered that his hands had been stained with kerosene from the oil-soaked excelsior.

Thain noted the glance, then dropped his eyes and said, as if addressing some one else:

"The man who made those oily finger-prints is the man I'm looking for—not necessarily the murderer, perhaps, but some one who knows what happened last night."

Sargent passed the print back to him. His face, still ashen, took on a determined look.

"I see," he said again. There was quiet challenge in his voice, now.

Thain's mental comment was: "Some bluffer." Aloud he said:

"Suppose you return to the lodge with me in the morning. I'd like to go over the ground with you." And the relief in the other's face at the changing of the subject was unmistakable, as he answered: "Very well, Mr. Thain."

SARGENT had ample time to reflect upon the probable consequences of the fact that he had handled Sanderson's gun, leaving the telltale finger-prints upon it with his oil-stained hands, as he and Thain returned to the lodge the following day.

He was aghast at the turn affairs had taken. He could think of no other explanation than that the pistol had dropped from Sanderson's gun-holster as the man rode over the ledge, and that in striking

the rocks the discharged shell had exploded, killing the ranger. One thing alone remained clear in his mind: the woman he had loved—and still loved with the silent faithfulness of his lonely heart—must be shielded at all hazards.

When he and Thain stood in the stuffy, kerosene-smelling living-room of the lodge, he knew that only the taking of his finger-prints was necessary to cause his arrest on a charge of murder, and he wondered why Thain hadn't done so, already.

Almost involuntarily his gaze traveled to the spot on the Navajo rug discolored by the coal-oil of the fire-trap.

Thain glanced about him. His eyes seemed to avoid the spot on the rug. But if Sargent had thought that the detective had failed to notice it, he was soon disillusioned.

Stooping, Thain poked the small burned spot in the middle of the satin with the toe of his shoe, and said in a mildly inquiring tone:

"Tried to have a fire?"

Sargent swallowed hard.

"Yes," he said as easily as he could. "Hurley, my friend, dropped some cigar-ashes there yesterday. Before we discovered it, the ashes had burned a hole in the rug."

"Oh," Thain said with a smile. "Lucky you discovered it in time. Kerosene and fire have made a lot of trouble for the insurance companies."

Sargent smiled wanly as he replied: "The oil was not there then. I spilled it myself last night when I filled my dark-lantern in the dark, after I found that the thunderstorm had blown out the electric fuses."

"I see," said Thain. "Hurley? Who is Hurley?" he asked.

Sargent explained.

"H'm! Left here the same time you did. For the San Gabriel River, you said?"

"Yes."

THAIN'S eyes wandered about the room and came to rest upon the small green disk pasted in the center of the plate glass windowpane.

"What's that for?" he asked.

Sargent drew his breath in sharply as Thain crossed to the window.

"There's a blister in the glass—a flaw. I pasted the piece of goods over it because the rays of the sun filtering through the blister during the heat of the day are separated into all the colors of the spectrum. It is very trying to the eyes if you happen to look directly at it," he explained glibly.

"Very interesting!" Thain bent forward and examined the disk briefly. "Shade-cloth?" he asked, glancing at the shade over his head; then as Sargent answered in the affirmative, the detective turned and looked out of the window.

"Nice view," he commented.

"Finest in the Sierra Madres," Sargent agreed enthusiastically, relieved at the changing of the subject, and when Thain suggested that they go into the cañon and look the ground over, he agreed with alacrity—too much alacrity, the detective thought.

"Before we go," Thain said, "would you mind showing me the lamp you used last night—the dark-room lantern, I mean."

"Certainly not. I'll bring it."

While Sargent stepped into the next room, Thain reached quickly for the ring in the window-shade above his head and pulled the shade down. He noted the hole in the middle of it and also that the hole would come directly over the disk pasted on the pane if the shade was pulled down far enough—further that the disk, undoubtedly, fitted the hole.

Running the shade up again as quickly and silently as he had pulled it down, he turned about and faced Sargent coming through the door with the red-shaded dark-room lantern in his hand.

SARGENT put the lamp on the table, and Thain bestowed upon it a cursory glance, without leaving his position at the window, then pointed to the door.

"That your dark-room?" he asked.

"Yes."

"May I see it, please?"

"Certainly."

As Sargent turned to precede him into the room, Thain reached out his hand and with a quick flip of his thumb-nail scraped the small green disk off the windowpane. Then he followed Sargent across the threshold.

When Sargent switched on the red-shaded electric light over the developing tray, the detective looked about him. To note everything in detail in the shortest possible space of time, was his habit. Nothing escaped him. He saw before him a photographic laboratory that would have put to shame the police laboratory of the city of Los Angeles.

Sargent, regaining his ease on his own familiar ground, proceeded to cultivate Thain through his hobby. He succeeded admirably. Thain had come into the dark-room to be cultivated—for a few minutes. He had reasons of his own for wanting to stay out of the living-room for that space of time.

He listened with well-simulated attention while Sargent rambled on about his hobby, waxing eloquent under the strain of having to entertain an undesired visitor. Sargent even took the box of new films from the shelf and explained to the detective their superior qualities.

"Those were the films you forgot—and returned for?" Thain asked, more to gain time than anything.

"Yes."

He was about to hand the box back to Sargent when he saw—or thought he saw—some finger-prints upon the top film. Lifting it out of the box, by the tips of his fingers, he held the film up to the light. He saw that he had not been mistaken. On it there were several finger-prints—seven he counted, quickly; and every one was imprinted clear and distinct in the sticky, gelatined surface of the film.

"Anybody handle this except yourself?" he asked.

Sargent leaned forward and glanced over Thain's shoulder.

"No one," he replied tensely. "Those finger-prints are mine."

"Positive? I mean that nobody but yourself has handled the films?"

"Absolutely positive," Sargent replied stoutly. "I broke the seal of the box myself last night," he lied, with the brazen mendacity of desperation.

THAIN pulled two pieces of paper from his pocket. One was the photographed prints taken from Sanderson's pistol, the other the ink-prints of the dead man's fingers. Holding them up to the light he compared them with the finger-prints on the film. Sargent held his breath. The game was up. The finger-prints, he knew, could be no one's but Sanderson's.

He waited breathlessly, eyes closed, for the verdict.

Then, to his unutterable amazement, Thain said:

"You're right, Mr. Sargent. The finger-prints on the film are not the same as the finger-prints on either of these pieces of paper. I guess they are yours, all right."

"Eh! What!" Sargent exclaimed. "Sure, I told you so," he stammered, hoarsely, as he recovered himself.

Thain put the film back in the box. His face was a study, as he shot Sargent a quick, perplexed glance. He was puzzled more than he would have cared to admit—even to himself. He had confidently expected to find that the finger-prints on the film would be the same as the finger-prints photographed from Sanderson's pistol, and he was certain that those were Sargent's. Whose, then, were these on the film? And why did Sargent claim them as his own?

He watched Sargent through narrowed eyes as the other put the lid back on the box with trembling hands, and placed the box on the table near the developing tray. Then he turned on his heel, quickly, as a faint burning smell came to his nostrils through the half-open door, and Sargent, after switching off the light, followed him into the living-room.

"Hello, Sargent!"

The voice was Len Pascoe's. The cattle-man pushed the screen door of the living-room open and entered without formality, as was his habit. He nodded to Thain. "How 'do. I heard about the accident from one of Morgan's riders yesterday, Sargent. Poor old Sanderson! Thought I'd drop in and get the details." He paused, eyes riveted on the Navajo rug in the middle of the floor. "Love o' Mike, Sargent, the thing's afire," he exclaimed, pointing at the rug with his quirt.

Sargent stared at the rug, then at the window, his eyes bulging from their sockets. Even as he looked, a tiny tongue of flame leaped into life in the center of the oil stain. He took a step forward, just as Thain calmly put his foot over the blaze, extinguishing it, then crossed to the window and pulled down the shade.

PASCOE was the first to break the silence.

"Somebody dropped a lighted match, I guess," he said. He turned to Sargent. "I was on my way down the trail. Going to Los Angeles on business. Thought maybe you'd like to have me take the money down and deposit it?"

Thain pricked up his ears.

"What money?" he interposed quickly.

"I beg your pardon?" the cattle-man replied stiffly. He measured the short, chubby figure of his interrogator with a

cold glance. "This is private business—mine and Sargent's."

"And mine!" Thain snapped, losing his temper for the first time in two years, and displaying his badge—then regretting it immediately.

"Nice badge!" Pascoe commented calmly. "Only it don't get anything in these parts, friend."

Thain's small back eyes narrowed to mere slits, but he had sense enough to know that his own flash of temper was responsible for this scene, and so he held himself in hand and said in a cold, metallic voice:

"Sanderson's death was not an accident. He was murdered. As his friend,—and from your conversation I gather that you were his friend,—it is your duty to him and to the State to give any information that might help to bring the murderer to justice."

"Murdered!" Pascoe reiterated. He stared from one to the other in amazement. "Impossible! Why, Sanderson didn't have an enemy on earth—as far as I know." He turned on Thain. "Besides, I don't see what me paying back a loan of ten thousand dollars to Sargent, here, has anything to do with Sanderson being—murdered."

"It might have a lot to do with him being—*killed*," Thain suggested pointedly.

Pascoe shrugged his shoulders. "I must be on my way. How about it, Sargent? Shall I take the money down with me or are you going down yourself?"

"I deposited it yesterday, when I was downtown, Len," Sargent said calmly. "Thanks just the same."

"I see," said Pascoe. He shot Thain a glance of amused contempt. "Any time you need me, Sargent, call on me. So long." As he stepped off the porch, he called out over his shoulder: "By the way, I forgot to tell you that I ran into your friend Hurley this morning on the San Gabriel. He acted like he had lost his wits when I told him what had happened. I rode around by the way of Camp Rincon to round up a couple of yearlings that had strayed onto the forest reserve—instead of coming here straight. Hurley was cooking breakfast when I saw him. He said that he'd pack up his burro, and start for home at once. I guess he'll be here in an hour or so."

"All right, Len," Sargent replied wearily.

SARGENT knew that he was not the first victim of circumstantial evidence who had unconsciously prepared the principal fact which would convict him. Men will believe a probable falsehood rather than a singular fact. In every step he had taken to shield the dead man from suspicion, he had forged a link in the chain of circumstantial evidence against himself. How diabolically perfect this chain was, every link of it, was borne home to him afresh as Thain pulled out his gun and laid it on the table beside him.

"Your bank-book, please," the detective said curtly.

Sargent drew the book from his pocket and tossed it on the table, and Thain, after opening it, said:

"The last deposit shown here was an item of eighteen hundred and sixty-five dollars on August eighth, two weeks ago. Will you explain?"

When Sargent did not answer, the detective put down the book.

"You can't get away with it, Sargent," he said. "Better own up. It'll make it easier for you."

Sargent could almost have laughed in Thain's face, then; it was so preposterous! He stood looking at the detective without moving a muscle; and Thain, tapping the table with his stubby forefinger to emphasize his remarks, said:

"Understand, I don't accuse you of murder, Sargent. I know that a man of your type and temperament would not commit a brutal murder. But I have a theory, and I think that you will agree with me that I have guessed right."

He paused and looked Sargent straight in the eyes.

"This man Sanderson," he went on, "came to your house night before last during the storm to thresh out an old, old matter—of twenty years standing, or more. Sanderson was a poor man. You are rich. He knew you had a large amount of cash in the house. He chose—unjustly, I think—to take the stand of an outraged husband. You remonstrated. In the ensuing quarrel, he drew his gun. You struggled with him. In the struggle the gun was discharged—or perhaps you got it away from him and shot him in self-defense."

He paused, again.

"How near am I right?" he asked.

Sargent did not reply. He stood staring at the man, dazedly.

"Up to this point," Thain resumed, "you had done nothing culpable—simply protected your life and property. But when you attempted to cover up what had happened, you lowered yourself, immediately, to the level of a criminal, and set in motion the principles that go to make up circumstantial evidence. I don't profess to know exactly what happened here night before last. I can't conceive of you throwing the body over the edge of the cliff and driving an unoffending horse over after it. A man of your type would shrink at such a course. The wild idea of burning up the house by the ingenious method we just witnessed a moment ago, to cover up any possible clue that the dead man had entered it, or had lost his life here, shows that in all your cleverness you were very foolish indeed. In your eagerness to shield a third party from the sordidness of the public exposure of her husband's attempt to extort money from you, and being herself thus indirectly the cause of the tragedy, you were actuated by a laudable motive; but the law concerns itself with facts only. A jury would interpret your subsequent actions as guilt. By covering up an innocent truth with a lie, you laid the foundation for a strong presumption of guilt.

"Now, then; my business as a detective is not only that of catching criminals. It is also my duty to see that cases which have the appearances of crimes are explained and disposed of. An unsolved case is a thorn in the side of the Department. In presenting my facts to the coroner's jury, an indictment for murder, or for at least manslaughter, would be returned against you. I don't want to do this, even though I feel confident that an able attorney would secure your acquittal. I want you to own up. I want you to tell the coroner's jury the truth—the whole truth, omitting nothing. They will return a verdict of justifiable homicide or self-defense. You'll be freed of all suspicion of guilt on the spot, and saved the humiliation and disgrace of a long and public trial.

"Don't forget," he finished, "that all I need to do to secure an indictment against you is to take your finger-prints and show the jury that they are the same as the prints photographed from Sanderson's gun. Now what do you say?"

IN the silence that followed, Thain watched Sargent's face like a hawk. He knew when a man was weakening—or thought he knew; he had watched the process too often in the past. He congratulated himself upon having handled his man skillfully. He had a pardonable pride in his profession, and because he was human he could not suppress a faint smile of triumph. So he got a distinct shock when Sargent said quietly:

"You wont need to take my finger-prints. I murdered Sanderson."

Involuntarily, Thain's hand reached for the gun on the table—but paused halfway.

"You—you're a liar!" he blurted out, bringing down his chubby fist upon the table.

There was a step upon the porch, then. Both men turned at once. In the open door stood Hurley, staring from one to the other questioningly. He shifted himself from one foot to the other, irresolutely, as if he was trying to make up his mind whether he should enter, or flee.

"Come in, Hurley," Sargent said. Then as Hurley stepped across the threshold, he added: "I've just told this gentleman that I murdered Sanderson. He refuses to believe it."

Hurley's face was a study. He leaned weakly against the door-jamb, his eyes roving furtively to the Navajo rug.

"I—I don't understand," he stammered. "I thought Sanderson fell over the cliff. Pascoe told me," he added hurriedly, as if anxious to impress his listeners with the fact that his information was only hearsay. He straightened up suddenly. Over his face there came an expression that was a mixture of relief and cunning—not the slightest trace of concern for his friend. "Why wont you believe him?" he demanded of Thain. "A man is not going to admit murder unless he's guilty of it."

"Oh, I don't know," said Thain impassively.

Sargent crossed to his side and held out his hands.

"Please put the handcuffs on me and let us have done with this business," he said wearily.

Thain wiped the perspiration from his forehead. For the first time in his life he lost his head.

"I'll be damned if I do!" he roared. "I'll take you with me, all right—but not handcuffed. I'm not going to make myself the laughing stock of the whole Department when this thing is cleared up."

"Well, then," said Sargent, imperturbably, "let's start without the handcuffs."

"All right," Thain grumbled. He turned to Hurley. "Please go into the dark-room and get me the box of films on the table near the developing tray," he said.

THE detective's face was turned away slightly.

Sargent tensed. Quick as a flash, Sargent's hand shot out for the gun on the table. The next moment Thain found himself looking into the bore of his own automatic.

"Put your hands above your head," Sargent ordered him curtly. Thain complied, choking with rage. Sargent jerked his head at the gaping Hurley. "Go into the dark-room, Hurley. Take the top film out of the box and put it into the developing tray and wash the finger-prints off it. Quick, now!"

Hurley, who had been standing by, speechless with amazement, suddenly realized that the finger-prints on the film could be no one's but his own. So he almost fell over the threshold in his anxiety to get the film into the developing bath. His brain, paralyzed with fright, functioned to that end only.

There was one moment of tense silence between Thain and Sargent; then Thain's chubby fist shot out and knocked the pistol from Sargent's hand. As the gun fell clattering across the floor, the detective leaped for the door, with Sargent at his heels.

The two men burst through the door just as Hurley dropped the film in the developing tray and immersed it in the developer with his hand. Thain pushed the man aside and made a grab for the wet film, but his hand paused in midair. Instead of picking it up, he stood staring at it in the light of the red-shaded incandescent overhead, his small black eyes wide with astonishment.

Sargent craned his neck over his shoulder. Hurley leaned forward too. Before the astonished eyes of two men, and the terror-stricken eyes of the third, a picture began to form upon the surface of the film —vaguely outlined at first, then filling out in clear distinct negative—the profile of a man in the act of discharging an automatic pistol.

There could be no mistaking the bold, predatory profile. It was Hurley's! And with the hiss of an angry, cornered cobra, the man made a grab for the film, but Thain was too quick for him. The next minute Hurley's two outstretched wrists were encircled by a pair of handcuffs.

Thain grasped him by the coat with both hands, and swung him around.

"Why did you kill Sanderson, Hurley?" he asked.

"I didn't. It's a lie!" the man screamed.

THAIN released his grip on Hurley's coat, slowly, finger by finger. His face relaxed.

"It's no lie, Hurley," he said wearily. He led the protesting man into the living-room and pushed him to a seat in a rocker facing the window. Then he picked up his gun from the floor where it had fallen, and said to Sargent:

"Rip the lining of his coat open, Sargent."

Hurley submitted, shrinking with terror, as Sargent complied with Thain's request in a half-daze. To his amazement, he found that Hurley's coat was padded with a double layer of currency in large bills. One of them was a thousand-dollar bill.

"I was going to take the money down and deposit it," Hurley whined desperately, trying to explain, even when he knew that explanations were futile. The craven in him was boiling to the surface.

Thain crossed to the window and pulled the shade down so that the hole came directly over the flaw.

Through the tiny aperture a shaft of sunlight, shot with prismatic splendors, pierced the half-dark room, terminating in a small golden pool of light on the bright-colored Navajo rug.

Hurley shrank back in his chair and covered his face with his manacled hands, and presently the silent room became filled with the clamor of his confession.

When he arrived at a certain point in his incoherent narrative, Sargent sprang to his feet.

"Great God," he exclaimed, "the flash of lightning photographed him through the hole in the shade as he pulled the trigger. The blister acted as a photographic lens!"

The Warning of the Desert

by William Lawrence

THIS is the story of Bill Andrews—plain Bill Andrews. He was twenty-seven years old—married—the father of as fine a baby boy as you have ever seen.

But Bill was just like thousands of other men. He had been forced to leave school and go to work when he was still young.

He had taken the first thing that came along and he had worked as hard as he knew how. But somehow or other, he didn't seem to be getting anywhere.

It was hard—terribly hard, sometimes—to make both ends meet. Sickness came—doctor's bills—the rent was raised—and all that sort of thing.

Above everything else in the world, Bill wanted to go home some night and tell his wife of a raise in salary—of a promotion that would mean a happier, better home.

I wonder if there is a man anywhere who hasn't had that same ambition, that same hope!

But that increase in salary and that promotion never came. Indeed, once or twice Bill came mighty near losing his job.

And then, one night, Bill came across an advertisement that told how men just like himself had gotten out of the rut and had gone ahead—how men with no more education than himself had studied at home in their spare time—how the International Correspondence Schools would come to him and help him to develop his natural ability.

Bill had seen that advertisement and that familiar coupon many, many times before. For two years he had been promising himself that he would cut it out and send it to Scranton. He knew that he ought to do it—that he should at least find out what the I. C. S. could do for him. But he never had.

And he might not have sent in the coupon this time, either, but for the few words under a picture called "The Warning of the Desert":

"On the Plains of Hesitation bleach the bones of countless millions who, at the Dawn of Victory, sat down to wait—and waiting, died."

Bill read that over two or three times. "The Plains of Hesitation!" "The Dawn of Victory!" These two phrases kept ringing in his ears. They worked their way into his very soul. So he clipped that coupon, marked it and mailed it to Scranton.

Bill told me the other day that he was surprised how interested he became in his lessons—of the personal interest the teachers at the I. C. S. took in him—how his employers learned about his studying and saw evidence of it in his work.

"The most important moment in my life," says Bill, "was that moment four years ago when I sent in that I. C. S. coupon. And the happiest moment of my life was when I went home with the news of my first real increase in salary and my first real promotion. If I hadn't sent in that coupon I'd still be working at a humdrum job and a small salary."

Won't you let the I. C. S. help you, too? Won't you trade a few hours of your spare time for a good job, a good salary and the comforts that go with it? Then mark the work you like best on the coupon below and mail it to Scranton to-day. That doesn't obligate you in the least, but it will be your first big step toward success. *Do it now!*

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Coming:

"South of Shanghai"

By GEORGE F. WORTS

Five New Ways

To whiter, cleaner, safer teeth

Dental Science has been seeking ways to better tooth protection.

All old methods proved inadequate. Tooth troubles were constantly increasing. Very few escaped them. Beautiful teeth were seen less often than now.

Dental research found the causes, then evolved five new ways to correct them.

The chief enemy

The chief tooth enemy was found to be film—that viscous film you feel. It clings to teeth, enters crevices and stays.

Avoid Harmful Grit

Pepsodent curdles the film and removes it without harmful scouring. Its polishing agent is far softer than enamel. Never use a film combatant which contains harsh grit.

Food stains, etc., discolor it. Then it forms dingy coats. Tartar is based on film. Most teeth are thus clouded more or less.

Film also holds food substance which ferments and forms acids. It holds the acids in contact with the teeth to cause decay. Germs breed by millions in it. They, with tartar, are the chief cause of pyorrhea.

Much left intact

Old ways of brushing left much of that film intact, to cloud the teeth and night and day threaten serious damage.

Two ways were found to fight that film. One acts to curdle film, one to remove it, and without any harmful scouring. Able authorities proved those methods effective. They were embodied in a tooth paste called Pepsodent, and dentists the world over began to urge its use.

Other essentials

Other effects were found necessary, and ways were discovered to bring them. All are now embodied in Pepsodent.

Pepsodent stimulates the salivary flow—Nature's great tooth-protector.

It multiplies the alkalinity of the saliva. That is there to neutralize mouth acids, the cause of tooth decay.

It multiplies the starch digestant in the saliva. That is there to digest starch deposits on teeth which may otherwise ferment and form acids.

It polishes the teeth so film less easily adheres.

Prettier teeth came to millions

One result is prettier teeth. You see them everywhere—teeth you envy, maybe. But that is only a sign of cleaner, safer teeth. Film-coats, acids and deposits are effectively combated.

Send the coupon for a 10-Day Tube. Note how clean the teeth feel after using. Mark the absence of the viscous film. See how teeth whiten as the film-coats disappear.

Cut out the coupon now.

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How YOU Can Make Money Writing Stories and Photoplays

By ELINOR GLYN

Author of "Three Weeks," "The Philosophy of Love," Etc., Etc.

FOR years the mistaken idea prevailed that writing was a "gift" miraculously placed in the hands of the chosen few. People said you had to be an Emotional Genius with long hair and strange ways. Many vowed it was no use to try unless you'd been touched by the Magic Wand of the Muse. They discouraged and often scoffed at attempts of ambitious people to express themselves.

These mistaken ideas have recently been proved to be "bunk." People know better now. The entire world is now learning the TRUTH about writing. People everywhere are finding out that writers are no different from the rest of the world. They have nothing "up their sleeve"; no mysterious magic to make them successful. They are plain, ordinary people. They have simply learned the principles of writing and have intelligently applied them.

Of course, we still believe in genius, and not everyone can be a Shakespeare or a Milton. But the people who are turning out the thousands and thousands of stories and photoplays of today for which millions of dollars are being paid ARE NOT GENIUSES.

Elinor Glyn

You can accept my advice because millions of copies of my stories have been sold in Europe and America. My book, "Three Weeks," has been read throughout the civilized world, translated into every foreign language, except Spanish, and thousands of copies are still sold every year. My stories, novels, and articles have appeared in the foremost European and American magazines. For Famous Players-Lasky Corporation, greatest motion picture producers in the world, I have written and personally supervised photoplays featuring such famous stars as Gloria Swanson and Rodolph Valentino. I have received thousands and thousands of dollars in royalties. I do not say this to boast, but merely to prove that you can be successful without being a genius.

Many people think they can't write because they lack "imagination" or the ability to construct out-of-the-ordinary plots. Nothing could be further from the truth. The really successful authors—those who make fortunes with their pens—are those who write in a simple manner about plain, ordinary events of every-day life—things which everyone is familiar. This is the real secret of success—a secret within the reach of all, for *everyone* is familiar with *some* kind of life.

Every heart has its story. Every life has experiences worth passing on. There are just as many stories of human interest right in your own vicinity, stories for which some editor will pay good money, as there are in Greenwich Village or the South Sea Islands. And editors will welcome a good story or photoplay from you just as quickly as from any well-known writer. They will pay you well for your ideas, too. Big money is paid for stories and scenarios today—far more than is paid in salaries.

I have shown hundreds of people how to turn their ideas into cash—men and women in all walks of life—the modest worker, the clerk, the stenographer, bookkeepers, salesmen, reporters, doctors, lawyers, salesgirls, nurses, housewives—people of all trades and temperaments.

One busy housewife, who didn't *dream* she could write, sold her first photoplay for $500.00.

Janett Burrows, a Cleveland, Ohio, stenographer, followed my suggestions and earned over $4,500.00 in six months.

Peggy Reidell, a clerk in Chicago, sold her first story for $250.00.

One young man quickly sold three stories to Canadian magazines.

The wife of an Ohio farmer sold an article to Woman's Home Companion and a story to The Farmer's Wife.

A Massachusetts housewife sold forty manuscripts in two years! Just imagine how much she earned!

I believe there are thousands of other people, like yourself, who can write much better stories and plays than many we now read in magazines and see on the screen. I believe thousands of people can make money in this absorbing profession and at the same time greatly improve present-day fiction with their fresh, true-to-life ideas. I believe this so firmly that I have decided to give some simple instructions which may be the means of bringing success to many who have not as yet put pen to paper. I am going to show YOU how easy it is when you know how!

Just fill out the coupon below. Mail it to my publishers, The Authors' Press, Auburn, N. Y. They will send you, ABSOLUTELY FREE, a handsome little book called *"The Short-Cut to Successful Writing."* This book was written to help all aspiring people who want to become writers, who want to improve their condition, who want to make money in their spare time. Within its pages are many surprises for doubting beginners; it is crowded with things that gratify your expectations—good news that is dear to the heart of all those aspiring to write; illustrations that enthuse, stories of success; new hope, encouragement, helps, hints—things you've long wanted to know.

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STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912

OF THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE, published monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for April 1, 1923.

State of Illinois, } ss.
County of Cook. }

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Charles M. Richter, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the Blue Book Magazine and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are:

Publisher, The Consolidated Magazines Corporation.....1912, North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

Editor, Karl Edwin Harriman.....North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

Managing Editor, None.

Business Manager, Charles M. Richter.....North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

2. That the owners are: (Give names and addresses of individual owners, or, if a corporation, give its name and the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of the total amount of stock.)

Louis Eckstein .....North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.
Estate of Louis M. Stumer....North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.
Benjamin J. Rosenthal.....North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.
Stephen Hexter .....North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.
A. R. Stumer .....North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.
Charles M. Richter.....North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.
Ralph K. Strassman.....33 W. 42nd St., New York City

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders, owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of the stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest, direct or indirect, in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

CHARLES M. RICHTER, Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 23rd day of March, 1923.

[Seal.] LOUIS H. KERBER, JR.

(My commission expires Jan. 4, 1925.)

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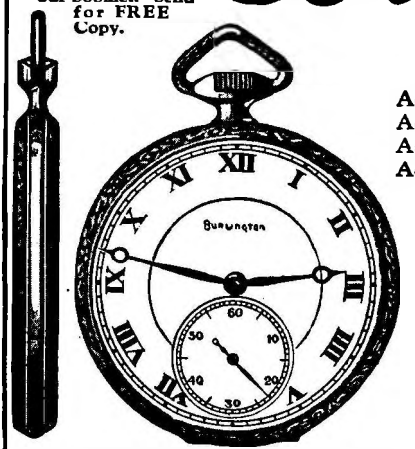

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