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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

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THE BLUE BOOK

KARL EDWIN HARRIMAN, Editor

COVER DESIGN: Painted by Laurence Herndon to illustrate "On Pine Head"

An Absorbing Novelette

Out-of-the-Ordinary Short Stories

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DONALD KENNICOTT, Associate Editor

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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE
Vol. 35 SEPTEMBER 1922 No. 5

LOU-LOU

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Here begins the latest and best novel by the brilliant author of "Darkest at Dawn," "The Second Life of M. the Devil" and many other noted stories.

"UPON a dark and stormy night" is, by the tradition of a bygone age, the approved method of the wrong way to begin any story. This one, therefore, must begin otherwise. In the blazing fifties, in those discreet days of dull bindings and dingy titles, in those lurid times of steamboat explosions and buffalo and slavery—in those happy days of gambling and high drinking and a wide-open democracy, our thrilling narratives did not reflect the spirit of their times. No! Instead they were lusterless in print, paper and covers—often in contents. One must confess that the reading public of the day had reason to engage in civil war. An outlet was necessary.

Yet even in these all-degenerate times it is frequently the case that we have nights which are undeniably dark. And although it is no longer the cheerful custom to keep a jug of hospitable liquor at each hearthside, we must acknowledge that often the demons of storm choose the hour of darkness in which to come hurtling upon us. A storm is during the daylight a blustering and blood-reddening thing, blowing upon us its impotent challenge, hiding the sun and convulsing the forces of nature; yet in the center of these overwhelmings, it leaves puny man quite undisturbed.

At night it is otherwise. At night the howl of the wind wakes in us old primal fears, dreads of uncanny things, of witches

and yelling demoniacs, frights of the dark and of unseen blasts.

BRIAN FORTESQUE, returning to his house in the hills, was much too big and blustery a man himself to care anything about the storm, or about the darkness. He was too far emerged from the primitive, too wholly a creature of civilization, to do aught but laugh at the ape-man's dream of falling through the gloom.

It was this very overcivilization, perhaps, which made him, in common with many other men, recoil in search of more primal things, which made him flee here into the mountains from the eternal strife of the city, which caused him to establish here a haven of peace, of loneliness, of reversion to himself and to the books which he loved. He did not bring his friends here; in this place he craved no human fellowship. He had the mountains for companions, and the silent trees for friends.

Above this long, rude house which he had erected with his own hands, above that massive doorway which opened into the massive, wide-hearthed room where he chiefly lived, he had placed the bold words *"Forte Scutum."* He knew enough about himself, this man, to put those words above his doorway and to live up to their boastful pride, their iron insolence. A strong shield!

Now, as he left his cloaked and hooded car and stamped in toward the house, he looked a very incongruous figure to be found alone in the mountains at midnight. The wet snow soaked his thin patent leathers in a moment, and searched out his collar and white shirtbosom with malignant fingers, as though intolerant of his evening attire amid such surroundings. The rest of him was hidden by a great fur coat and thick fur cap.

The rain lashed sweepingly upon his broad figure. It was half rain, half snow, swirling before the blast of wind; the high trees leaned and bowed as that whitish rain was hurtled through them from the blackness above.

Fortesque stamped up to the door. He felt a thrill of responsive gratification as the heavy panel swung open to his touch. It was like a silent welcome, to this man who had none other to welcome him, when that heavy door swung silently to the impact of his hand. It suited his fancy to have it always open, always ready to welcome him. And why not? In this desolate wilderness which overhung the coastal terrain and the city-crowded shores of a more enervated, more tropic California below—in this wilderness of another clime and a purer atmosphere, which looked down upon the cities of men with a proud hauteur, there was only an occasional forest ranger to take advantage of this paradox of a door, always closed and yet always open.

FORTESQUE stepped over the threshold and flung aside his heavy coat. He growled in his throat, shaking himself like a great mastiff, as he searched his pockets for matches. Upon leaving for the city, it was always his custom to lay a ready fire in the fireplace, and to put new candles in the sconces. The touch of a match would set this place gleaming in the ruddy cheer, roaring and glinting in merry welcome.

But now there was no match. The match-box was gone. Fortesque vainly went through pocket after pocket, fumbling for a stray phosphorus; at length, realizing that he had none, his lips opened and gave vent to two hearty imprecations which echoed through the place like the report of pistol-shots.

"Name of the devil! Damnation!"

Before the echo of his sonorous voice had died, Fortesque started violently and stood as though paralyzed, staring into the darkness. He stood tensed and strained, listening, every sense on the alert to catch a repetition of that sound which had so startled him.

Now it came again—a soft and fluttering breath like the sigh of some sleeper wakened from dreamy repose. And upon the heels of this there rose a gently questioning voice out of the darkness:

"I hope you have a match, because I could find none, and I'm cold."

A woman—in this place!

Fortesque said nothing. The modulation of that voice, its refinement and soft richness, startled him anew. Remembering his coat, he leaned over and picked up the fur garment. His exploring fingers came upon the missing match-box in the pocket, with his pipe and tobacco.

With the assured step of one who knows his way perfectly, he strode forward, taking a match from the box. No further word came to him from the darkness—

no outcry of alarm, no questioning voice. He crossed the room and came to a halt before the fireplace. There he scratched a match, holding it in turn to each of the pair of candles on either side of the mantel.

The mounting glow of the candles illumined the strong, harsh outlines of his face, struck upon the wide challenge of his heavy-lidded eyes, accentuated the virile carving of nostrils and squarely massive chin. Before the match was extinguished, he stooped and thrust it among the papers which lay beneath the kindling and logs in the fireplace.

Then, and not until then, he turned and calmly took in the amazing sight which greeted him.

ALMOST at his feet, upon the bear-robe outspread before his hearth, was seated a woman, who gazed up at him with eyes as calm and serene at his own. He was amazed by the perfect self-possession of that regard—more amazed by it, even, than by the beauty or attire of this intruder.

Yet both her beauty and her attire were distinctly out of the ordinary.

Fortesque met her gaze in silence, his eyes studying her in detail, and she returned the look with one which was equally assured, equally calm in its appraisal. Fortesque was somewhat staggered, inwardly, by this return of his own cool arrogance.

He thought to himself that seldom had he seen a woman whose beauty was more appealing than that of this faëry creature who sat and gazed at him. Her features, her hands, her bare feet, her body, were finely drawn and delicately chiseled as though carved from some long-buried tusk of creamy ivory. There was a hint of the exotic, of the foreign, in her face, but only a hint. It contained nothing coarse, nothing voluptuous. That whole face, lighted from within by a flaming character, dimly reminded Fortesque of the faces of noble women as limned by the artists of Mogul times. The eyes which dwelt so coolly upon him were of deep lapis, speckled with irregular flakes of gold.

Strange beauty, assuredly; yet not so strange as the attire below it! Strictly speaking, there was no attire. About the shoulders of this intruder was gathered the richness of a Kashmir shawl, which Fortesque recognized as one of his most cherished possessions; it had plainly been taken from its place on the chaise longue beside his reading lamp. Below this, he saw the soft folds of his own silk lounging robe, from which peeped out the bare rose-petal feet of his guest.

At length the silence was broken by the woman, a ripple of laughter lightening her face.

"Aren't you ever going to ask any questions?"

Fortesque shrugged, and surveyed her coolly.

"Why should I? I can use my eyes. You evidently came here today in the rain. You could find no matches about the place, as I keep none here for fear of the wood-rats starting a fire. I might say, however, that you would have been much warmer if you had chosen some of my woods clothes, or if you had gotten into bed."

"Quite true," she answered with perfect unconcern. "But your clothes were too rough for me, and I could discover no sheets for the bed. I am not accustomed to that sort of thing. I had much rather freeze with silk next me, than find warmth in wool."

FORTESQUE gazed down upon her, somewhat astonished.

He invariably felt a sturdy contempt for the feminine luxury which knew nothing but silk lingerie and a fastidious nicety. But something about this woman kept that feeling from him now. He was conscious of a force within her, of a will that already clashed lightly yet strongly against his own. A hint of admiration came into his eyes as he regarded her—admiration not of her body, but of her soul. He discerned a fine spirit under that beauty.

"You speak English with an accent," he stated.

"Do I? Very few observe it." She gazed curiously at him. "Do you know, Mr. Fortesque, I did not expect to see just the sort of person you prove to be?"

Fortesque started slightly. She had scored.

"You know me? You know who I am?"

The woman smiled. He thought to himself that her smile was superb. None the less, it irritated him, for that smile implied a trifle of superiority.

"I came here this morning." She turned her head and glanced about the long room. "I have lain here most of the day upon

the warm fur. I have read your books; I have seen your things; and through them I visualized you. But now it seems I was wrong. You are—"

She paused, her eyes coming back to him. Fortesque smiled slightly, for the first time.

"Yes?" he prompted, tempted by curiosity.

"Peacock!" She taunted him with a merry burst of laughter—laughter that rang in the room like a silver bell. "For that, I will say nothing more about it until you get us both something to eat. I broke no locks, you understand."

Fortesque nodded curtly. The woman stirred a little on the rug, and the silken lounge robe fell for an instant from one knee and ankle as perfect as though outlined by Praxiteles. With perfect unconcern, as though he were no more than a slave before her, she gathered up the folds again.

"Your clothes?" he questioned.

"In the bedroom. I had no means of drying them."

Fortesque took one of the candles and stepped across to the second room of the place. It was a bedroom, barely furnished, a cedar chest containing most of his wardrobe. This he unlocked, and from it drew silken pajamas, which he placed on the bed. He came back to the living-room.

"Get your clothes and dry them before the fire," he said. "I have laid out pajamas which may suit your taste. I'll get busy in the kitchen."

He strode on into the kitchen as he spoke. It was the third and last room of this his castle. Behind him he closed the door.

II

HE lighted a lamp and an oil-stove that stood in one corner. He kept a goodly stock of eatables here, but he kept them locked in a cupboard; they were not the sort of things to appeal to forest rangers. He wondered anew at this woman. She had taken what she liked, she had lain here all day like some hunted creature; yet, starving, she had not broken into that cupboard. She might not have known the food was there; and yet—

Fortesque laid the table, and set about his work.

He opened tins, cut into a moldy round of cheese, set crackers warming to crispness, diluted evaporated milk, set to work mixing his rarebit. Going outside, he pulled out a small trap set in the earth, and resurrected two bottles of ale.

"Humble fare, but nourishing," he said ironically.

In a few minutes he opened the door and called his guest. She came with a little cry of eager delight, wearing now the pajamas beneath the silken robe. Fortesque, grotesque in his muddy evening dress and wilted linen, served the rarebit and ale.

"I understood," she said, with an inquiring lift of her delicate brows, "that liquors were no longer to be had in this country?"

"Money," responded Fortesque, "is the modern worker of miracles. Eat!"

She ate—with her left hand, he observed. And at this, he smiled to himself. Neither of them spoke until the plates were empty. Then she glanced up, with a little sigh.

"That is so good! May I have some more, please?"

Fortesque shook his head and removed her plate. He unlocked a tantalus in the corner and produced a flask of Amontillado sherry, which he opened. Then back to the stove again, and in a moment more he placed before her a steaming platter of *canard sauvage*.

"It's tinned, of course," he said apologetically. "Imported, however—not bad."

"But you are a wizard, Mr. Fortesque!" she exclaimed.

He did not reply, but attacked the duck. He was hungry despite the rarebit.

The sheer beauty of the girl, now under his close view, held him astonished. Once and again he caught her darting at him swift, sidelong glances from those eyes of deep blue, so oddly flecked with gold—eyes of Russian lapis, wonderful and deep. The texture of her skin, too, was marvelous—sheened like mellowed ivory, creamy against the rich luster of her black hair and brows.

Thus Fortesque surveyed her, outwardly with a cold and impassive dominance. She, in turn, respected his silence. When the meal was ended, Fortesque removed the dishes and placed before her the coffee-pot, with cups. He then went to the tantalus and produced a small box of sandalwood, which he opened; a slight smile curved his lips as he set the box before her and loosened the cigarettes it contained.

"You will, perhaps, find these familiar."

He seemed not to observe the astonished widening of her eyes, the involuntary look

of surprise that his words produced. Dropping into his chair, he filled and lighted his pipe, and fastened his gaze upon her.

"Now let us resume," he said quietly. "You were saying that I am not as you thought—"

A RIPPLE of laughter danced through her eyes. She took a cigarette and lighted it from the match he extended.

"My first—although you'd not believe it. You are a strange man! From your books and furnishings, I thought the owner of this place was an artist, a poet, a writer. Strange! Books one very seldom sees; the Annals of Rajasthan, that fascinating Chinese work of Chauvannes, Aurel Stein's volumes on Serindia, the Jons India-farer Saga, and so on. The books of an adept in the arts—the belongings of one who is a sybarite in the wilderness.

"But now I alter my diagnosis. You are not the man I thought. You are a rich man, a captain of business, a financier. You come here as to a refuge, to indulge your secret pleasures, your secret joys, your hermit's delights. In the city you are a hard man, a cold and harsh man—a gilded man. Did you ever hear what happened to that beautiful boy whom the Medici gilded for a pageant? Well, here you are something else again. Here, you become a dreamer."

Suddenly Fortesque found himself doing an unwonted and amazing thing, an incredible thing: he found himself talking.

"That is true," he assented with a weary gesture. "I inherited money and affairs. I have had to manage them. In this place I can be myself and enjoy what I like. There is no one in the world for whom I have respect, and but few things."

"Ah! Not for religion?" she suggested.

"A game, a political rabble, a bundle of hypocrites and Pharisees!"

"That is because you never met the right men; probably you have met only bishops." She smiled a little as she watched him. "It is the common people who preserve the verities. Nor for women?"

"There are few whom I could not buy—if I desired them." His tone was acrid. "There you are right. It is the common women who preserve the verities."

"Again, you have failed to meet the right ones." Her face was grave. "Nor for the friendship and faith of men?"

A flash of bitterness glowered in his eyes.

"Women will deny love; but men will betray it."

"That is because you have met one man who betrayed. Well, what of yourself?"

"Respect—for myself?" He gave her a swift glance, then laughed for answer.

"That is because you have never met yourself." She regarded him calmly. "You are trying hard to become a Timon, a misanthrope; you are striving to become a money-sucker, a vampire of gold—but you have to flee to this place. I could prove to you that religion is not a game, but a faith; that you cannot buy the woman you most desire; that the simple friendship of men is stronger than life; and that you yourself deserve a meed of respect."

Fortesque smiled sardonically.

"You can prove this? When and how?"

She made a light gesture. "Time enough to discuss it; a simple matter. You are wondering about me?"

"Not particularly," returned Fortesque coolly. "I accept you as I would accept any phenomenon of nature in these hills. As I would accept the lightning—for which the Arab word, by the way, is *Barak*."

She started slightly. "What do you know?"

Fortesque studied her, and suddenly laughed outright. When he laughed, all the massive dominance of his face was changed to a cheery humor, a whimsical *camaraderie*. One would have said that the inner nature of this man came out only when he laughed.

"Know? Nothing. You speak with a slight accent. You are the most beautiful woman I ever saw; yet I do not think you have passed twenty years. You eat with your left hand, and yet you are not left-handed. Those cigarettes, which came to me from an Arab merchant, drew a light of recognition to your eyes. You are alone at midnight in the mountains with a strange man, and yet you have no fear; *convenances* mean nothing to you. The Arab name of *Barak*, the lightning, startles you."

He paused, grimly noting the remarkable effect of his words on this girl.

CHAPTER II

THE woman was leaning forward, staring intently at him from eyes aglow with fright, but only for an instant. Then she

relaxed, and he thought of a quail he had once dropped, both wings broken, which had still stabbed desperately at him as he clutched down.

"What do you know?" she asked again, a pulse beating in her eyes.

"Nothing." Fortesque looked at her steadily.

A silence settled upon them for a moment. It was a deep silence, and pregnant with strange thoughts. Outside the place, a sudden gust of rainy sleet slashed down upon the roof with impotent malice.

"Guess," she said, her bosom swiftly rising and falling.

Fortesque gestured widely. "Guess—what? A vision from some old romance. A character from the annals of Delhi. How should I know? Indeed, I *know* that all this is quite impossible. Therefore I say that you are a sultan's daughter, a rajah's *rani,* a princess of the realm of Prester John, a daughter of the Soldan of Babylon!"

Wonder grew and deepened in her lapis eyes.

"This is singular!" she murmured. "Very singular! For a man guessing at random, you are surprisingly adept! But myself—of what people am I, then? Of the fairies, you would say?"

"Hardly." Fortesque's lips curved grimly. "The race? What blood brought to perfection this lotus-bud beauty of yours? The using the left hand; well, that is Arab, purely Arab! The accent; that might be anything, although I would venture that it is French. The eyes—ah, the eyes cannot be placed! I have never seen such eyes of lapis lazuli—true Siberian orchid of heaven; stone with golden stars, as the Chinese call it. How should I know? All that I can say is this: for love of you, a man would go into hell with laughter on his lips!"

A smile blazed suddenly in her face—a smile half scornful, half sad.

"What, so soon? One would scarcely think you the sort—"

"Oh, I'm not speaking for myself." Fortesque shrugged coldly. "I know that you're a dream, an illusion, an unreal phantom. I'm merely stating a fact, quite impersonally."

"Ah, yes," she responded, although her lips twitched slightly. "On the whole, you're not far wrong. I have some Arab blood—as white as yours, probably more so; my father was a sultan, who traced his lineage unbrokenly to one of the companions of the Prophet. I was educated in a convent of French nuns. My eyes came from my mother, the daughter of a noble Spaniard killed in Luzon, in the Philippines; they are the eyes of old Spain, of the Goths, of Pelago and his comrades, of the Cave of Covadonga and the knightly lists of Granada! And I came hither in the arms of *Barak,* the lightning—there is a riddle for you which I shall not solve until I am ready.

"But what of my name? Have you not guessed that?"

Fortesque shook his head. "Impossible. Some things are beyond the power of man."

"It is Lou-lóu."

AS she pronounced the name, cold print cannot picture it. It rolled from her lips like a drop of liquid music. She imparted to it the lingering cadence of a softer clime; the caressing lilt that one hears upon the tongue of a backwoods Cajun, who holds in that word the ruined heritage of Grandpré and old France.

"Lou-lóu!" repeated Fortesque musingly. "A strange name, this, a name which could mean anything or nothing, a name which has no mother tongue but all tongues for mothers! Louise, *revenant de son amour!* Louise—Lou-lóu, little jewel of the Latins, who know how to give music in all names, yet whose names are robbed of all music on northern tongues, as the old shrines of Byzantine mosaic were wrecked by the maces of the Vandals!"

He closed his eyes.

"Decidedly, I am dreaming," he growled. "Or more likely I am a little mad. Surely this is California? Surely this is my own house. Surely, the road I followed tonight was impassable for other cars—and not even I would dare repass it now. Surely no stranger could have reached here unless by flight—in the arms of the lightning, indeed!

"Yes, it must be that I have gone somewhat astray mentally. The daughter of a sultan—the blood of the Koreish—arrant nonsense! I must do something about this."

He stirred. His eyes opened, dilated with a sudden inward fright. His face began to work oddly as he stared into the intent, slightly smiling gaze of Lou-lóu, across the table.

Swiftly, suddenly and swiftly as a gleam

of light, his hand shot out over the table and closed upon the slender white circlet of her neck. One would have said that those iron fingers would strangle her—yet the girl did not shrink nor move, except that the smile deepened slightly in her eyes. Then, at the touch of her flesh, Fortesque's hand fell away, dropped with a startled vehemence; he sank back in his chair and passed a hand over his eyes.

"Forgive me," he said, struggling with himself. "Forgive me. I—I thought—"

"You thought that I was unreal?" Her silvery laughter chimed forth as she rearranged the silken folds about her throat. "Do you know, Mr. Fortesque, I think that I shall like you extremely well, provided you can get rid of that severe mask of yours! It's only a mask, after all—a mask against all the world, a defense, a fierce safeguard of your inner self! I like that motto over your doorway, too; that *'Forte Scutum!'* It gives a personality to this house of yours, this strong shield of yourself. It takes one back to the days when houses meant something. There's something very feminine about you."

"What!" Fortesque shot out the word, astounded. "Feminine—about me? Heavens, no!"

"Certainly—that very mask of yours!" And again she laughed. "But you couldn't understand if I told you. I'm beginning to think that I was guided to this house by Providence, Mr. Fortesque, and to you. You came in a car, you say?"

FORTESQUE was himself again. He regarded her coldly, spoke with a careful appraisal of his words, a balance of his utterance.

"Yes," he answered, frowning. "But it's absolutely impossible for me to go away tonight. I had to leave a dinner engagement early to get here before the road down the cañon was washed out, and I barely made it. By this time it's impassable."

"Go?" Her eyes widened slightly on his. "But I don't want you to go!"

He stirred uneasily in his chair.

"My dear girl!" He tried to assume a paternal and admonitory manner, and felt that it was a miserable failure. Why not? He was barely twenty-eight. "My dear girl—" When he met the wondering regard in her eyes, he realized that he was botching it. "You must be aware—oh, damn it!"

SHE laughed suddenly, gayly. "That's better—off with the mask! Don't search for words; say what's in your mind to say!"

"Well, then," growled Fortesque, "I've some sense of decency, if you haven't. It's out of the question for us to spend the night here together."

"Why?" she asked, her lapis eyes widely innocent.

"Good heavens—you ask why? Your reputation, for one thing!"

"I have none," she answered calmly.

The speech staggered him, angered him hotly. He felt like giving her the lie direct; then he remembered that this was not an American girl.

"We'll not discuss it," he said grimly. "I have a reputation, if you haven't."

"You mean," she intruded, smiling, "that you have money. Money gives you position. Position fastens the eye of the public on you. By reputation, you mean that you cower before that silly little sham world of yours—oh, don't scowl at me! You know it's true. You spoke much more truly when you said that you had decency. I know that already. If I were a bad woman, I think that you would be very much embarrassed over my presence, and would get rid of me quickly. But as it is, I have eaten your salt; I claim your protection and shelter. You're a queer man, but you'd be dreadfully nice if you'd only let yourself be so!"

Fortesque felt that he would have been actually much less embarrassed if this girl *were* the other sort of woman. Her calm words left him squirming, stripped him of his poise. He did not know what to expect next from her.

"Well," he said awkwardly, "that's all right; you're welcome to the place, of course. I expect I can follow the trail up to the ranger station—it's only three miles. If—"

"Please don't be silly!" she broke in, with anxious earnestness in her eyes. "We're all alone here, aren't we? Nobody could come along?"

"Confound it!" Fortesque flushed. "That's the very point. I—"

"You mustn't set your jaw and look stubborn, please, or I shall have to call on *Barak!* The lightning is my servant, you know." A whimsical smile dimpled her cheeks as she spoke, and laughter lightened in her eyes. "I'm not going to have you tramping over the mountains just because

I happened along. I'll curl up on the bear-skin and keep warm—"

Fortesque rose with a muttered oath, and gave up.

"I have sheets," he said curtly, and stamped out of the kitchen.

Somehow, the words lingered with him: "I have eaten your salt; I claim your protection and shelter." There was something strange about this girl, he felt, something undeniably mysterious. Yet she was very wonderful. His pulses leaped to the thought of her.

IN the bedroom he got unused sheets from the cedar chest and spread them on the blanketed bed. A spare blanket he tossed out into the living-room for his own use, and followed it with his woods clothes —flannel shirt and corduroys, woolen socks, boots. Then he went to the fireplace in the other room and gathered up the garments spread on the screen to dry. A sudden gust of confusion came over him as he did so; he caught them up hurriedly, feeling as though the touch of his fingers were a profanation. He did not inspect them, but he realized that they were of filmy stuff, silk, quite unsuited to this place in the mountains.

These garments were dry. Fortesque carried them back into the bedroom and was about to drop them upon a chair. He paused suddenly; from those filmy silks in his arms emanated a subtle fragrance. From those delicate garments, still warm from the fire as though fresh from the palpitating bosom of their owner, ascended to him a yet more delicate perfume—a mysterious blending of unknown flower-scents, a faint harmony of that aromatic essence which we call perfume, about whose origin and cause and substance we know nothing, any more than we know how the blade of green rises from a rotting seed.

Before him rose the vibrant face of Lou-lóu, beautiful beyond a dream—the witchery of her presence was suddenly upon him like an overwhelming wave bursting above his spirit. As though against his will, as though beneath some compellent urge outside of himself, he lowered his head and touched his lips to the heap of stuffs in his arms—then he dropped them into the chair and started back, flushing at his own thought and deed.

"What has come over me?" he muttered. "This is all impossible, unreal, fantastic!"

He turned away, once more impassive and cold, and retraced his steps to the kitchen. The girl looked up at him and smiled.

"Forte Scutum! A good omen," she said. "A good omen. You will be my shield?"

Fortesque smiled ironically.

"Who rides on the lightning needs no shield. It is nearly two o'clock; I have no silken sheets such as a sultan's daughter would have, but you will find the linen ones clean and soft. I myself will sleep on the chaise longue in the other room—I often prefer it to the bed."

The smile grew in her eyes as she regarded him.

"What a man! He sends me to bed as if I were a child," she murmured. "Your name is Brian? Yes; it was in the books. Brian!" She gave it the Latin pronunciation, lingering on the vowels. Then she nodded. "I like it. And you are all alone in the world?"

"Yes," said Fortesque uneasily.

"Do you know, Brian," she said reflectively, her eyes grave, "I am sorry for you. I think that you are a man to be pitied."

Fortesque started slightly, and frowned.

"And now, what?" he returned.

"Just that. You have no respect for religion. You have no respect for women, for the faithfulness of men, for yourself even! Decidedly, you are to be pitied. I must teach you all these things. Shall I?"

His eyes mocked her.

"If you can."

"Agreed, then! You can leave your business affairs to themselves?"

His brows drew down. "If I like, I can—but I may not choose to do so."

The girl rose, and her silvery laugh pealed out.

"Very well—we shall see! Since you are sending me to bed like a child, are you not going to tuck me in and put out my candle?"

Fortesque gripped himself hard. In those lapis eyes, in their hidden laughter, he delved and found a strange light that shamed him.

"If you like," he assented coldly.

She moved to the door. He accompanied her. They passed in to the bedroom together, and with a lithe movement she flung off the lounging robe and, the silken pajamas rustling, got between the sheets.

As though he were tending a child, Fortesque tucked the blankets about her shoulders, looked down into her eyes, paused.

"Kiss me good night, please."

He stooped and touched her lips with his. In that touch, all the doubt and perplexity was suddenly cleared from his brain; he saw that she was, indeed, a child—a child who had read him to the deeps of his soul, a child who knew nothing of the world's dark elements, a child wholly sophisticated and yet wholly virginal—a child who was not tempting him, but who was trusting him!

HE put out the candle, wished her pleasant dreams, and closed the door behind him as he returned to the living-room.

He did not go at once to rest. He sank down in a chair before the fire and stared into the red glow.

"She does not know shame because she has in her nothing of which to be ashamed," he thought. "By heaven, that is the truth! What a marvelous creature she is!"

How had she come here? He was drawn down to practical things, and puzzled. The railroad was ten miles away; there was a water-tank here in the mountains, but nothing else. No station, no town. She had not come by car. The road that wound up from the cañon was on Fortesque's own property, had been built by Fortesque's money; it was a private road in his private domain. Save for a winding ranger trail, it ended at this place. What wild talk was that of having come here borne by *Barak,* the lightning? And a sultan's daughter—why, the thing was wild, fantastic, impossible!

And her eerie notion of teaching him respect! He frowned at this. He stirred uneasily in his chair. Had she not fulfilled a little of her promise this very night? Had she not taught him a little respect for himself, after all?

"Damn it!" he said, and rose. "Who is she? How did she come here?"

He went outside. The half-frozen downpour had turned wholly into rain by this time, driving angrily at the house in gusty swirls. Careless of his evening clothes, Fortesque went out to his hooded car, fumbled inside for the packages he had brought with him, and returned into the house.

He rid himself of his wet clothes, removing the studs from the shirt and tossing it into the fire. He followed it with the other garments. She had spread the Kashmir shawl on the chaise longue again, and he rolled up in his blanket, watching the play of the firelight upon his walls and books.

She was real—absurdly real, wonderfully real, incredibly real! A woman, yet a child. A creature radiant in the flesh, yet more radiant in the spirit. Her ideas about things were childish; they were the terrible and uncompromising ideas of a child, built upon an unshaken idealism, an absolute faith.

"Such a woman as this," muttered Fortesque, "such a woman as this would be the woman—"

The thought still but half formed, half uttered, he fell asleep.

CHAPTER III

WITH the first streak of dawn Brian Fortesque was up and about. He started to climb into his rough clothes—then sudden remembrance flooded in upon him, bewildered him. Had he dreamed all this phantasy of the night? Had something affected his brain, perhaps?

He glanced at the door of the bedroom. It was slightly ajar, for it had no lock or catch. Fortesque hurriedly finished dressing, then stepped to the doorway. He looked—and turned away. No dream, then—no dream after all!

Going into the kitchen, he set water to heat on the oil-stove, cleared up the dishes, stacked them ready for washing. From the little heap of dry wood he always kept inside, he built up the fire in the living-room. Then he left the house by the back door.

Ten feet away was a pile of unsplit sections of logs, above them a roof. Fortesque went to this, intending to bring in some wood and let it be drying before the fire. The day was keenly crisp; the rain was gone; the sun was promising to rise upon a cloudless sky.

Fortesque came to the roofed pile of wood, and stooped. Then he came suddenly erect. From the top of the pile, from underneath the flimsy roof, a figure slid and stood before him, presenting a revolver at his breast.

Without a word, Fortesque stood motionless, inspecting that figure in astonishment. It was a singular creature, dressed in mud-splattered garments, trailing a blanket that had been stolen from a Pullman car. But the revolver was large, and was cocked. Over the revolver, Fortesque looked into the face, a man's face, a face bronzed and powerful, lighted by two wildly flaming eyes.

"A hobo?" said Fortesque coldly. "A bindle stiff, eh?"

The other made a gesture, but did not answer. Fortesque saw that his hands were large and remarkably powerful; the arms were short—ah, that was it! There was something askew with the creature, something misshapen. He was not a hunchback, but the arms were short, the shoulders fearfully wide, the head low-set, seated upon the vertebræ, upon the shoulder-blades.

"What do you want?" demanded Fortesque. "Are you hungry?"

The strange creature motioned toward the house. It was an imperative motion of command, and brought a hint of anger to Fortesque's eyes. He had no idea whatever of bringing hobos into that house—or anyone else, for that matter, until his visitor had departed.

"Nothing doing," said Fortesque crisply. "If you're hungry, wait here and I'll bring you something—"

To his alarm, he saw the trigger-finger contract, and the wild eyes gleamed with an unmistakable light of intention. Upon the instant, he knew that the man would murder him and think nothing of it. He could read that in the flaming eyes.

Suddenly, this singular being opened his mouth widely. Fortesque started; a thrill sent cold needles down his spine. The mouth was empty. It contained no tongue. The man was not dumb from sullen choice, but from awful necessity. Fortesque felt a stirring of pity.

Once more the creature gestured. This time Fortesque nodded and turned in assent. After all, he could keep the fellow in the kitchen, feed him, send him away. If it were a question of robbery, he would have little compunction about knocking this man on the head; but for the present, pity was strong within him.

Thus, he led the way into the kitchen. The mute glanced around questioningly and made as though to pass on. Fortesque stepped in his way.

"Be careful! Stay here and don't imagine you've scared me with that gun—"

A flash of anger crossed the face of the mute—a flash of anger so intense that Fortesque recoiled. Then the face changed, the eyes gazing over the shoulder of Fortesque; the whole face lighted up with a passionate joy, a delight, a devotion. The revolver dropped to the floor.

ASTONISHED, Fortesque turned and discovered Lou-lóu standing in the doorway, smiling. She was clad now in her own garments, and he saw that they were not so exotic after all—her dress was a plain gown of rose-silk. She held out her hand to him.

"Good morning, Brian! So you have found Barak? I did not know where he had gone."

"Barak!" Fortesque stared at her blankly. "You mean—this creature—"

The girl smiled, and loosed her hand from his, held it out to the mute. He dropped on his knees and pressed it to his mouth, an inarticulate sound croaking from his lips.

Lou-lóu broke into pealing laughter at sight of Fortesque's bewilderment.

"Barak—certainly! Did I not tell you that I came here in the arms of the lightning? Well, that was true. Barak is as strong as three men. He must have carried me for miles, through the darkness and rain. He can see in the dark, and he could follow the little trail. It was daylight when we found your road, and arrived here."

"Barak!" Fortesque moistened his lips, unable to find words.

"Yes. He understands English perfectly. He has served me, and my mother before me. Listen! This is our host, Barak; he is my friend and protector. Obey him as you would me!"

The mute turned, still upon his knees. He seized the hand of Fortesque and pressed it to his lips. Then he glanced upward.

In that look was accomplished a miracle; the dumb man spoke. Upon his face was imprinted a tremendous gratitude, a blind devotion, a wordless appeal. More clearly than through words, Fortesque read in those eyes an apology for what had occurred at their meeting, and a promise that such a mistake would not recur.

He was deeply touched by the emotion in this tacitly eloquent face.

"That is true," he said gravely. "Put that blanket of yours by the fire to dry, then bring in your bed, or part of it, and set that to dry also. You have nothing to fear here."

Barak rose. The blanket, which he still dragged after him, he took into the living-room and hung upon the fire-screen. Then he dashed outside, and presently returned, bearing in his arms a huge pile of wood, a monstrous load of logs that hid his face from view. As though this load weighed no more than a feather, he bore it into the living-room and deposited it before the fire. Then, at Fortesque's command, he curled up upon the bearskin.

"A strange servant!" said Fortesque.

Lou-lóu assented with a gesture. "If I told him to kill himself to amuse you, he would do it. If I told him to kill you to amuse me, he would do it."

"Very likely," Fortesque shrugged his shoulders and brought a flitch of bacon from the cupboard. "Let's get breakfast."

In twenty minutes breakfast was ready. Then Barak appeared, and stood motionless behind the chair of his mistress, his gaze fastened upon Fortesque. Under the steady regard of those eyes, Fortesque felt a decided constraint.

THE girl sensed this constraint, felt this silence. She gave Fortesque a smiling glance.

"You have no questions to ask?"

"None." Fortesque poured another cup of coffee. "Will you have more bacon?"

She shook her head, and studied him with that smiling scrutiny. Then suddenly she turned her head to the mute and spoke in a language which Fortesque did not understand. She immediately added, in English:

"Give them to Mr. Fortesque. He will take care of them from now on."

Barak stepped to one side. He came around the table and stood before Fortesque, one hand fumbling beneath his shirt. Fortesque understood that this man would have been more at ease if denuded of these garments, if wearing a sarong about his waist, and perhaps a kris at his hip.

That large, heavy-muscled hand brought into view a little bag of leather. Opening the draw-strings at the neck of the bag, Barak spilled the contents upon the table in front of Fortesque. The latter found himself gazing upon a dozen stones that shone with the rich scarlet of new blood, yet which bore in their hearts a spark of living fire.

A sudden laugh shook Fortesque, as he leaned forward and touched the stones with his fingers. And he had taken this man for a hobo—this man who carried beneath his shirt a dozen rubies, any one of which would make a collector's eyes water!

"Have you any questions to ask now?" said the girl's voice.

Fortesque smiled. "Why should I?"

"Oh, man of iron!" she made a grimace half of mockery, half of exasperation, then broke into a laugh. "Is there nothing which can shake your dreadful self-sufficiency?"

The eyes of Fortesque struck suddenly at her.

"Yesterday I would have answered no," he responded with grave intonation. "But today I must answer—yes. They say that every ship must sometimes pass by the lodestone mountain."

A slight tinge of color crept into her cheeks as she met his eyes. Then:

"Will you please take care of these stones for me? I will explain about them later."

Fortesque assented with a curt nod. He gathered up the stones one by one into the bag. Each stone, as it fell, resembled nothing so much as a drop of warm, pulsating blood dripping from his hand into the bag. There were twelve stones in all, each of them perfect, each of them a stone for which men would have died—and for which men of the dusky Orient had undoubtedly died in times past.

"Originally," said the girl, watching the rubies as they dropped, "there were fifteen. Barak sold three of them in New York, and they brought us here."

"Three such stones," and Fortesque put the bag in his pocket, "should have taken you around the world."

"Strangers in a strange land must take the best they can get." Lou-lóu made a gesture as though to make light of the matter. "Besides, they are nothing to me. They represent money, and money means only the possibility of getting home again. I suppose that such a doctrine is rank heresy in the ears of a financier?"

Fortesque smiled coldly. "Not at all. The only advantages money can give are good clothes, good food, and the enjoyment of beautiful things."

"Come! You are improving." Her

eyes danced at him across the table. "I want you to sell those stones and bring me the money—enough money to take me to Manila, and a little farther. Will you do it?"

"Certainly. But to sell such stones as these is not very easy. I shall buy them myself and have them made into a necklace for my wife."

At this the lapis eyes dilated.

"Your wife! I did not know that you had a wife!"

"Nor have I." Fortesque pushed back his chair and rose, his face impassive. "Yesterday I would have denied the possibility. Today I anticipate it. Now I must go out and see to my car. Please consider the house at your disposal."

He departed abruptly from the rear door. However, he did not miss the laughing half-mocking words that floated after him:

"But don't forget—I foretold to you the woman whom you could not buy!"

BRIAN FORTESQUE strode out to the spot where he had left his roadster, in front of the house. He had some work to do, and welcomed it with relief. He wanted to escape into the open air, to get away from the strange personality of that girl inside of the house. He felt that she was playing with him, forming him like soft clay under her hands, and the knowledge irritated him.

Sunlight was flooding above the mountains as he stood before his car and surveyed it. The day had come out perfectly, and its perfection was increased a thousandfold by the freshness of the storm-cleared air, by the myriad glittering raindrops that clustered and glistened upon every tree.

Fortesque stripped the rain-curtains and covering from the car, then unfastened the chains and dropped them from the wheels. He had driven the last few miles of his journey from town with one flat tire. Now he got out a spare tire, removed it from its case, and fell to work jacking up the car and removing the punctured shoe.

As he worked, his thoughts were busy with the amazing situation in which he found himself. Last night he had been astonished to discover that he was acting as host to the daughter of a sultan; this morning he had witnessed the astounding fact that the lightning might conceive and bring forth precious stones. It is true, Fortesque had the little bag of rubies in his pocket to prove that all this was not a dream, but he was none the less disturbed by the whole affair.

"Were I living in the Middle Ages," reflected Fortesque to himself, "all this would smell most abominably of sorcery! Most assuredly it would be my duty to denounce this charming creature as a witch, and the mute as her familiar."

It was most undeniable, however, that he was not living in the Middle Ages. Therefore he could not very logically seek this easy way of solving his problem. The girl was here; the mute was here; the rubies were here. And Fortesque was quite convinced that his own sanity was not in question. Unless he were to accept the explanation of the girl herself, which was no explanation at all of how she had come to this place, he must cast about for some practical and matter-of-fact elucidation of the mystery.

As though in answer to this thought, he heard the uplifted echo of a voice that came to him from the winding road below; and with it the clatter of a horse stumbling across the fallen branch of a tree. Some one was on the road, coming here!

A single glance showed him that there was nothing to betray to any casual eye the presence of visitors at the house. If this were the forest ranger, all would be well. If not—

Fortesque lifted his fresh tire into place and began to clamp home the nuts that held it on the wheel. He paused in this work to fill and light his pipe, and was just breaking the match, after the custom of the mountains, when two horsemen appeared riding toward him. Fortesque turned toward them and waved his hand in greeting. One was the sheriff of the county; the other was a stranger—apparently a city man.

"Morning, Sheriff!" Fortesque's voice rolled out with sonorous power. "What brings you up this way? You must like exercise, to tackle the roads after a storm like the one we had last night!"

The two men drew rein, but did not dismount.

"Howdy, Fortesque!" returned the sheriff cordially. "Seen any strangers up this way?"

Fortesque laughed. "Strangers? I should say not! I had hard work to get up last night myself, and I guess the cañon road is clear out by this time."

"Oh, I'm not talkin' about cars," said the sheriff. "We're lookin' for a man and a woman who got off the limited at the waterin' station under Old Baldy, and skipped into the hills."

"Ah!" Fortesque smiled. "An elopement?"

"Hell, no!" growled the sheriff, while his companion chuckled. "The man pulled a big jewel robbery in New York. The woman's just out of an asylum there—they hitched up and skipped west. Los Angeles was all fixed to grab them when the train came in, then the oiler remembered he'd seen 'em duck off the train up here."

Fortesque's brows lifted. "They came this way?"

"Dunno. I'm jest lookin'; that's all. It's a cinch they went somewheres! They might ha' come over this-a-way by the trail."

"Sorry I haven't seen 'em," rejoined Fortesque—then frowned. "Out of an asylum? Both?"

"Nope!" It was the other man who made answer now, jauntily. "Just the woman. Calls herself Lulu and has it all doped out that she's a princess or something. The man's a plain crook, I guess. It's the woman I'm after. Private asylum. She broke out 'fore she'd been there a week."

"Oh!" Fortesque looked at him calmly, without sign of the murderous itch in his palms. "Oh! You're from the asylum?"

"I was wired to do the work for them—yep. Martin's private agency in the city. I'm Martin. Got to get the woman, see? Wearin' silk clothes, the wire said."

Fortesque shook his head, and took the pipe from his mouth.

"No sign of anybody around here," he rejoined. "I wish they'd come along; it might be interesting. Will you come in and get a bite to eat?"

"No, thanks," said the sheriff, gathering up his reins. "Done had breakfast an hour ago. Well, I guess it aint no use goin' on to the ranger station—we can telephone him. But if they aint come past here, they must ha' struck off down the cañon. The poor fools! It's clear washed out, down there. Well, so long!"

"So long, and good luck!" returned Fortesque cordially.

He watched them as they rode away down the trail, and he continued to watch the empty trail after they had gone. He stood motionless. After a moment he slowly knocked out his pipe.

It was evident that he had forgotten all about his half-repaired car.

CHAPTER IV

FORTESQUE slowly took his way toward the house.

The world had reeled and rocked around him, and had crashed into chaos. All his fine imaginings were destroyed. He perceived that he had dreamed once too often. The dream had been very sweet, it is true, but the wakening was the more bitter.

How clever he had thought her! Well, so much the worse. He had been a fool. What a fool, to swallow that rigmarole about a sultan's daughter and a slave! This Barak—his real name was probably Jim the Dip, or something of the sort. He had played up to his part cleverly. The wit of a madwoman and the wit of a criminal—a strong combination!

He shrank from the thought, as he remembered the strange sweetness that had hovered about him when he had put her to bed like a child. That hurt. He felt as though he had lost something very precious.

Brian Fortesque was bitterly angry with himself. He was angry because he had indulged a wayward romanticism, because he had fondled a vagrant illusion, because he had met that girl as an equal and had allowed her to delude him with her fanciful lies. At this very moment she was probably laughing at him! No wonder he had thought her mannerisms a bit strange! No wonder he had credited her with a charmingly virginal naïveté! No wonder he had found her so different from other women!

There had been some truth in her story, evidently. She must have left the limited, the transcontinental train, at the water-stop in the hills, at evening or later. Then the burst of the storm, the hill trail, the long ten miles, lasting until daybreak, in the arms of Barak. What a night! A night fitting for a madwoman—a madwoman, in the arms of an escaped criminal, following the moutain trails amid a driving sleet of rain!

Suddenly Fortesque halted, under the startling impact of an idea.

"Those rubies! What made the man give them up to me so freely, at her mere

word? That was a most unusual thing! Ah—of course! They arranged it between them. They arranged that she would delude me, lure me into disposing of the stones for them, using me as a tool!"

He went into the kitchen. Barak was standing there, arms bared to the elbows, at work washing up the pile of dishes. He glanced up, and his mouth gaped suddenly at the look in Fortesque's eyes; then he went to his work again. Fortesque passed him by and went on into the living-room. Then he halted.

On the chaise longue, which was placed to catch the light from the eastern window, lay his fair guest, one of his yellow-backed French volumes in her hand. She saw him, smiled, and rolled the liquid lines at him:

"Ce pays nous ennuie, O Mort! Appareillons!
Si le ciel et la mer sont noirs comme de l'encre,
Nos cœurs que tu connais sont remplis de rayons!"

He marveled at the rich intonation of her French, the lingering sweetness of her voice. The book dropped from her hand, and she beckoned imperiously.

"Come and sit by me, Monsieur Narquois! Do you still refuse to ask questions?"

"Absolutely," he said coldly, as he brought up a chair.

HE sat facing her, studying her as though to thus pierce to the riddle of this enigma, this charming, half-human creature who had enmeshed him. And he put the thought into words:

"It was not Œdipus who asked questions."

She laughed deliciously, swung up her hands beneath her head, gave him look for look.

"So then I am a Sphinx? And you think that I would devour you?"

"Your name should have been Helen."

"Ah, it is you who put the riddle, without asking a question! But I can answer that," she exclaimed triumphantly. "Helen means *taker*—Helen, taker of cities, taker of men! It was Æschylus who sang that. You seem to have a frightful opinion of me this morning! Are you angry with yourself because you like me?"

He started, astonished at her penetration. But he did not deny.

"Yes," he said simply. Lunatic or not, she was clever; there was a gloomy fascination in watching her sheer young beauty, in following the striking high-lights of her fantastic brain.

Yet, as he gazed at her, he found his palms itching again for that second horseman, that bold-eyed, impudent-mouthed man from the city, that Martin of the agency. What if that man had come here last night—and if Brian Fortesque had not come? The thought brought sweat to his forehead, until he remembered Barak.

He felt himself under the spell of this delicate thing of flesh and blood. He perceived himself unable to preserve the thought of her mental frailty. In her presence, he was forced to forget it. She was stronger than the chaos into which he had fallen. She dominated even this.

And now, regarding her steadily, he saw that a new dignity seemed to have come into her face—a simplicity, a severity of purpose. When she spoke to him, it was with a level gravity that matched the deep poise of her eyes.

"I should like to tell you about myself, if you will let me," she said softly.

He assented silently, with a gesture, a look; he was to all appearance perfectly cold, impassive as a man of stone. He had never been so thankful for this external seeming as now, at this moment.

"My home is south of Manila, east of Singapore, north of the coral seas, west of Mindanao—north of the sun and east of the moon!" Her voice was like the low music of a *vox humana* stop pulsating among the carven beams and blackened pennons of some old cathedral. But Fortesque did not look into her eyes. He was gazing at the floor. He was afraid of her. He was afraid of himself.

"Connais-tu le pays?" Her voice was dreamy, musing. "There is a bay, a long and deep bay with reefs and shining fish, where the long *praus* of my grandfather used to ride in with the spoil of Christian ships. Nobody comes there now, except an occasional rusty, battered, wheezy little steamer."

Fortesque began to see the picture. He wondered whence she had obtained it.

"The houses are white from the sea, dirty from close up. The largest house of all is the house of the sultan—the palace. Brown men armed with swords keep the doors. Inside are many beautiful things, many gaudy, trumpery things. All around are other houses, tall feathery trees, an island kingdom. The United States owns it, but does not disturb it. The American

flag flies from the palace. There are a few white men—a funny fat man who deals in merchandise, a dry, withered little man who plays the fiddle divinely and cries when he talks of Virginia; they are my friends. There is no cable, no communication with the world, no mail-service. It is our world, the world of the sultan. There are other white men too. A tall man, with a thin nose and deep eyes! A year ago he kissed me, and the sun still burns the place as though fire had scarred it."

SHE shivered slightly. The picture grew upon Fortesque. He saw these men rising before him to fade away again, like those men of old from whom Saul hid his face in the cave of Endor. One by one they rose before him, and their eyes fell upon him bleakly as though to ask by what right they were summoned from the deeps of beyond.

"This man is named Hvarson." Her voice was liquid in his ears again. He looked at the floor, but it was not the floor that he saw. It was Hvarson. "I think he comes out of the Northland somewhere. He is a very terrible man. He has a friend who is named Hamed Ben Yusuf, an island trader, the son of a Chinese woman and my grandfather's old pirate captain. This Hamed Ben Yusuf has a schooner, and trades. He is an old man, very fierce and cunning, very tall and strong. One of his eyes is dead. Men fear him, for they say that Sheitan crouches in the prow of the *Gazelle,* and that a woman's skull is the lamp in his cabin."

Fortesque saw the grizzled, one-eyed, stalwart old sea-jackal uprise before him, bend upon him a look of scornful wonder, and slowly fade again.

"They are my enemies, those—the friends of my half-brother, on whom they prey. They know that if I sit in the palace, as my father the old sultan willed, they will be swept away like leaves in the typhoon! So they hate me. They plotted against me, and told my brother, with cunning words, how to bring me into a prison in America. And he obeyed, for he feared me. With me out of the way, who would be sultan but Zahri, the son of a handmaid, Zahri of the dark skin?

"So they brought it about. And now I am here, longing for my home and justice!"

Fortesque struggled to rouse himself from this siren song that drew him ever closer to the rocks of destruction. He struggled, and he forced a question, thinking to trap her wandering mind.

"The man who played the violin—the fat man who cried at thought of California—"

"No, no—the dry and withered man! Not California, but Virginia. His name is Franks, and he would do much for me. Tell me, Brian, will you take me home again and protect me until we get there?"

NOW, this question frightened Fortesque terribly. He perceived that it was asked in earnest.

For a moment he sat silently gazing at the floor. It would have been easy to say no; yet he dared not utter the word. That would mean to abandon this girl to Martin of the agency, and sweat came into his palms at the thought. For Martin would get her, certainly.

He raised his head and looked at her. To his astonishment, her lapis eyes were sane—limpid and clear, deep and cool and sweet, gazing at him like bits of star-spangled heaven.

"Will you?" she asked, leaning forward a little on the arms of the chaise longue. One hand, slim and slender, ringless, crept out and touched his like the appealing caress of a child. "Will you forget your money for a little while, and take me home?"

Fortesque felt the pulse throbbing in his temples. Temptation swirled upon him, lurid and terrible. What easier than to obey her behest, take her to the tropic seas, lend himself to her delusion and make life happy for her? What easier than to bind her life to his?

He put that thought away from him very quickly.

If he said yes, then there must come an awakening some day. Well, why not? Was he to let this exquisite thing fall into the hands of Martin of the agency? Was he to let her be gyved and shackled and taken back again to some dreary padded cell under the shadow of Sing Sing? He could realize, in this moment, why the jewel-thief so implicitly obeyed her, how the criminal had fallen under the sway of the madwoman.

"Will you, Brian?"

"Yes," he answered hoarsely.

"You mean it?"

"I have never broken my word in my life."

"That is because you have seldom given

it," she uttered, with a momentary return to her lightness of manner of the previous night. A long sigh escaped her lips, and she sank back. "Oh, I am happy now! You will sell the stones, and we shall go home together, and you will protect me. '*Forte Scutum!*' Did I not say that was a good omen?"

FORTESQUE wondered a little whether her whole vast delusion had arisen out of seeing those words carved above his door. Yet he did not particularly care. He had passed his word; he would keep it.

"What of Barak?" he asked. "Does he go too?"

"Yes. But in this country Barak is so helpless—I can talk with him by signs, but he cannot talk with these others. If it had not been for Barak, I would not be here now. Shall I tell you about how he got me away, and how he took the stones from my brother?"

"Yes," Fortesque assented quickly, wondering how much she would tell.

She laughed a little, and settled herself upon the cushions.

"It is fall now; then it was spring, rich, late spring, when my father the sultan died, and left his power to me. I was pure-blooded, legitimate. My brother Zahri was not. But Zahri was there, on the island with Hvarson and Hamed Ben Yusuf. I was in the convent at Nice, in France.

"So Zahri wrote to me and said that he would meet me in New York, and sent money. I came, and he came. I hoped that he would bring Franks with him, but he brought Hvarson. We waited in New York a little while, until a week or two ago, because I did not want to go home in the rainy season. Zahri brought with him, also, the slave Barak, and some of my father's jewels. I think Hvarson had something to do with the jewels, but I am not sure.

"Then, very suddenly one night, two men came to the hotel. They were very queer men, doctors, and they asked me queer questions. I could see no sense in them at all. They looked at each other and nodded, and went away. The next morning Zahri told me to take a little journey with him, and because I suspected nothing, I went.

"We did not travel far—only an hour or two up the Hudson River. We went into a strange house, a gloomy place with a high wall, and the two doctors locked me into a room. Hvarson came and looked in at me, and laughed. He was very terrible. He said to wait for him, and that in a few months he would come back and get me.

"Do you understand? They said that I was mad, insane! It was to give Zahri the island."

Fortesque looked at her, and saw that her eyes were troubled, distended in fragmentary fear. He nodded quietly.

"I understand," he said. "That can be done in New York. Zahri wanted the power, eh?"

"No."

"What?" He frowned at the word. "But you said—"

"Don't mistake, Brian. Not Zahri, but Hvarson—Hvarson! Poor Zahri! A flabby and drunken sot; what would he do with power? He has no ambition except for fresh women, no desire save for plenty of opium, no strength but for opening bottles of whisky! Zahri and Hvarson went home to tell the folk that Christian learning had unsettled my mind and put me in a madhouse, which would seem very likely to my people.

"Hvarson and Hamed Ben Yusuf—they knew that I would sweep them away! So they wanted Zahri on the throne of my father. On Zahri they could feed, could gorge, as vultures gorge on a dead whale. Hvarson would give him women; Hamed Ben Yusuf would give him opium and liquor; from him, bit by bit, they would strip my father's wealth and riches and dominions. Who could stop them? No one."

NOW her eyes were filled with storm and fire.

"Barak learned what had been done with me. He could have broken those two men in his hands, but he dared not; he was afraid of this country and its strange ways. So, on the night that Zahri and Hvarson departed for San Francisco, Barak stole the fifteen rubies that Zahri meant to sell. He stole them, and sold three of them, and came to me.

"What a night—what a night! This Barak came over the high wall, and a guard tried to stop him. Barak took that man and squeezed him into a rag; just that! Squeezed him into a red, dripping rag. Then Barak found my window and

climbed to it. He took the iron bars in his hands, and I heard him laughing as they bent and twisted in his hands. Once, long ago, I remember seeing Barak take guns and bend them double across his knee to amuse my father the sultan.

"So I went away with Barak, and we started to San Francisco. But people looked queerly at us, and whispered, and I knew that the telegraph would go faster than we, and I became afraid. So when the train stopped among the mountains, I told Barak, and we left it unseen and fled. That is all—all except the words over your door—*'Forte Scutum!'* A friendly omen."

Fortesque sat in silence for a little while.

"Tell me!" Her voice leaped forth suddenly. "Do you think that I—I am mad?"

He regarded her steadily, trying hard to keep himself in hand.

"Does it matter, Lou-lóu? If you are mad, then I shall be mad also, and gladly!"

"Oh! You will keep your promise, knowing everything?"

"I will keep my promise."

"You must go to the city tomorrow. I have only one friend in this country, and I was trying to reach him. You will go to him—and the things I have promised will be begun."

"The things you have promised?" He repeated the words, puzzled. She smiled gently.

"Yes. To teach you respect for religion, for woman, for friendship—and for yourself."

He smiled a little. "Very well—if you can; but it will not be easy. You shall remain here. I can return in a week—"

"A week?" Dismay widened her eyes. "No, no! Two days at the outside!"

He calculated for a moment, then nodded. "Very well, in two days. I will go tomorrow, Monday, and I will be back Tuesday night. We shall go to San Francisco in my big car, avoiding the railroad. You will be safe here in the meantime, but do not go outside, lest the men come back."

"The men? What men?"

"They were here this morning, seeking you—two men. They told me your story. I sent them away."

"Oh! You did not tell me—"

He made a gesture as of dismissal, and rose. Then a smile crept to his lips.

"You have eaten my salt; would I betray you?"

HER eyes lightened with a great flame of— No; he turned away coldly, refusing to meet that look. From the kitchen doorway he glanced back. Her head had fallen into her hands. He thought that her shoulders shook as though with silent sobs.

Fortesque went into the kitchen and closed the door. Barak turned to him. Fortesque went to the man, took him by the shoulders, held him pressed against the wall. Beneath his hands, the great muscles lay quiescent. Barak gazed at him, calm and unmoved.

"Listen!" said Fortesque in a low voice, his face like stone. "I shall go away from here for two days. If in that time anything happens to this girl, when I return here I shall kill you without mercy! Do you understand? I know the whole truth. Men were here this morning looking for you. Also, she has told me what I did not know. I leave her in your charge. Don't count on your strength, my friend—if anything happens to her, my strength will be more than yours! That is all. See to it."

The head of Barak drooped on his breast. The flaming eyes closed. Two tears crept down the rough, bronzed cheeks of the mute.

Fortesque loosed him and turned away. He went out, out in the morning sunlight, and stood there gazing around. The great flood of the morning light seemed to restore his balance; the tall shapes of the green trees around him seemed to bring his staggering mind to new poise. He knew that he was quite sane. Yet those tears in the eyes of Barak—they frightened him!

"That thief is not a bad man," he said to himself wonderingly. "Or else—she has bewitched him, as she has bewitched me! I wonder if she believes the story herself? She must! Well, then—I'll believe it too. I have been very sane all my life; now I shall become a lunatic and seek happiness at the rainbow's end. And I shall keep my promise to her."

He went toward the roadster to finish his work.

CHAPTER V

WHEN, in the early daybreak of Monday, Brian Fortesque threaded his way along the washed-out cañon road, when he came to the boulevards and the orange groves, when he left the mountains

behind him and came roaring down to the city, he had but one thought.

"I have been too long sane. Now I shall be happy."

He still had the rubies. He thought the girl had cast a spell upon this thief, Barak as she called him. He felt that the same spell held him bound and hepless and—happy.

All the same, he did not doubt that she was mad, and that her story about the Orient isle had been a queerly convincing phantasmagoria, a rhapsody drawn from an over-read brain.

He did not even believe that the Reverend Luke Quail actually existed.

When he drew into the city, he did not seek his downtown offices; all that could wait until later. Within an hour or two he could put his financial affairs in shape to leave, and that would come last of all.

Last of all! It was significant. Those three words would have profoundly astonished anyone who knew Brian Fortesque in the city. He had been a cold, harsh delver after gold; bonds and stocks wrapped him about; interest hedged him in; money ruled him. What had changed all this? What tremendous and awful influence had swept away into the farthermost corner, swept away as a minor and unimportant affair, the necessity of looking after his money?

The eyes of a madwoman!

Fortesque, then, went neither to his bachelor apartments nor to his offices. Instead he turned aside into a dirty suburb of the city—a factory suburb, a place of old squalor and ruined adobe buildings from Mexican days. He drove slowly through this, looking for an address.

Presently, somewhat to his surprise, he came upon the street. A little afterward, he came upon the house. It was a clean little house of adobe, very eloquent of poverty. Above its door was a board painted with the word "Mission." Here Fortesque stopped his car and got out.

He did not knock at the door, but opened it and walked in. A man looked up at him, silent.

FORTESQUE saw an open suitcase being packed hurriedly, with trembling hands. He saw a man, an old man dressed in black with a white rim of collar showing. The man had white hair, the redly streaked face of age. His blue eyes were blurred a little. This man was going down into the ruin of lost hopes, lost youth, lost everything: his clothes were worn and threadbare; his linen was frayed and scissored at the edges. He looked underfed.

Yet the blurred, weakened blue eyes held true and straight.

"What do you want now?" said the old man, fright in his voice, stern strength in his eyes. "I told you I had nothing to say."

"You are mistaken," said Fortesque coldly. "I have never seen you before. My name is Fortesque. Are you the Reverend Luke Quail?"

The other started, peered at him again.

"Eh? Yes. Thank God, I made a mistake! What do you want with me?"

Fortesque looked about the room. A few chairs stood ranged, little black books upon them. An old organ stood in the corner. In the center of a wall was a high box draped with cloths, and on this box stood a cross of plain wood. The bare austerity of this place, the stark poverty of it, stirred and humbled Fortesque.

"I want to talk with you," he said, more gently.

"There is no time." Luke Quail shook his head and began putting frail and mended garments into the torn paper suitcase. "I am in a hurry. I must go away and help a friend—"

"You must stay here," said Fortesque. "I have come to ask you a question. Do you know anyone who calls herself Loulou?"

He was startled. Luke Quail arose before him, staring. In the blue eyes shone a piercing light of anger. From those eyes, Fortesque almost recoiled.

"What is that to you?"

"The girl is in my house, under my protection. She sent me to you. I hardly believed her story, for I knew that other men were seeking her. But I have come to learn—"

LUKE QUAIL flung himself forward. He caught the upraised hand of Fortesque and pressed it between trembling, quivering fingers. Tears fell upon his cheeks; his mouth worked terribly.

"Thank God!" he cried quaveringly. "Oh, thank God! I have never known Him to fail in answer to my prayer—and this time, *mea culpa,* I thought that He had failed. Oh, sit down, sit down! You must excuse my emotion. I am an old man. She is here?"

"Not in the city. In the hills. She is safe. She told me a queer tale about being the daughter of a sultan, and about her brother putting her away, and stolen jewels—"

"Sit down, sit down!" Luke Quail pushed him into a chair, feverishly. Then the old man turned and flung up his arms. "Praise be to God! Wait until I come back."

He rushed away, dabbing at his eyes, and vanished in a rear chamber.

Fortesque looked about the room. Suddenly he remembered that he still wore his driving cap. He looked at the pitiful altar and the naked cross. A little flush rose into his cheeks, and awkwardly, as though he were ashamed of doing it, he removed his cap.

He was utterly amazed because he had found Luke Quail. Was it possible, then, that this girl was not, after all—

The old man returned to him, hastily. He drew up another chair for himself, and then pulled forward a third. Upon this he laid a mass of newspaper clippings.

"Look, look at these!" he exclaimed. "I heard about it yesterday, and got them only last night. I borrowed some money, and was going to New York at once. Oh, it is awful, terrible! Here is the whole story. Perhaps you know more than I."

Fortesque made no response. He took up clipping after clipping, and read.

The Sultan Zahri, variously misspelled after the fashion of newspapers, was the ruler of an island in the Philippines or near them. He had been traveling in the United States. In New York a trusted servant had robbed him of family jewels valued at a huge price, and he was now in San Francisco, expecting to leave for his island possessions by the next steamer.

So much for one set of clippings. The other was more terrible.

A madwoman, confined in a private asylum on the Hudson, had done a fearful thing. She had broken free, and had with her bare hands terribly mangled one of the guards of the place; the man had been broken out of all semblance to a man. She was now at liberty somewhere. Her mania was that she was an Oriental princess.

The latest clipping said that the madwoman and the servant of the Sultan Zahri were believed to be en route for California, either in company or singly, and that "the police were working on sure clues."

Fortesque threw down the clippings and wiped his hands, as though he had touched something unclean. He gazed fixedly at the Reverend Luke Quail, and spoke. He wanted now to know with whom he dealt, before he came to other things.

"Lay all this aside for the moment," he commanded coldly. "Where did you know her?"

Luke Quail appeared agitated. "But—but—"

"Answer me," said Fortesque, more gently now. "You must make me believe in her, if you can do so."

THE blurred blue eyes softened.

"Yes. I was a missionary out there for years, you see, doing God's work. I knew her in all her childhood. We have corresponded regularly ever since."

"So she told me," said Fortesque. "Then her story—is true! Very well. But she also told me that you had a magnificent church here, and that—"

Tears trembled upon the old cheeks, and Luke Quail raised a protesting hand.

"Don't, don't!" The voice faltered and broke. "I—I lied to her, because I knew that she would send charity if I told the truth—and I could not accept it! I wanted her to think of me as anything but an old failure, a miserable and broken wreck."

For a moment Luke Quail dropped his face in his hands; then he looked up again.

"Well, no matter! My punishment has come upon me, and the lie was well meant."

"I see," said Fortesque coldly. "How old are you?"

"I am nearly seventy."

"The church supports this mission here?"

"No." The old man hesitated. "No. A few faithful people hereabouts keep it going. It—it is all I have."

Fortesque's brows lifted. "What? But you receive a pension."

Luke Quail shook his head, dumbly.

"You mistake," said Fortesque. "I distinctly remember giving ten thousand dollars to the pension fund of your denomination. Every minister over sixty-eight was to receive it."

"Only on condition," broke in Luke Quail quietly, "that he was in active service upon a certain date. Two days before that date I was in the hospital, very ill. That my congregation might obtain another pastor, I resigned. When I recovered, I found that I was technically not permitted

to receive a pension. Further, the church stated that I was retired and commanded me to cease giving any services. I came down here, and with the approval of my bishop ignored the order—"

"Damnation take such a church!" cried out Fortesque, in a sudden gust of terrible anger. "That is not a religion; that is a—"

"Peace!" Luke Quail rose before him. So stern were the blue, blurred eyes, that Fortesque abruptly checked his outburst. "How dare you say such words, sir? Retract them instantly, lest God bring punishment upon you! Bow your head, sir, and ask His pardon for those words."

FORTESQUE wanted to laugh. He wanted to utter another curse upon such a church as this, such an organization of technicality-worshiping hypocrites. He looked into the blue old eyes of Luke Quail—

And amazedly, a man in a daze, scarce knowing what he did, he murmured an apology.

"I do not complain of God, sir," went on the old man. "All my life have I served Him, and I do not think that He will forget me at the end. The church itself, you know, does not matter in the least; the church is only here as a means of serving God."

"Queer theology!" said Fortesque, not without a sneer. "Does your denomination preach it?"

"Of course." Luke Quail gazed at him calmly. "You think, I suppose, that I should blame the rulers of the church? No. I do not complain. They act according to their light, sir; better men than I, by far! What they do really troubles me very little, because I do not serve them, but God. I do not pray to them, but to God. You understand?

"All the same," he added, a little plaintively, "I do not like these technicalities."

At this, Fortesque wanted to laugh, but he did not. Instead, he came much nearer to very abruptly taking this old man into his arms. The impulse astonished him with its force.

"Then you do not need money?" he asked.

"No. I have enough. All my life I have never received more than a thousand dollars a year, and I have raised six children—and buried them. Forty years in the service of God. He has never failed me."

"And yet they deny you a pension!"

Fortesque gazed wonderingly at this man, who in all his life had received but forty thousand dollars, who had raised and buried six children, who did not complain. He wished that he had known about this man when he gave ten thousand dollars to that pension-fund.

Was this man more happy than he? He believed it firmly. In those blurred blue eyes he saw a soft radiance that shamed him. He felt suddenly afraid of the whole thing, afraid of the entire subject. He wanted to be rid of this man, who wakened such strange things in him.

"Let us return," he said abruptly, coldly. "Lou-lóu is at my shack in the hills. With her is the man Barak, who stole the jewels. Now let me tell you the story that she told me."

HE leaned forward and spoke, briefly sketching her tale. It was not she who had so frightfully slain that guard, but the man Barak. As he spoke, Fortesque felt within him the hard, dry realization that all her story was true to the letter.

"Do you believe her story?" he asked at the last.

"Do you?" said Luke Quail.

"Yes." The word was an act of faith.

"So do I."

"I have promised that girl that I would take her back to her island kingdom and establish her in her rights. I think that will be no easy matter, but I shall keep my promise. Tomorrow night I shall return in my big car, get her and Barak, and motor north to San Francisco. There I have friends, and we shall have no trouble in leaving the country."

Luke Quail was looking at him steadily.

"Men are seeking her," he uttered. "The law is seeking them both. Somehow they knew that I had been connected with the place in the Eastern seas; they came here two hours ago to ask questions. There will be danger to you."

Fortesque gestured scornfully. "No matter."

"How long have you known her?"

"Two days."

"You are an impulsive man."

"On the contrary, I am a cold and practical man. I am doing this because—because—"

"Why?"

"I don't know."

Luke Quail smiled a little. It was a very tender smile.

"God bless you, my son! She wants me to come?"

Fortesque nodded. "She wants you to come to the island with us and help us."

The blurred blue eyes probed into him very searchingly.

"And you do not think it wise?"

Fortesque flushed slightly. "You are old. The way is long; the enterprise is uncertain and dangerous. But perhaps I have been sent to aid you, Luke Quail. Tomorrow I will give you fifty thousand dollars. Build your church, remain here and serve God, make this end of town a rebuke to the Pharisees—"

HE paused suddenly, for there was an awful light in those blue eyes; they were not blurred at all, now.

"I think," said Luke Quail softly, "that the devil put that idea into your head! Kneel down here beside me and pray."

The old man plumped down upon his knees and held out his clasped hands toward that bare altar, toward that naked wooden cross. He did not say anything, although his lips were moving slightly. If he prayed, it was within his soul.

Fortesque felt the force of that silent prayer. Perhaps it was the force of his own shame that he felt. He bowed his head a little. After all, he had deliberately tempted this man! He had thought to test him.

By inches Fortesque felt his right knee sliding down, as though some unseen, invisible hand were impelling it. After a moment he was kneeling, wholly ashamed of the action, upon one knee. He rather hoped that Luke Quail had not observed it. And as he knelt thus, he thought of what the girl had said to him—that this visit would be the beginning of her work upon him, that with this visit he would somehow begin to find the respect that he had denied.

Fortesque came upright and stood looking at Luke Quail as the latter rose.

"I will call for you at four tomorrow afternoon," he said simply.

"I shall be ready," said the old man.

Fortesque laid a roll of bills upon the chair.

"Repay what you have borrowed. Get what is necessary. If they come around to ask any more questions, have no fear."

Luke Quail laughed amusedly.

"Fear, my son? Why, it is you who should have no fear—not I!"

Fortesque left the place and was climbing into his car before the full meaning of those words struck into him. He jammed his cap upon his head and pressed the starting button.

"I believe that man is not quite sane," he said to himself.

But presently he added, more thoughtfully: "I almost wish that a little of his madness would extend—to me!"

Then he thought again of the girl's prophecy, and an ironical smile touched his lips.

CHAPTER VI

DURING the rest of that day, Fortesque devoted himself to putting his private affairs in order. His finances he still left to the last.

On Tuesday morning, his big car awaiting him down below, primed and ready for the trip north, he sat in his office. Once more he picked up his morning paper and read over the paragraph of shipping news which carried such vital information. The *Tenyo Maru* had sailed on the previous day for the Orient, and prominent on her passenger-list was Sultan Zahri of Sibuko. He had gone, then, and Hvarson with him; beyond a doubt they had gone in ignorance that Lou-lóu had escaped, or they would not have departed so quickly.

All that morning, stone by stone, Fortesque stripped down the golden edifice which he had raised around himself. It was not to be done rapidly; yet he did it rapidly. He leveled the barrier of stocks and bonds; he brought low all the glittering thing he had reared; he put it all away to await his return, and dictated letter after letter of resignation. And there were other things to be attended to, chief among them a telephone-call to a man named Smith.

All this Fortesque did, not carefully, but hurriedly. He wanted now nothing so much as to get away from here, to get back to that house in the mountains. He knew now that he was facing absolute realities, not fancies.

Rightly or wrongly, that slender child was wanted for murder; and if Martin of the agency found her, she would go into a frightful hell on earth. And she would remain there—until the man Hvar-

son came to get her. In short, people would turn and rend her as though she were a mad dog.

The police were after Barak, and a man of his peculiar description would be hard to hide. Fortesque was thinking of this when his secretary ushered in Mr. Smith.

"Hello, Brian! Why all the frantic rush?"

Fortesque shook hands delightedly with Smith, who was a man of some prominence in his own way. He set out cigars, then relaxed and met the inquiring gaze of his caller.

"Smith, I am going to the Orient on the first steamer, and I want you to use all your influence to get me fixed up with passports. Can you do it?"

Smith looked at him, and chuckled.

"Maybe. Paid your income tax?"

Fortesque smiled grimly and took from his desk the papers which he had prepared.

"Here you are. I'm going; the Reverend Luke Quail is going. Also a young lady—"

He checked himself suddenly. It occurred to him for the first time that he had not the slightest idea of Lou-lóu's name.

"Oh-ho!" Smith chuckled again. "What's this, anyhow? You're not going on a honeymoon trip, old man?"

Fortesque compressed his lips, then nodded.

"Yes. But—I warn you, I want nothing said! No publicity. A servant goes too—John Simpson."

"Who's the lady, Brian?"

"She will be Mrs. Fortesque. Is that enough?"

Smith tipped back his chair, surveyed Fortesque, and slowly nodded.

"I guess so. If you're taking old Quail along, everything ought to be dashed regular, eh?"

"I'll be going to San Francisco at once," said Fortesque. "Do you suppose you can wire them there, and have the papers waiting for me?"

The other whistled. "I doubt it. What boat?"

"The first I can get. Money is no object."

Smith rose. "Good-by! It'll cost you a little for wires and—"

Fortesque extended a blank check, signed.

"Fill that in to suit yourself, Smith."

"Good luck! Congratulations and all that—I'm off to the wire this minute."

Fortesque sat for a little, gazing at the door. Then he smiled slightly.

"Good chap, old Smith! He'll do it if anyone can."

With a bundle of securities under his arm, Fortesque went to the bank at noon, and gained access to the vaults. In his own box he placed the securities, then dropped after them the little leather bag of rubies.

At the counter he drew ten thousand dollars in currency, and departed to his club for luncheon.

HE lunched alone, at his own little table near the corner. At the next table were three men. He nodded to two of them, fellow-members. The third man was a stranger—a ruddy, bronzed man whom he heard addressed as Mariner. This Mariner had recently returned from years somewhere in the Eastern seas. When he talked, his voice roared and rumbled gustily as though reaching out against a booming wind.

Fortesque ate rapidly, heedlessly. He was about to shove back his chair and leave the club for the last time when, suddenly, his head jerked up. From the adjoining table he heard the voice of Mariner mention the name of the Reverend Luke Quail.

"He's somewhere in this town of yours," said the bronzed man heartily. "Don't know of him? That's the usual way of it. Down in the islands, now, they still tell about him."

Fortesque sat silently for a moment. It was not the first time in his life that he had one day heard of some person or thing, only to find that the air about him seemed surcharged with references to the same person or thing. Perhaps he would not now have had his attention drawn to this Mariner, had he not met Quail on the preceding day.

Fortesque rose and leaned over the table adjoining.

"I beg your pardon," he said, looking at Mariner. "I heard you mention Luke Quail."

"You know him?" asked Mariner, when introductions had been effected.

"Very well indeed," said Fortesque, and with some truth. "A little worn-out man—that's all."

"A lot you know!" said Mariner scorn-

fully. "How they'd laugh at that, down in the islands! Ten years ago Luke Quail was a missionary there."

"I know," said Fortesque. "He was speaking of it yesterday."

"Good! I want to meet him!" exclaimed the traveler.

Fortesque shook his head. "He's leaving today, I think, for the Orient. May I ask why he is so famous in the islands?"

"Damn it, I'd give a hundred dollars to meet him!" said Mariner gustily. "Sure; it's no secret. He was a fighting missionary; that's all. Man named Hvarson had an island somewhere near Zamboanga; Quail had heard things about him; didn't like 'em. One day Hvarson and the preacher met on the Escolta—in Manila, that was.

"They say that Quail gave old Hvarson, who's a regular pirate, a tremendous tongue-lashing, and then there was a fight. The preacher went down three times, badly beaten up, but in the end he came near knocking the life out of Hvarson. When he got through, he stirred Hvarson's ribs with his boot and told the trader to go get baptized before they met again. Hvarson was past asking questions, but somebody in the crowd spoke up, and Quail says: 'Why? Because I can't read the burial service over a man unless he's been baptized! Tell him about it, will you?' Then he picks up his hat and walks away, with blood on his face. Well, that's the kind he was. Hvarson is still alive, so I guess he and the preacher never met up again."

FORTESQUE went back to his office reflecting about these things.

He realized that Luke Quail had really told him nothing at all, had merely confirmed the story told by Lou-lóu. They had met and talked, but not as men would ordinarily meet and talk. Why was this? Their meeting had been one of many things said, of course; yet it had contained much that was unsaid, much that was tacitly understood. It was odd, looking back upon it.

And Luke Quail had not referred to his past experiences, except to say that he had known Lou-lóu through her childhood. There was a good deal of reserve power in that.

Fortesque ceased abruptly to think of Luke Quail as an old and feeble man, a man outworn. He realized his mistake. He saw that there was in the old body something that he did not comprehend—a force of the will, a force of utter conviction, a force of the spirit, which he had seldom encountered among the men of gold. Just what this force was, he did not understand; but it was there.

He no longer considered any difficulties in getting safely out of the country.

AT three o'clock he left his offices for the last time. He drove home and obtained four suitcases. Two of these contained his own things; two of them contained things which he had ordered for Lou-lóu. With these in the tonneau, he drove the big car around to the Mission in the squalid end of town.

Luke Quail was awaiting him on the curbing, with the torn paper suitcase. About the old man was gathered a small crowd—women, most of them, but some men; there were tears, fervent words in many languages, hands to clasp and dirty babes to kiss. Fortesque understood suddenly that the Reverend Luke Quail was giving up something in thus going away, that in this departure there were effects upon other lives and other people than those to whom he was going. Fortesque, too, saw that there were tears in the blurred blue eyes.

In short, Brian Fortesque found himself learning something.

"You're not sorry to be on your way?" he asked as he drove out of the city.

"Of course I am," said Luke Quail, his voice quavering a little. "Sorry and glad. We're sorry to die, but we're glad to enter into paradise."

This was a unique way to regard the matter, certainly.

"Do you look upon the South Seas as paradise, then?" asked Fortesque.

"If you knew the place to which we are going, you would not ask."

Presently it occurred to Fortesque that in this reply there might have been a double meaning, a deep significance. He found the words disturbing.

"What is your conception of paradise?" he demanded suddenly.

"The knowledge of the mysteries of God." Luke Quail spoke slowly, dreamily. "And in the old days I seldom knew anyone so fresh from the hands of the Creator as the girl Lou-lóu."

"Ah!" said Fortesque, astonished. "That is rather—well—"

"Heterodox? I don't think so. The saints of God were men and women."

"She is a child."

"Of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Fortesque said no more. He perceived that this old man was a little more than his equal. Besides, he rather agreed with the expressed idea. It was plain that Luke Quail almost worshiped this girl from the Orient, and Fortesque could blame no one for such a feeling.

"How can you hope to get Barak away unobserved?" asked Luke Quail when they had left the boulevards and were on the cañon road, toward dusk.

"As your servant," said Fortesque bluntly. "One arm in splints—injured. The right kind of clothes. He will pass unnoticed, I think. Besides, our party will attract no attention. There will be nobody watching the piers and ships."

"I would not be so certain about that," returned the other, "if I did not know that Hvarson had already sailed. You're sure Zahri has gone?"

"It was in the paper—and if he'd failed to go at the last minute, it would have been mentioned. The shipping news is very fully covered."

Luke Quail nodded, satisfied.

IT was dark when at length they entered upon Fortesque's private road and made the final grade up to the house in the hills. Fortesque halted the car, switching his spotlight upon the house door. This opened, and Lou-lóu came forth to meet them.

The meeting was tumultuous, there in the darkness beside the car. Fortesque dimly saw the girl fling herself at Luke Quail with a choked cry of gladness. He paid them no attention, but got out the suitcases containing the clothes he had bought for Lou-lóu. Then, suddenly, he found the girl at his side.

"Oh, you are so good!" Her voice thrilled into him, low and vibrant. "You make me so happy. Here, Forte Scutum, is all the reward I can give you now—"

He stood astonished, holding the suitcases, and felt her lips brush his cheek as though the petals of a rose had fallen across his face. But he comprehended that this reward came to him because he had brought Luke Quail, not because he had brought himself.

"No one has come?" he said coldly.

"No one has come, iron man!" she answered, and laughed a little, very joyously. "But now everyone is come, and I am happy! Also, supper is ready."

Fortesque went into the house. As he came into the living-room, he paused. Before him, on the bearskin by the hearth, he saw the mute Barak, kneeling, flinging himself forward until his head came down between his outstretched hands. Barak had his face toward the east.

"It is his evening prayer," said the voice of Luke Quail softly.

Presently Barak raised himself and turned. Luke Quail said something in Arabic, and to him rushed Barak, kneeling before him, kissing his hand rapturously, eyes eloquent.

Fortesque comprehended that these twain, also, had met before this day.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN the steamer *Pearl of Asia*, of the new China line, cast off her tug and headed out through the widespread glory of the Golden Gate, Fortesque and Lou-lóu stood side by side on the promenade deck and looked back at the brown coast-line they were leaving.

"Do you feel sad?" asked the girl softly.

"Sad?" Fortesque laughed. "Heavens, no!"

"I did, when I left home to go to the convent in France. Where is Luke Quail?"

"Making demands," answered Fortesque dryly. "Some of the officers are old friends. He's down with the purser, I think; at least, he said he'd try to get you a cabin to yourself. He'll not make it—the boat's pretty well crowded. I suppose in a week we'll be bosom friends with half the first cabin."

The girl shrugged her shoulders, a little disdainfully.

"No one said anything—about my being your wife?"

Fortesque, looking out at the land, moistened his lips.

"Why should they?" A little hoarseness was in his voice. "No. Of course not. That was only intended to tide over a difficulty."

She glanced at his strong profile, a dancing light in her lapis eyes.

"Ah!" She sighed slightly. "And don't you wish that it were not a lie?"

Fortesque slowly turned and regarded her, quite coldly.

"My dear girl," he said, his voice level, "why do you ask such questions?"

"To get an answer, of course!" She flashed him a smile.

For an instant, flame broke out in Fortesque's eyes. Then he was master again.

"Well, then I say—yes," he replied calmly.

"Oh, Forte Scutum!" she exclaimed. "How beautifully you control yourself—gilded man! But you cannot buy me. Look yonder!"

Her finger lifted, and pointed toward the sunset, showering red gold over the sea.

"Out there," said her voice, "I am something more than a girl; out there I am a sultana! You shall come and see. You will find many beautiful girls whom you can buy—many far more beautiful than I, who will amuse you far better than I could; and you can buy them for just a little gold. Just a little!

"And you shall see my people; the brown men in their sarongs and bright vests, the old wise men with their gray beards. You shall see my fat brother, and his cases of gin, and his thirty women. You shall see all the beauty and the dirt and the raw flesh of it, out there. And you shall see the great wealth that my father left—the wealth that his father, the pirate sultan, left to him—more wealth than you have ever seen! And then, last of all, you shall see me—as I am, not as I have seemed."

FORTESQUE gazed gravely at the delicate beauty of her slender face, and suddenly the heart in him ached to possess that beauty, to possess the love of this girl. But his face remained impassive.

"I've been talking with Quail," he said abruptly. "And I rather think, Lou-lóu, that you are going to be proven wrong in one of your prophecies."

"Oh! And what is that?"

"When you said that I could not buy you."

"Yes, but *I* said that you could not buy the woman you most desired!"

Fortesque shrugged. "No matter; all the same, if I want to buy you, I think that I shall be able to do so."

"How, then? With money?"

He only smiled inscrutably and shook his head.

"Wait and see. And now, I think you'd better prepare for dinner; they do things up in style on these ships, you know."

He left her at the door of her cabin, and did not observe the look of puzzled wonder that she directed after him.

That night, in the darkness of the upper deck, Fortesque paused to light his pipe. He was alone.

The match flamed in his hands, and its glow illumined his face redly as he puffed the pipe alight. He tossed the match over the rail, then turned as a man came to him and spoke:

"May I trouble you for a match, sir?"

"Certainly."

Fortesque fumbled for his box. It was a striking voice, this of the dark stranger—a voice singularly hard and chilled and steely.

"Here you are."

With a word of thanks, the other man took the match, lighted it and held it to his cigarette.

Fortesque had a swift glimpse of a face that he could not forget. A high, dark face, the nose thin, bony, slightly hooked; the forehead white and high, the cheeks darkened by the strong sun, the lips and chin very strongly carved. The eyes were deep, black-browed, violent with a smoldering fire.

This man returned the box of matches and went on. An instant later Fortesque felt a tug at his sleeve, and saw Barak there. The mute had suddenly evolved out of the shadows, and now pulled again, urgently, at the arm of Fortesque.

The latter comprehended, and followed.

Barak led the way to the cabin which Lou-lóu now occupied, alone. He knocked, and the girl opened the door. They passed inside, and Barak, his eyes flaming and rolling, began making rapid signs.

Fortesque watched, puzzled. He saw a swift light of fear leap into the face of the girl; then her eyes flitted to him.

"Well?" he asked.

"That man—that man who got a match from you—"

"Yes? What's the matter? What's Barak saying?"

The eyes of the girl suddenly widened upon his.

"That man was Hvarson."

The next installment of this vivid and absorbing novel brings us to Lou-Lou's tropic kingdom and to the high-keyed drama that accompanied her arrival. Mr. Bedford-Jones is at his excellent best in this remarkable story.

The Jigglesqueak

A new speed king comes into his own in this story by the author of "A Child of Hermes," "The Luck-Hound" and many other memorable Blue Book successes.

By Paul Fitzgerald

TOBE CHESSLEIGH, proprietor of the Santa Inez Garage, saw a ghost! Tobe was writing a letter in his little office. He happened to glance through the glass door that led to the runway; and—there it was, plain as the rear axle on a cut-down Lizzie!

"H'm!" he commented.

Tobe averted his eyes, chewed nervously on the stump of a black cigar, and looked again. It was there all right—the figure of a man in mechanic's overalls, face upturned to a gaudy poster advertising the forthcoming Cup races at Warm Springs. There could be no mistaking the identity of the apparition. Tobe recognized the profile through a veil of twenty years. There was the same tawny curl drooping from under the black cap, the same bold sweep of nose and chin, the upward curve to the lips, the well-remembered poise of head, and above all, the indefinable expression by which one face is distinguished from all others. Yet this man was dead; Tobe Chessleigh had cried over his grave!

Fat and forty-five, the proprietor of the Santa Inez Garage laid aside his cigar and penholder. Slowly he got to his feet, left his office and approached within easy speaking distance of that motionless figure.

"Reynolds!" he quavered, *"Reynolds, old pal!"*

The ghost vanished, and Tobe found himself gazing into the startled face of Georgie Kingston, his apprentice mechanic.

"Reynolds is my name," said Georgie. "But how—how did you know?"

Tobe stood there blinking stupidly, eyes traveling from the face of young Kingston to the poster on the wall, and then back again. His mind tried vainly to fathom the phenomenon that had just occurred, and gave it up.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed. "Let's go in here and figure this thing out!"

ACROSS a littered table in Chessleigh's office they faced each other. Tobe fumbled among papers for the stump of his cigar, found it, puffed vigorously, and then tilted his chair against the wall. His eyes bored into those of his youthful mechanic.

"You sure gave me an awful start," he grunted. "Don't know why, either, unless it was the light, and looking at you through the glass from a side view. Expression's gone now; and yet—Georgie, are you really the son of old Doc' Kingston, down at Calora?"

Georgie Kingston drew from an inside pocket a yellow envelope containing a faded photograph, and a number of withered newspaper clippings. He spread the collection in front of his employer.

"That's the answer," he said. "The Doctor gave them to me the night of the big storm after I drove the Banana Special up Gray Mountain and saved those kids. He said it was my birthright. Until then I thought he was my father. You can read those clippings if you want. The Doctor saved them at the time. But you called me Reynolds—how did you know?"

"Wait," said Tobe, "and then maybe I'll tell you."

HE adjusted his spectacles, picked up the first clipping, read it line for line, and passed on to the next. Georgie watched him silently. Finally, Tobe Chessleigh concluded his reading, spat on the floor, and looked out the window.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he mused. "So you're Bill Reynolds' boy?"

Georgie's lips parted eagerly.

"You knew him?"

"I was his mechanic," said Tobe slowly. "We were pals."

"But the mechanic was killed with him—"

"A green man," said Tobe. "That was the trouble—a green man—wasn't watching the tires on his side. I was in the hospital with blood-poisoning. Bill wouldn't let me sit with him that day—'fraid I might get hurt worse. I should have gone anyway, should have gone!" He banged the table with a fat fist, and repeated bitterly: "Should have gone!"

Georgie Kingston's blue eyes glittered electrically. Warm blood crimsoned his cheek-bones. He leaned across the table, and laid an impulsive hand on Tobe Chessleigh's sleeve.

"Think," he pleaded, "think what it would mean to you, if you had never seen your father, and he had never seen you, and some day you met a man who had known him! Boss, I want to know my Dad—I want to be able to love him!"

Tobe hoisted his rotund body erect. He waddled around the table and stretched an arm across the shoulders of his young mechanic.

"Son," he declared, "anything old Tobe can do for you, will be done. Shake on it!"

THEY clasped hands, and thus Georgie Kingston formed his first alliance—a fusion with a retired racing mechanic in a country town, set in one of California's valleys, needing only publicity and population to make it a jewel in Eureka's crown.

Thirty miles northeast, beyond the barrier of Gray Mountain, lay the little town of Calora in which Georgie Kingston had spent his boyhood, and which he still called home, since old Doctor Kingston and his wife Sophie, and pretty Marjie Taylor, all lived there. If it was mere chance that had guided the boy to a mechanic's job in Tobe Chessleigh's garage at Santa Inez, it was a more powerful agency that now held him there.

From the lips of his father's chum Georgie learned the things for which his heart hungered.

"I don't want to change my name," Georgie told his employer. "It was really the Doctor who brought me into this world, and no man could have been kinder, or as patient. But tell me more about my *real* father."

Tobe did his best in behalf of a lost pal, and as usual when memory paints the past, the story lost nothing in the telling. An idealized portrait of Bill Reynolds, pioneer racing driver, was painted for the benefit of the son he had never seen, and this portrait in turn became a shrine before which Georgie consecrated his life and burned the incense of ambition.

"Yes sir," Tobe used to say, "your Dad was a strange fellow, sure was! Make a violin talk, he could! Used to write poems to his wife, too! Never seen any prettier poetry! As near as I can understand it, your mother was studying music in Paris when she met Bill, who was just out of college. Each was living on a family allowance which stopped when they got married. Bill came home with a wife and an automobile, and he loved both, right up to the end."

IT wasn't long before Bill Reynolds' former mechanic realized what was in the heart of Georgie Kingston. The symptoms were too plain to be misread.

Georgie's bible was a motor magazine that chronicled the exploits of Vargas, La Fontaine, Hildebrand and other speed kings. Figuratively, young Kingston slept on a tire-rack, and derived the sustenance of life from the exhaust-pipe of a motorcar. Night and day he worked and dreamed over a motley collection of automobiles. But it was in driving that he showed the skill that many men who drive for a livelihood never acquire.

"Handles a wheel pretty," commented his employer. "Never fights it; just gauges the leverage exactly right. He can take a curve easier than any other man I've ever seen. Born to the speedway, that boy! Yes sir, blood'll tell! Now, I wonder what I ought to do?

"How would you like to own a regular old go-fast, Georgie?" he asked one day.

Kingston's eyes sparkled. "You mean a racing-car?"

"Well, not exactly," confessed Tobe. "Can't afford the real thing yet, but we might make a pretty fair imitation. There's that Banana Special that you remodeled for Dr. Kingston. It's got a French engine that might turn the trick. We could rip off the body—"

Georgie's face clouded. "No," he interrupted, "that was the first car I ever handled. If you'd seen how proud the Doctor was when I showed him all the things I'd done with my own hands, and how I'd arranged the leg-space so that he could drive even though his knee caps are both broken, you'd understand that no other car will ever take its place. But do you want to do something for me, boss?"

"I do," said Tobe. "But quit calling me boss. What is it?"

"Sell me the service car. I can let you have about a hundred down, and—"

"Nothing doing," shouted Chessleigh. "The old jigglesqueak? I wouldn't sell it to my worst enemy! You crazy? Take that Carrollton Six. I'll let you have it five hundred under cost, and you can fix your own terms."

"No," said Georgie, "I'll buy the jigglesqueak or nothing. There's a frame over at the Central Garage that I can get, and I was figuring on lopping off about a foot and welding it together again. I can use the wheels from that old Bernard Flyer, drop the steering-wheel down and pull it back, shorten the drive shaft, and install a Miller transmission. Look here, I got it all figured out."

He produced a penciled sketch covered with notations, and went on excitedly:

"Call it a jigglesqueak if you want, but the engine was made in this country, and it's an underslung, with double ignition. I'll gear it up two for one, and get ninety miles out of her or better."

"How long you been thinking this out?" Tobe demanded.

"Not so long," Georgie answered. "I read in the paper the other day they were thinking of holding a meet this fall at Santa Flora."

He looked wistfully at his employer. The latter grinned, and was about to wax facetious when he changed his mind.

"Well, I'll tell you how it is," said Tobe. "You can't buy that old jigglesqueak, but you can have it. Take its guts out and stuff 'em in a lawn-mower or the kitchen stove; I don't care! When you're ready to take the road, come to me, and I'll tell you the only thing I learned in twelve years of racing."

KINGSTON went back to his work, radiant, and the corpulent proprietor of the Santa Inez Garage, left to his own reflections, burst into song. It was a simple ditty, dedicated to a hopeful individual who once, in the language of the librettist:

Took four spools and an old tin can,
Made him a car, and the damn thing ran!

The machine that Georgie Kingston evolved in the subsequent weeks had as many parents as a cat has lives, but it was as truly an American product as any child born in this great melting-pot of a country. Tobe tried to keep his hands off the job as much as possible, but the temptation was too strong. Night-time often found him in the pits with his mechanic, helping to apply the finishing touches to a freak of the road. Out of his own pocket the older man paid for a special tachometer and an oil hand-pump. Georgie fashioned the body of the car, and painted it a brilliant orange with vertical black stripes, the class colors of Marjie Taylor. The crowning touch was a length of stovepipe for the exhaust, of such size and construction that the explosions from the four cylinders sounded like a machine-gun playing on a tin roof.

"Well," commented Georgie's patron saint, "that's one way of drowning out all the squeaks and rattles."

He smiled at Georgie and then went on:

"Let her rest now, and come on into the office."

"Now then," he continued, when they had seated themselves, "if I guess what's in your mind, you'd like to take the Jigglesqueak down to Santa Flora this fall and try her out in the Cup race, eh?"

"Gee!" breathed Georgie, "if I only could!"

Tobe chuckled. "Well, boy, you've worked pretty hard for me, and you've got a vacation coming. Drive the old buss home and spend a few days with your folks. Don't forget your girl. Then go on to Santa Flora—"

"Now?"

"Now," affirmed his employer. "You'll have about thirty days before the race, and I want you to go over the course repeatedly, studying just one thing."

"What's that?"

"Your right rear tire. On a speedway that's the one that gives out first, and it means either one of two things: delay or disaster. When a white streak begins to show, you can take your choice of going to the pits or the hospital, and in either case you're probably out of the money. Georgie, you're up against a hundred-and-fifty mile race on a five-mile macadam course with the curves banked. That means thirty laps, and a long way to the pits if you break down in the back-stretch.

"MOST of the cars wont get there until a few days before the contest, and the drivers will do their experimenting during the race itself. Go there now, son, and learn just how fast you can cover that course without burning out a tire. I'm too fat and nervous to ride at your side, Georgie; but when the big day comes, I'll be in your pit, and I'll beat you to death if you come in for a tire. Drive a non-stop race, even if you average only ten miles an hour."

He paused, and tugged from his hip pocket a worn wallet.

"Here you are, Georgie: here's two hundred dollars that you may need, and may God be with you! Now get out of here!"

Georgie's eyes filled. He looked at the money, then at his corpulent patron.

"Tobe, if I win, you'll get half of the ten thousand."

"If you win," said Tobe, "all I want is the best heart-specialist in the country; I'll need him bad."

SO Georgie in his Jigglesqueak rode forth in search of gold and glory, and stopped en route at the little town of Calora, where there were three people who loved him. Of these three, two had reached the twilight of life, and were descending bravely into the shadows hand in hand. Dr. Kingston, country surgeon, philosopher, and a nobleman by nature, had found a final harborage from which he could look back upon a useful life, unmarred by a single regret. His wife Sophie—with her girlish face, her gray curls and her slim hands always patting the folds of her black silk dress into place, held the same joy for him as ever. They were a Darby and Joan, each worshiping the other, and their love for the boy they had raised as their own was openly lavished and as openly reciprocated.

But when Georgie, on his last day at Calora, took Marjory Taylor out riding in the Jigglesqueak—that was something different, for Marjie was eighteen and had known him since they used to sit together as children on Doctor Kingston's lap, and listen open-mouthed to the story of how big Chief War Cloud, carrying the medicine that was to save his beloved Chinny-Chatty, rode three horses to death, and then ran all the rest of the way for twenty miles!

Georgie used to assure the Doctor that he would do the same thing for Marjie some day; but somehow or other the opportunity never came. Instead, when Marjie was ten years old and generally described as a 'fraid cat, she went to Georgie's assistance in the school yard one day when he was attacked by superior numbers, and she wielded two sturdy little brown fists with such astonishing rapidity as to turn the tide of battle. Thereafter, Marjie was spanked by her mother, praised by Dr. Kingston, and—well, Georgie kissed her, which was probably how it all started.

Riding home at dusk, Georgie told her about Tobe Chessleigh and the history of the Jigglesqueak, and the story of his real parentage. Marjie listened in silence, but when he came to the part about Meredith Reynolds, who refused to be parted from her husband even by death, her hand sought his and held it firmly; that was all. Later, in the hallway of her home, when he was saying good-by, she asked:

"Georgie, suppose you were to win the race, what would you do then?"

"I don't know," he answered frankly, "but I feel that I would like to go out into the world and try to do big things before I —well, before I do anything else," he said, and looked at her wistfully.

Marjie pursed her lips thoughtfully, and nodded. She put the next question very simply:

"Georgie, do you love me?"

For answer he took her in his arms and kissed her.

"That's all I want to know," she said, freeing herself. "Go ahead, dear, and spread your wings. If you ever want me, I'll be here."

"I was going to ask you if you'd drive the folks down to the race?" he pleaded. "You could take them in the Banana Special."

And though he couldn't have suggested anything that would be quite as distressing to her as the prospect of watching him in his first gamble with Death, she answered lightly:

"Why, of course we'll go, and I'm going to make you a regular racing hood, with my initials embroidered on it, and I'll mail it down to you. Good-by, Georgie. Write to me, dear—and do be careful!"

"I will," he promised. "You're a peach, Marjie. So long." He ran lightly down the stairs.

THE Chamber of Commerce at Santa Flora had called a meeting to decide whether or not plans for the proposed Cup race should be abandoned. Several hours before the conference, Editor Tollinger and Barney Goff, proprietor of the principal hotel, stood on a street-corner discussing the matter.

"I'm as game as anybody," said the hotel man, "but we've bit off more than we can chew. What with liability insurance, gate prizes, advertising appropriations, traveling expenses, and now appearance-money for some of these prima donnas, we need ten thousand more than we figured, and the money isn't in the town."

"Well," lamented Tollinger, "it will give Santa Flora a black eye if we throw up the sponge. There ought to be some way of boosting the subscriptions. I'd do my share, but the trouble is, the merchants can't visualize what a great race means. What we need is a little encouragement; we—holy smoke, what's that?"

The heavy-throated roar of a mechanical bull emanated from a spot hidden by the courthouse. It rumbled like distant artillery, faded, and bellowed again. It snorted, coughed and thundered. Pedestrians paused, and a crowd of boys began to run in that direction. Near-by stores disgorged curious patrons.

"Must be an airplane lit in the street," said Barney Goff. "Let's walk over."

But before they could carry out this suggestion, the mysterious visitor rolled into view, escorted by twenty eager youngsters on bicycles. It was a racing car, stripped for action, a huge figure "9" painted on the radiator, and a boyish pilot sitting at the wheel. On it came, picking its way through the traffic of Santa Flora Street, the unmuffled exhaust reverberating against the stone buildings on either side. The car stopped outside the Havens Garage, and in ten minutes hundreds of people who had never seen a racing-car before were getting an eyeful.

Tollinger and the hotel man struggled through the crush. The editor exercised the privileges of his office.

"Well, well, well!" he cried. "Welcome to Santa Flora! What's the name, please —and what famous car is this?"

"Why," said the youthful driver, "my name is Kingston—Georgie Kingston; and I come from Santa Inez. The car's a sort of American Special, I guess; back home we call it the Jigglesqueak!"

"Jigglesqueak?" shouted Barney Goff. "Ha-ha! That's good; that's mighty good! 'Rah for the Jigglesqueak!"

He leaned over and whispered fiercely in the ear of the driver:

"Say, if you'll drive that car around this damn town for a couple of hours and make all the noise you can, I'll stake you to the best dinner you ever ate in your life! Oh, boy, I think you've saved the day!"

Editor Tollinger leaned over too.

"Come on into the office afterward," he urged. "I'll give you a drink, and half of tomorrow's paper!"

SO for two hours the Jigglesqueak threaded the streets of Santa Flora, roaring a message from the Thunder Gods, and that night the Chamber of Commerce, instead of throwing up the sponge, dug into its pockets a little deeper and voted enthusiastically to go ahead.

Georgie made his headquarters at the Havens Garage, getting free space in return for the advertisement, and he had no

trouble in securing a mechanic to ride with him.

"Anyone who can pump oil and look back," said Georgie to Tom Havens; and the proprietor of the garage loaned him Eddie Thorne, a cool-headed, quick-witted apprentice. Neither did Georgie experience any trouble in getting permission to warm up the Jigglesqueak on the new five-mile boulevard that encircled Santa Flora.

"Help yourself," said the sheriff, who was one of the heaviest subscribers to the guarantee fund. "Take the road at six o'clock every morning, and I'll put a man at either end of the course with a flag. If anybody gets in your way, I'll arrest 'em!"

Those were great days for Tobe Chessleigh's protégé, and he made good use of them. The Jigglesqueak had a right-hand drive which enabled Georgie to follow out his employer's instructions, and keep one eye on the right rear tire that spun in a black streak just below him. Again and again he flashed into the banked turns at fifty, sixty, seventy miles an hour from every angle, studying the tire wear and the general strain on the car. He noticed also the varying effect of weather conditions on the road-bed, as reflected by the casings. At the end of the first week he received from Tobe Chessleigh six new racing tires by express, and the second week brought a half-dozen more. One after another they were sacrificed on the rough altar of experience, but by the end of the third week Georgie had learned the formula for a non-stop race, and he and his mechanic began going over the car in a final grooming.

Meanwhile temporary grandstands, pits, scoreboard and timer's stands had been constructed on the outskirts of the town. Representatives of the Contest Board of the A. A. A. arrived to inspect and measure the track, and to put the red seal of approval on the contestants. Newspapers began to arrange for special services; the hotels found their accommodations all reserved well in advance; Santa Flora grew feverish and expectant; and finally the first shipment of cars showed up in the advance of the drivers. They were unloaded by their mechanics, and from the moment these superb specimens of speed-craft rumbled into Santa Flora, Georgie Kingston and his Jigglesqueak passed into total eclipse.

It was a bitter disillusionment to the youthful owner of the American Special. He was among those who went over to the Keystone Garage to take a look at the cars of Louis La Fontaine and Laughing Joe Hildebrand. It was like the owner of a milk-wagon worshiping the chariots of the sun. The two blue and white Chevaliers exceeded Georgie Kingston's fondest dreams. Looking under the hood was like looking into the back of Dr. Kingston's jeweled watch. Each car was a two-thousand-pound synthetic gem unmarred by a single speck of visible dirt or oil. Georgie Kingston went back to his hotel room that night and cried.

THEN came the gasoline gladiators themselves, the knights of the whirring wheel, men who laughed at Death and tweaked the beard of Father Time. They were soon surrounded by obsequious satellites. Newspaper photographers and motion-picture camera-men flocked into town and followed in the trail of the celebrities. They hovered around Tony Vargas, leading claimant for the Triple A crown; potshotted Louis La Fontaine and his teammate Laughing Joe Hildebrand; hurried after Tommy Clifton, the Consistency Kid, and half a dozen others. But only as a matter of duty, bearing in mind the possibility of a tragedy, did they waste a negative on the Santa Inez contender and his Jigglesqueak.

There was to be a dinner for drivers and mechanics at the Riverbank Hotel. An hour before the scheduled time for the repast, the lobby was dotted with groups of laughing and joking men, exchanging anecdotes and confidences with members of the entertainment committee. Georgie Kingston found himself standing next to the great La Fontaine, a dapper Frenchman of magnetic personality, full of verve and charm. Louis was telling of an incident at the Crescent Boulevard races from which they had just come.

"Nevair again do I want to feel zat way," he told his hearers. "Zat man,"—pointing to Hildebrand,—"he is my friend, and we drive ze cars zat look alike. On ze nineteenth lap, I am going one hundred miles an hour, and I see ahead of me by ze road, three trees cut off and a car that is bust to pieces. *Mon Dieu*—it look like a white car—and there is a man's head over here, and somezing else over there. *Sacré bleu!* Nineteen times I must pass zat place, and each time I say: 'Zat is Joe! Zat is my friend!'"

Hildebrand chimed in:

"And of course, when I went by, I thought it was Louie. My mechanic did too. He held up four fingers to me—the Frog's number—and I nodded. Gosh, it slowed me up for half a dozen rounds. Damn' near cost me the race!"

"It was ver' bad," acknowledged La Fontaine. "But when I draw into ze pits at ze end, I find ze man on ze road was Trykoff, ze Russian; and behold—there is Joe, my friend, alive and sound!"

He shrugged his shoulders, and concluded with a faint apologetic smile:

"So I fall on hees neck and keess heem!"

A MAN with a badge began herding the guests toward the dining-room, and Georgie followed, his brain dizzy from the momentary glimpse into the lives of these extraordinary mortals. Editor Tollinger was the toastmaster. One after another he called to their feet the honored guests of the occasion, and finally he remembered Georgie Kingston. Then he told of the time when Santa Flora's civic pride hung in the balance, and how the advent of the Jigglesqueak had saved the day.

"Mr. Kingston," he called, "who will drive an American Special!"

Georgie floundered to his feet. He tried to say the things that were in his heart, but he was stricken with stage-fright. Every preceding speaker had related some anecdote of the speedway; he had no experience from which to draw. And while he hesitated miserably, Louis La Fontaine leaned across the table and waved an encouraging napkin at the helpless youth.

"Bravo, ze Jigglesqueak!" he cried. "I sink I will beat everybody else but you. Tell them zat Napoleon was a little corporal, and La Fontaine once have bow legs and drink from ze milk-bottle. By gar, I pull for you!"

There was a general laugh and banging of knife-handles on the table. The son of Bill Reynolds' collected his faculties.

"Gentlemen," he stammered, "I'm just a busher, and I guess the Jigglesqueak is a joke; but"—he flung up his head bravely —"if I live, I hope to go faster than any man has ever gone, and it will be at the wheel of an American car!"

He sat down trembling, and again it was the gallant Frenchman who leaned over and exclaimed, amid the perfunctory applause:

"Zat's ze stuff, *mon brave!* I believe you will!"

BUT the qualification trials, held three days before the race itself, destroyed the last vestige of Georgie's confidence. Had it not been for La Fontaine, he would have retired. The Frenchman came to Georgie's aid when the boy was frightened and heartsick as the result of an encounter with Tony Vargas, the South American speed king. Vargas was born in Bolivia, raised in England, and spoiled in the spotlight of success. He loved himself and was cordially hated by everyone else. As soon as Vargas beheld the Jigglesqueak roll onto the track for a tryout, he hunted up the official starter.

"Who is that *person* with Number Nine car?" he demanded. "That's my number, you know. Have him take it off at once!"

The starter sent for Kingston.

"Mr. Vargas," he explained, "has been accustomed to having Number Nine. Inasmuch as you got here first and registered under that number, it is your privilege to use it, unless as a matter of courtesy you are willing to take another."

"I'm sorry," said Georgie, "but there's a reason for my wanting Number Nine. It means everything; I can't—"

Vargas cut in: "See here, don't be ridiculous, my boy. I'm not going to have that silly blunderbuss trailing around with my number on it. Take it off! Take it off!"

Georgie's eyes chilled to steel; he bit his lips and fought for self-control.

"I'm sorry," he repeated thickly, "but that number stays where it is. It was my father's; and by God, it's going to be mine!"

TURNING away, he climbed into the Jigglesqueak, and undertook to circle the course in the time demanded by the qualification trials. His nerves were upset by this unexpected clash, and he covered the five miles with only ten seconds to spare. He kept on, striving to steady himself and make a better showing while still keeping within the pace experience had taught him meant the preservation of his tires. Other cars swept by as though the Jigglesqueak was standing still. Hildebrand and La Fontaine, in blue and white torpedoes, thundered at a hundred miles an hour.

The audacity of that mad flight thrilled the boy until he almost forgot his own discomfiture. But in another minute he was startled into quick possession of all his

faculties. Vargas, in a green Victoire, cut in ahead of him on a bend so closely as almost to force him off the road. He was smothered in dust from the safety lane, and almost blinded, but he retained control and took the curve by grace of memory alone. He heard his mechanic shout a curse at Vargas. Thereafter he drove carefully, well on the inside of the track. Once more the Victoire came up from behind, bore in deliberately, and the hubcaps clicked. Georgie's mental photograph of the course helped him through the dust that flew from the dirt embankment on the curve.

As they approached the pits, Vargas was already out of his car, and talking to the referee. Georgie was waved down by the starter, and he complied instantly, turning off into a by-lane that brought him back to the stands. The referee approached, his face troubled.

"Mr. Vargas complains that you are endangering the other drivers," he said to Georgie. "I'm sorry, my boy, but we can't afford to risk an accident. You wouldn't want that yourself—"

"No," said Georgie, and his lips quivered. "If anyone else besides Mr. Vargas has any complaint to make, I'll withdraw."

He looked back, and saw a blue and white car drawing into the pits. He cast his fate into the hands of the man who had once before befriended him, and turned to the referee.

"Ask him," he urged. "Ask La Fontaine. He was right behind us when Vargas cut in. If he says it was my fault, you can tear up my card."

The referee walked in the Frenchman's direction, Vargas following, and redoubling his protests. La Fontaine listened quietly while the situation was explained. Then he spread both hands eloquently, and looked up at the vault of heaven.

"I know nozzing except zis," he sighed: "Ze boy is all right, and zat fellow over there, he is both one grand villain and ze damn' liar. Some day I pull hees nose!"

Immediately three special police were called on to stop the makings of a beautiful fight, and in the resulting confusion the original cause of it all was temporarily overshadowed. But Georgie Kingston clipped a picture of La Fontaine from the evening paper and folded it away in his wallet with the faded portrait of his own father.

Twenty-four hours later Tobe Chessleigh showed up. He reacted to all the excitement and confusion like an old racehorse that once again hears the familiar bugle-call to the post.

"Gosh!" he grunted. "Takes me back to old times. How's the Jigglesqueak? How's the Village Blacksmith? Gonna make 'em eat your gas tomorrow, kid?"

Georgie told him of the encounter with Vargas.

"Humph!" said Tobe. "Well, that's the way it goes. Them foreigners are all fatheads—"

"I know one foreigner that I'd give up my life for!"

"La Fontaine?" said Tobe. "Oh, he's a nut too. The boys tell me he puts perfume in his gasoline. Saw Dr. Kingston and your girl in Calora. They're coming down to help us shove the Jigglesqueak off the track when you get enough of it. Go to sleep. I'll come in after a while."

But when Georgie woke up the next morning, the other bed in his room was undisturbed. Not until long afterward did he find out that Tobe had stretched his corpulent frame on the cold floor of the Havens show-room, and guarded the Jigglesqueak all night long. Tobe knew a thing or two about the racing game.

BLUE sky roofed a summer day in Southern California, and the little town of Santa Flora reaped the harvest of its enterprise. Near-by cities emptied motor flotillas into the highways that led to the scene. An army of deputy sheriffs, special police and Boy Scouts enforced the parking rules, and guided thousands of spectators into the roughly constructed stands that lined both sides of the start and finish. Concessionnaires cried their wares; the bands played lustily; airplanes circled overhead; and Death grinned from behind each of the thousand pepper trees that flanked the five-mile boulevard. In the foreground overalled figures tinkered with the ten entries in the inaugural Santa Flora Cup Race, while newspaper photographers and the camera-men of the movie weeklies battled as usual with beribboned officials for the freedom of the press.

It was all an old story to the majority of drivers, but to Georgie Kingston it was a period such as only the raw soldier experiences when he is told to lie quiet under fire for the first time. And just as the quivering recruit sees his whole life spread before him in a mental panorama, so the

son of Bill Reynolds visualized all that had gone before. A scant hundred yards away, he could see the pink dress of Marjie Taylor, alongside the dignified figure of Dr. Kingston, in the front seat of a yellow car parked by the rail. A moment before, he had felt the cool, firm pressure of Marjie's fingers, heard her voice, and looked into frank brown eyes that held the flame of womanhood's appeal. And he knew that an hour before that, he had signed his "death warrant," the little slip of paper by which every driver relieves officials and promoters from all responsibility for what may happen. For the first time he realized the three great mysteries of the human race: Life, Love and Death. He held life; he wanted love; and he was courting death. In the turmoil of his conflicting emotions, some power deeper than anything he had yet experienced urged him forward. Tobe Chessleigh, nervous and perspiring, shouted in his ear:

"Mind the right rear rubber, boy. The car's a joke, but you've got just as good tires as any man in the race. Steady, my boy, steady. Watch for my signals in the pit, and God be with you!"

Georgie nodded. The band finished playing, "Hail, Hail, the Gang's All Here!" The cars were rolled into position, in tiers of three, with the pace-maker in front of the pole. Georgie tightened the chin-strap on the embroidered headpiece Marjie had given him. His mechanic hopped in by his side, and the boy gripped the wheel of the throbbing car.

The starter whirled to the timer's stand, and around at the battery of scorers. There was a responsive wave of hands, the crack of a pistol, and every car got into motion in the preliminary whirl that would bring them back in correct position for the actual start.

IN auto-racing, as in other sports, there is an all important moment for the participant. It comes to the jockey with the first spring of his horse from the barrier, to the ball-player as he sees the first ball approach him from the pitcher's box. His mental and muscular reaction to that supreme moment tells the story: either he is *there,* or he isn't!

But with the first response of the Jigglesqueak to his command, Georgie Kingston found himself. The fog of hysteria and nervousness cleared away; his hands caressed the wheel with the touch of a master, and his body automatically settled into the rushing swing of the striped car. The pace quickened, and he maneuvered for his assigned position, dropping gradually into seventh place and on the outside. The pace-maker was going a little too fast for some of the second-flight drivers, and it was another mile or so before this was rectified. Then the line of humming machines slowly bunched, maneuvered, and swung into the final turn. The flight grew faster; Darcy of Boston thundered into position, Vargas flashed up beside him; Hildebrand and La Fontaine formed the central bar in a figure A, their roaring torpedoes not four feet apart. On they came, flying like wild duck before the hunter, heading straight for a man with a red flag, and gathering speed as they came. Ninety—ninety-five, a hundred miles an hour, and with the roar of an unleashed Niagara! The starter edged into the path of the hurricane, swung a blood-red cloth in the face of the nearest driver, and leaped aside. The race was on!

There were thousands present who looked upon that race as a Roman holiday. For them it was enough that these goggled figures who flashed by at a speed that stunned the senses were gambling with the most precious thing in the knowledge of man. Down in the mechanics' pits, or crouched over wheels of those Mercurial chariots, were men who had dedicated their lives and talents in the time-old struggle of human genius against the limitations of time and space. For them it was the most fundamental and fascinating game in the world. And still there were others—like old Doctor Kingston and Marjie Taylor, sitting pale and silent in the balcony of beholders, counting each lap in an agonized litany, and praying that Fate would be kind once more to those they loved.

For Georgie Kingston it was the fulfillment of a dream. His faculties answered to the fixed concentration of a somnambulist. The son of Bill Reynolds had but one idea: to keep going at the pace he had rehearsed. He was oblivious of the lithe mechanic seated at his side, blind to Tobe Chessleigh waving a blackboard at him as he swept by, heedless of the blackened stands, and the cars that one by one sought the pits as the dizzy pace told on the tires.

The Jigglesqueak dropped steadily behind until it was in last place, a tortoise plodding persistingly along in the trail of scurrying hares. Only the checkers in

their stands, Tobe Chessleigh in his pit, Doctor Kingston and Marjie Taylor at the rail, kept track of its progress, and knew that it alone had not yet stopped.

THE fifty-mile mark was passed, and the drivers were still experimenting on those banked turns, going to the pits every third lap, and then flashing out again to join the whirlpool. Again and again Hildebrand, La Fontaine and Vargas swept by the American Special, and Georgie Kingston realized it dully. He lost all track of his position. His mechanic shouted repeated messages in his ear, but he could not distinguish the words. His eyes grew bloodshot, his fingers numb, and the leaking exhaust-pipe enveloped him in smothering fumes. He leaned out, filling his lungs, and then holding his breath for half a mile at a time. But as the race progressed, dimly he became aware that the cars were farther apart, and for some reason, there was more room.

Hildebrand had dropped out with motor trouble; Tommy Clifton had cracked a cylinder; the Anderson White Bulldog threw a smoke screen and was waved from the course. La Fontaine and Tony Vargas came into the pits for the sixth time, one behind the other, and the tire-crews got them away again in twelve seconds. The toiling Jigglesqueak thundered on, and the huge scoreboard showed that it was creeping gradually into contention. From eighth place, it had advanced to sixth, then fifth, then fourth. Tobe Chessleigh's judgment regarding tires was being vindicated.

At a hundred and twenty-five miles Tobe started an offensive of his own. All through the race he had been climbing up and down a stepladder, as the son of Bill Reynolds flew by. But never once had Georgie looked at the upraised slate. From the adjoining pits the mechanics had been kidding the fat garage-man, and he had borne it silently.

"The kid can't read!" they yelled. "You're out of luck, Tobe! The line's busy!"

But in the twenty-seventh lap, with only three more to go, the proprietor of the Santa Inez Garage scrambled off his ladder and shook the slate in the faces of his tormentors.

"Read it yourselves, then!" he screamed. "Take a good look at it, damn you! What does it say? *What does it say?*"

They had no reply to make, for Tobe Chessleigh's slate held the figure "1." The Jigglesqueak was in the lead!

When the cars came flying past again, La Fontaine and Vargas looked at their pits, and each read the same mystic signal: "G-9." They nodded and were gone. "Get 9"—that was the last injunction from the coaching-line.

Georgie's mechanic, pumping oil desperately, held a grimy forefinger in front of his driver.

"We're in front!" he shouted. "We're a lap to the good if we can hold it!"

Georgie nodded. He was aware of a green Victoire sweeping up alongside him, and the hooded face of Tony Vargas not a car-width away. Hitherto the emerald car had flashed past quickly; now it hovered on even terms. Georgie's mechanic looked back, and saw that La Fontaine was right behind. Vargas was teaming with the Jigglesqueak in order to block the Frenchman at the approaching curve. The blue and white Chevalier nosed up so close to that flying barrier that three men knew Death was merely the question of the turn of a wrist or the pressure of a shoe. For ten seconds the three cars held stubbornly to their course, and then the South American cracked under the strain: the Victoire swerved to the right, and La Fontaine hurtled forward, threading the two cars in a figure S that for sheer brilliancy was unsurpassable. The Frenchman was now driving to regain that lost lap—driving with all the superb recklessness that made him the idol of the course. Back of him raced Tony Vargas, with the same object in view. They hit the curve at terrific speed, La Fontaine on the inside, the Victoire behind him at the right.

Swift intuition froze the blood in the veins of Bill Reynolds' boy; his right hand left the wheel and clutched the emergency. Ahead of him there was a sharp report, a shower of rubber through the air, and the blue and white Chevalier skidded across the road, straightened itself, skidded in the opposite direction, and rolled over three times!

THE green Victoire sped past unchecked; but behind it a striped absurdity, with forty thousand people waiting to cheer its winning driver, screeched under smoking brakes and came to a full stop. In another minute Louis La Fontaine, bleeding from a gash on his forehead and

quivering from the shock of three fractured ribs, looked up to see Georgie Kingston bending over him.

"Nom de Dieu!" he sighed. "You too? What ze hell happened to ze Jigglesqueak?"

Georgie saw with relief that his idol was alive.

"Nothing," he gasped. "I saw you go over, and I stopped to help. Thank God, you're all right!"

La Fontaine wiped the blood from his eyes, looked over at the Jigglesqueak, and jerked himself upright.

"Mille tonnerres!" he wailed. *"Imbecile!* Get ze hell out of here! Go on and win!"

HE reached for a clod of dirt and aimed it feebly at the head of the startled youngster. Georgie's mechanic was shouting desperately, and the Jigglesqueak's driver stumbled back into his seat, threw off the brakes and looked back as he got under way. La Fontaine's mechanic was tearing up a red sweater in lieu of bandages, and the Frenchman was shouting at the top of his lungs:

"Vive le Jigglesqueak! Mon Dieu, go on!"

In that high-pitched cry from the injured La Fontaine, Georgie Kingston caught the spirit of the Thunder Gods. The Jigglesqueak lunged forward like a thing alive. There was a space of but two miles between it and the checkered flag, but the delay had been costly. The Victoire shot by again. Vargas was no longer a lap behind, but soaring into the lead with gold, glory and the Triple A crown beckoning him on.

But even as that lunging mechanical wolf rounded the last turn and straightened out for the dash for the checkered flag, the engine rebelled under the punishment, and a broken spark plug dulled its speed. The Victoire slackened. The Jigglesqueak gained.

Vargas' mechanic looked back, and then signaled to the man beside him. They were only a quarter-mile from the finish, but behind them came a roaring bulldog speeding stubbornly on their trail. Vargas swung to the outside and left a clear path to the stands along the inner edge. The inexperienced youth behind him took it, as the man ahead hoped he would. The Jigglesqueak drew up to within a car-length, and then the trap was sprung. The green Victoire began to cut across toward the finish in a diagonal line. Nearer and nearer the cars came, heading for the roaring stands, green comet shunting the American Special off the road. Down in Pit No. 9 the fat, perspiring pal of a driver long since gone, raised clenched hands impotently and cursed the soul of Tony Vargas. The multitude arose, eyes on those challenging meteors. They looked for this unknown Lochinvar to drop back and try to go around, to slow up in the face of certain death. But there was still one course to victory, and with the memory of La Fontaine's cry still ringing in his ears, Georgie took it.

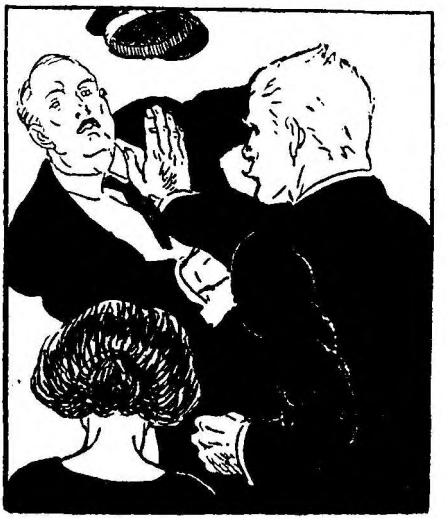
The Jigglesqueak's full power, held hitherto in restraint, was suddenly *kicked into liberty!* It shot forward toward the closing gate formed by the rail and the veering Victoire, and hurled itself into the narrowing gap, true as an arrow, swift as a thunderbolt. There was a heart-halting moment of suspense, a click of hub-caps, a rush of wind, a great gasp from the crowd —and Georgie Kingston in a striped rocket shot past the checkered flag that says: *"You win!"*

THE American Special flashed on for another mile before the smoking wheels slowed down. Then Georgie turned the car into the safety lane, and came chugging back to receive the plaudits of the conqueror. The bands played, and photographers swarmed about him. Tobe Chessleigh was prying his fingers loose from the wheel, pounding him on the back, lifting him from the seat, shouting something about "ten thousand dollars! Buy a real car now. Show the whole damn' world something!"

But Georgie Kingston was now only a tired, dazed novice to whom a miracle had come that was still beyond belief. He reeled against Tobe on legs that bent under him like rubber, tried to laugh and couldn't. He searched vainly the faces that encircled him.

Tobe Chessleigh steadied the youngster with a protecting arm. Finally he diagnosed the symptoms of his protégé, for Tobe himself had once known both love and the lust for glory.

"Out of the way!" he shouted. "Officer, help us get across the track. Right over there by that yellow car—that's where we want to go! The new Speed King wants to see his girl!"



A Splash in Society

The spirited story of a Texan who went East, by the gifted author of "The Chinese Label," "The Hand of Esau," "Harmony and High Water" and many other fine stories.

By J. Frank Davis

CAPTAIN WILLIAM T. TITUS, TEXAN, having finished a leisurely breakfast at the Hotel Van Wouter, read a morning paper in his room and mentally debated the relative merits of a Long Island resort he knew, and the metropolis itself.

The business that had brought him to New York had been settled with surprising dispatch the afternoon before; he had arranged his affairs in San Antonio to be absent two or three weeks; it was hot in New York but much hotter in Texas; and he hadn't been East before for several months and was in no hurry to get home. But the two or three friends he had tried to reach by telephone after his business was finished were all out of town, and it looked as though whatever he did for entertainment would have to be done alone.

He had decided to remain in the city for at least a day or two and was turning to the amusement advertisements, when a bellboy appeared at the door with a telegram, a long one, from Captain Bill's secretary in San Antonio. Mentally supplying the missing capitalization and punctuation, the Captain read:

> Letter just received from Ralph K. McAlester, Bushee Building, Broad Street, New York, is as follows: "If you are coming to New York in the near future, can you find it convenient to meet me here to discuss a business matter which I believe will prove mutually advantageous? I have a proposition for your consideration which, for various reasons, it would be better to take up orally than by letter. I am informed you visit this city rather frequently, and if you should come here next month and would be good enough to telegraph me before starting, I shall endeavor to be here and to accommodate my plans to your convenience. If you do not come to New York this summer, perhaps you can arrange to meet me later in St. Louis or Chicago,—at such time in October, I would suggest, as we can make mutually convenient."

Captain Bill, his forehead wrinkled thoughtfully, re-read the message twice. He knew Ralph K. McAlester by name, of course—most business men in America did,

—but he had never met him or had dealings with him. What did the financier and organizer want that Bill possessed? Something important; McAlester did not deal in small matters. Besides, he was willing to take the time to go to Chicago or St. Louis to talk it over. This set up another train of logical thought; McAlester did not want to appear in San Antonio for the discussion; probably it concerned some Texas matter regarding which he preferred the world at large should not guess that he was interested, as the world might if it got into the newspapers that he had visited the Alamo City.

WHERE, Captain Titus wondered, did his interests touch McAlester's? Bill, whose fortune had begun with herds, still owned many cattle, but the chance was small that Ralph McAlester had any concern with steers. Bill was a successful oil operator, but he had never heard that McAlester was interested in oil. The Texan was a heavy owner and director of banks, but surely financial institutions of Texas size were not of importance to the New Yorker.

"Shucks!" he exclaimed at this point. "One way of finding out what you don't know is to ask." Not long afterward a taxicab decanted him at the entrance to the National Community Bank, where a roomful of waiting busy business men scowled when the youth who took in his name to one of the biggest of the vice presidents came out with word that Captain Titus was to go in ahead of them.

"I wont waste a minute more of your time than I have to," Bill told the great man, when salutations had been speedily accomplished. "Ralph K. McAlester. What interests has he that might touch mine? Or, to make it a little broader, that might touch Texas?"

The vice president looked thoughtful. "That would be hard to say," he replied. "We are not his bankers—"

"And if you were, and knew it that way, of course you couldn't tell," Bill interrupted. "But you know, because there isn't anything to speak of going on down in this end of town that you don't know. Is there any reason why you can't tell me? If there is, say so, and I'll say thank you for your time, see you later and good mawnin'."

"You're a direct actionist," smiled the banker.

"You're a creature of habit," Bill retorted. "You stalled, answering me, while you were figuring out whether there would be any harm in letting me know what you know. I do it myself. But you are too busy this forenoon to lose any time stalling —especially after I tell you I wont be mad a-tall if you just tell me you are minding your own business these days and hope I am the same."

CAPTAIN TITUS was a source of occasional delight to the high officials of the National Community. He was also a valued friend of the institution, which had had his assistance in profitable deals. The vice president grinned admission to Bill's impeachment and replied:

"Could it be a line of oil steamships?"

"Has he?" Bill asked.

"In entire confidence—the matter isn't generally known—"

"Graveyard," Bill assured him solemnly.

"He heads a syndicate that has just got control of the Blue Band International Navigation Company. There are at least six tank-boats in that outfit."

"That is probably exactly what I wanted to know," Bill said. "One other thing, please suh. What kind of a man is he?"

"His check is good for whatever figure he writes on it. He keeps any promise he makes. It doesn't do any harm, of course, to listen quite attentively while he is making the promise."

"Tricky?"

"No—shrewd and—'ruthless' is the popular word for it, I think. His word is good, exactly as he states it. It is up to you to observe his choice of language. *Caveat emptor.*"

"High society, isn't he?" As the vice president did not reply immediately, Bill explained: "I saw a picture of his Long Island place in a Sunday paper, lately. Houses, garages, sunken gardens, horses, dogs. All kinds of aristocratic dingbats and dewdabs."

"Mrs. McAlester goes in for society. A very fine family Mrs. McAlester's. He—" There was an almost imperceptible pause. "He naturally is accepted by her friends."

"More or less."

The vice president laughed at Captain Titus' shrewd reading of his thoughts. "Yes," he agreed. "He naturally is accepted by her friends—more or less."

"What is his out?"

"An eclectic sporting disposition. Don't

misunderstand me. He never allows it to interfere with his business. In business he is reliable; if he wasn't he wouldn't have got the power he has in the various things he has interests in. Outside of business— Well, he has never made the best clubs."

"I get you," the Captain said briskly. "Well, as the matter I have an invitation to see him about is probably all business, and as I have some other friends here and there who occasionally let me look at the inside of their clubs, I reckon his little personal failings don't concern me. Thanky' kindly, suh. When you want some information about some *hombre* down in Texas, holler."

"I'll holler," the vice president promised, and Bill shook hands ceremoniously, Texas fashion, and departed.

McALESTER'S secretary answered the phone at the financier's office and became cordially anxious the moment he learned Captain Bill's identity.

"He is starting today on a little vacation, Mr. Titus," he said. "He wont be here for a week at least. He is leaving this afternoon, and I know he would like to get in touch with you personally before he goes. Could you call him up at his Long Island place? Or I will, if you like, though it would save time for you to get him."

"I'll call him, if you think best."

"Thank you. I'll give you his private number—the one that isn't in the book. It will save time and trouble getting him to the phone."

McAlester's voice, when Captain Bill had him on the wire, was as cordial as his secretary's had been. It was a deep, authoritative voice, the voice of one accustomed to giving orders and having them obeyed. In two or three crisp sentences he expressed his regret that he wasn't in the city, where Titus could meet him without trouble. "I'm leaving on my yacht at four this afternoon," he said, "for a little trip down East. If you could take the time to run over here, we could have a late lunch and— How much time have you got? How long are you going to remain in New York?"

"I have finished the business that I came for. I don't have to get home in any particular hurry."

"Look here! Why can't you take a cruise with me? That is, if you wouldn't figure a few days on a steam yacht as wasted. I'm making the trip alone; we can combine business and pleasure. I am planning on being gone perhaps a fortnight, but if you haven't that much time to spare I can land you anywhere you say, and you can get back here in a few hours by train."

"Why, that's shorely mighty kind of you, Mr. McAlester."

"She's a good, comfortable boat, the *Minerva,*" McAlester urged, and Bill knew from his tone that the invitation was meant. "Perhaps you don't care for the water."

"On the contrary. I'm like the Cap'n in the song; I'm hardly ever sick at sea. Must have got used to the motion riding pitching bronc's."

"Then you will come?"

"Yes, thanky' suh. I'm downtown now. I'll go right up to the hotel and check out. How do I reach your place?"

BILL had hardly more than a glimpse of Mrs. McAlester, a beautifully groomed woman of forty whose face would have looked ten years younger but for her weary, disillusioned eyes. She was casually gracious; Captain Titus got the impression that McAlester might have asked her to be nice to him. She stood on a veranda and smiled a farewell as her husband and Bill went down to the boat-landing and off in the speedy launch to the *Minerva.* The anchor came up the moment the owner was aboard, and they headed up the Sound.

"At exactly four-seven," McAlester declared, after glancing at his watch, "it is my daily custom when on a vacation to have a little drink. Unless you happen to be a prohibitionist—"

"I'm not. With just a li'l' plain water on the side, please suh."

A steward served the refreshment.

"I've got enough to last me and my friends the rest of my natural life, if I live to be eighty," McAlester boasted. "Just make yourself at home and call for whatever you want whenever you want it. Aboard the *Minerva* we do as we please. If it weren't the custom to name yachts after ladies, I'd have called her *Liberty Hall.*"

It appeared, shortly afterward, that while on a vacation Mr. McAlester was also in the habit of taking a drink at four-fifteen—and at four-thirty. When

Bill named ginger ale on both occasions, his host protested good-naturedly: "You'll never catch up if you don't get a start. We're getting farther away from home every minute, and we don't touch land until tomorrow. Have a real one this time."

Bill smiled disarmingly but shook his head. "Tell you the truth," he confessed, "I'm one of these light-drinking antis. There's lots of 'em in my State, same as there are a lot of drinking prohibitionists. I like good liquor, but I don't like *much* good liquor. Just before dinner, if there happens to be a cocktail standing around somewheres within reach— And a li'l' snifter, sometimes, before I go to bed. Beyond that, if you'll excuse me, suh—"

"Of course," McAlester agreed. "I'm a moderate drinker myself, but when I'm off on a trip—" He poured himself another ration, into which the steward deftly squirted soda. "And that will be all for me too until dinner-time," he decided.

A NASTY little cross-sea was running between Point Judith and Gay Head, that evening, and the *Minerva* rolled through it with a good deal of motion, from the landsman's point of view, although really bearing out her owner's description as "a comfortable boat." Bill sat with McAlester and watched the white crests that came leaping out of the darkness into the electric illumination from the after-deck and went slinking under the keel into darkness again to landward. "I'd just as lief not have to try to keep afloat more than two minutes in waves like those," he remarked.

McAlester was talkative and a trifle inclined to brag. "That would be one of the easiest things I do," he laughed. "I wouldn't want to have to do it, but I wager, if I fell overboard right now, I could get my shoes off and keep afloat until the small boat could find me. I was a bit of a swimmer in my youth; I can swim pretty well now, for that matter."

"Raised on the coast?"

"Yes. I used to be as much at home in the water as a duck. Won a lot of swimming prizes when I was a youngster. You don't ever forget how to swim, you know."

"So I've heard," Bill agreed. "Me, I've done most of my swimming motions reaching for the ground when some evil-minded hawse decided the time had come for him and me to part—and got away with it."

McAlester introduced the subject of business soon after breakfast. One "eye-opener" was all he had allowed himself; he was clear-headed, alert, incisive. He stated his proposition succinctly. Bill found it easy to see how he had gained the place he held as a leader in affairs of magnitude. Earnest, forceful, eloquent, compelling, daring in conception but safely conservative in application, he made a good impression on his hearer from the start. Bill admitted to himself, as McAlester talked, that he had seldom met a more magnetic person. One likely to have his own way most of the time, if he could get face to face with his subject!

The business was important, and McAlester made it attractive. Captain Titus controlled three big oil-companies, could easily secure control of two more. He had great weight in the counsels of a strategic pipe-line. McAlester already had tankers; there were more in sight; his representatives had secured markets; dock facilities in Texas had been partly arranged. Bill had powerful friends at Austin, where friends might be needed to protect such a combination as the financier proposed against hostile officials and possible "strike" legislation. McAlester needed him. He made no secret of it. He laid his cards frankly on the table—Bill felt reasonably sure not one of them was being withheld—and his talk made a deep impression.

It was a good proposition. Bill did not see how he could lose, and he did see how he could gain largely. McAlester was making his offer without reservation, and Titus had been authoritatively told his word was good. He asked searching questions; McAlester replied frankly and satisfactorily. He might be able to put through his plan with others, but it promised best with Captain Titus' coöperation, and he was willing to concede an appropriate reward. It looked good, and yet—

"All right," Bill said after an hour's talk. "I reckon we've got down to the bottom of the thing. I'll chew it over awhile."

"How long?" McAlester obviously had hoped for a quick decision.

"Oh, a day. A few hours, perhaps. At the latest, tomorrow."

"Fair enough," the other said, clearly relieved. "And now, that being over, we'll have the steward do his duty."

PAST Clam Island Light the *Minerva* steamed late in the afternoon, and rounded the whistling buoy off Meachem's Point into Longport Harbor. Since mid-forenoon the yacht had been running under reduced speed; McAlester had remarked, at luncheon, that he was in no hurry to reach Longport. "We'll lay up there to-night," he said, "but there's nothing to see or do there; I hardly ever go ashore at the cussed town. We'll be out of the harbor early tomorrow and get down to the Maine coast." He hesitated, then added: "We might pick up another passenger at Longport; I'm rather expecting a friend aboard."

He did not amplify this statement, and Bill felt no especial curiosity regarding the friend's personality. McAlester had a good many drinks during the afternoon, and was in an elevated mood at dinner. When coffee had been finished and his host was sipping his third liqueur, Captain Titus asked if it would be convenient for him to go ashore for a little while. "I've never been up on this part of the coast," he said, "and the town looks sort of picturesque. If you don't mind—"

He thought McAlester accepted the suggestion eagerly. "I'll have the launch ordered away as soon as you like," he said, "and they'll be at the landing to bring you aboard again at whatever hour you say."

"Thanky' kindly. Maybe I'd like to wander around and look at the place—and the folks. Suppose I plan to come back at half-past ten."

"At your own convenience. You wont find anything doing ashore after that. It's a dead town."

CAPTAIN TITUS stood, a half-hour later, on a curbstone in the glare of Longport's only movie-palace, watching the people who passed or turned in at the entrance. Many of these were summer visitors; they did not interest him greatly. The natives, more or less typical New Englanders of a North Shore fishing town, attracted his eye and ear. He wheeled suddenly at a pleasant voice:

"It's a long way from San Antonio to Longport, Mr. Titus."

The speaker was a smiling man in the fifties, carefully dressed and with a little pointed gray beard. Bill had met him two or three years before at a meeting of financiers in New York. He remembered he was president of a big Boston bank.

"Mr. Look!" he exclaimed. "I'm shorely right glad to see you, suh."

"Where did you drop from, and what are you doing in our midst? I knew there were quite a few Texans in the summer colony, but I hadn't seen your name in the papers."

"I just came in for the night. On a yacht. Ralph K. McAlester's. We had some business to talk over, and he invited me along to take the sea air with him. Do you live here?"

"Summers," Mr. Look said. "I was born here, and I hang out here about five months out of the year." Bill, shrewdly sensitive to changes in men's expressions, felt a lessening of cordiality; he thought Look's face had hardened a trifle at the mention of McAlester's name. "You say you're leaving in the morning, eh? Did Mr. McAlester come ashore?"

"No. I sort of wanted to look the town over, and he let me take the launch."

"Nice boat, McAlester's," Mr. Look said. "Ever made many trips with him?"

BILL translated this question into exactly what the Boston banker was driving at; it was as though he were asking: "Are you a friend of McAlester's?"

"Never saw neither the boat or McAlester until yesterday afternoon," he replied. "He had a business matter he wanted to take up with me, and I connected with him just before he sailed."

Look's eyes became more friendly.

"So if you don't mind telling me what's the matter with him," Bill went on easily, "I'll be much obliged, thanky' suh. I remember when Mr. Vanderpool introduced you and me, he said you was a regular friend of his, and as I remember it, he mentioned that he and I get along pretty well together. All of which being the case, perhaps you wont mind giving me a little idea of why you thought less of me when I told you I came here on McAlester's boat."

Mr. Look's face showed some chagrin that his mind had been so easily read. "You ought to be a good poker-player," he countered.

"No suh," Bill told him earnestly. "I aint especially. But I've studied the game, off and on, for some years. I'm learning it a little. About Mr. McAlester, please suh. I haven't closed up any business with him yet—and I'm a stranger in a strange land."

Look laughed. "Not a thing against

him in a business way," he declared. "If your relations with him are only business— I'll admit I don't especially like the gentleman, but it's purely personal. Or rather, it is only due to some of his personal characteristics. If I stopped doing business at my bank with all the men whom I don't especially like personally—" He laughed again. "How were you planning to spend the balance of this evening?"

"Just roaming around and gaining a knowledge of your fair city. Maybe, if I got tired of drifting, I'd go to a picture. I have to be at the boat-landing at ten-thirty. When I'm in a strange country," he added, "I kind o' like to look at the folks that are different from the folks down our way."

"I can show you some folks—three or four of them—who will interest you more than these strangers passing on the street, half of whom are city people, anyway. You will interest them too. We're going to have a little poker session, over at my place, as soon as I get back. I discovered, a little while ago, that I ran out of cards and came downtown to get a few decks. If you feel like changing your program a little— It's just a friendly five-dollar limit game. But you don't have to sit in, unless you want to. We'd be glad to have you come and meet the boys and be merely a spectator, if you prefer."

"But I don't prefer," Bill protested. "I expect, not being a very good player thataway, that you-all will take away my shirt, but if you will guarantee my check for my losings if they happen to be more money than I've got in my jeans, I'd admire to participate in the carnage."

"I get the cards right there at the first corner," Look laughed. "We'd better hurry, I guess. The boys will be there ahead of us, as it is."

THREE men rose to greet Mr. Look, when they arrived at his summer home on the point overlooking the harbor entrance, all grumbling at his delay. They fell silent when they saw he had a stranger with him, and responded to his introduction:

"I ran into an old acquaintance down in the square, fellers—Mr. Titus of Texas. He's a banker, and in oil, and some other things, down there. We met in New York, and a friend of mine that's a friend of his warned me never to sit into a poker game with him without being prepared to hock my watch. . . . . This is Jim Tucker, Mr. Titus. He's an ex-selectman, and he didn't get the wherewithal to play poker out of politics. . . . . And Captain Adoniram Swasey; I guess maybe you've heard of him; he used to be a shipmaster, and now he's a director in what the Boston papers call the 'fish trust.' . . . . Seth Purvear is a malefactor of great wealth. He runs one of our leading eating-houses for automobile parties from the city. I guess maybe it's good—I don't know; we Longport folks never eat there; we can't afford it."

Bill's swift impression was that each one of the trio looked exactly as he ought to from their host's description of his business—as much, he reflected, as he himself probably looked like an old cattleman dressed up.

"Are ye visitin' Longport for any considerable spell?" Captain Swasey asked. The former shipmaster had a big white mustache and wind-faded blue eyes, and could have been elected president (if there had been such an institution) of the Society for the Preservation of the New England Dialect.

"Only overnight," Bill replied; and Look put in: "Mr. Titus came in this afternoon on the *Minerva*."

INSTANTLY Titus was again conscious of the same atmospheric chill that he had felt when he had conveyed the same information to Look. The Boston banker was making it right, however. "He isn't a friend of McAlester's," he said. "They just happened to have some business to talk over and did it on the yacht. He never met McAlester until yesterday."

Ex-Selectman Jim Tucker tamped a pipe solemnly. "You could 'a' postponed meeting him at all without loss, if you ask *me*," he declared to Bill, with a sudden smile that robbed his words of any intention to offend. "At that, I don't know a thing against him in a business way."

"Didn't Vanderpool call you by some title, Mr. Titus, when he introduced us?" Look asked. "Was it Colonel?"

"Cap'n," Bill said modestly. "Most folks down in Texas call me that. Cap'n Bill. Before that, it was Nueces Bill. 'Way back it was 'the Nueces Kid.' Kind o' picturesque names they used to hang on folks down there."

"Cap'n in the milishy?" asked Captain Swasey.

"Ranger Service. Back of that I was

a cow-puncher." They were drawing up around a table, and Mr. Look was apportioning little stacks of chips. "If you don't mind," Bill said with some diffidence, I'd appreciate it right well to know why it is none of you gentlemen like this Mr. McAlester. He was talking a little business to me, and I sort of like to know a lot of things about a feller before I do too much business with him—personal as well as commercial. Sometimes," he explained, "there might be quite a lot of money in being associated with a feller, and yet it wouldn't be worth it."

ALL four nodded appreciation of this viewpoint.

"I gather you are all acquainted with him."

"He was born here," Mr. Purvear said.

"He didn't mention that."

"He prob'ly wouldn't. He left here when he wasn't more than eighteen. Nobody mourned the loss. Lived here until he was eighteen, and not a livin' soul in Longport ever called him 'Mac.' "

Bill murmured understanding of what this implied.

"No sir, he didn't have any close friends at all. Always said a risin' young man didn't *need* to have any friends but a bank-book. Didn't come back here for fifteen years. Then, after that, we never saw him again until last summer. Didn't stay long then."

Bill sensed some significance in this reference to the former summer, but ex-Selectman Tucker had taken up the tale:

"Begun to get rich already, McAlester had, that time he come back here when he was thirty-three or -four. Didn't have any steam yacht, those days, but he stopped at the Seaview. Had a soot of two rooms. That was the year before he got married. Didn't know us old fellers very well." Mr. Tucker giggled slightly. "But Cap'n Swasey took him down some. Tell him 'bout it, Adoniram. That time he stuck out his chest about the town growin', and you give him as good as he sent."

Captain Swasey responded without urging:

"Standin' down on what we call the bullevard, down by the cove, he was, lookin' out at the boats. 'H'lo, McAlester,' s' I. 'I heard you was in town. Fourteen or fifteen years sence you was here before, aint it?' s' I. 'How do you do, Cap'n Swasey,' s' he, high an' mighty. 'Fifteen years. How busy the town looks,' s' he. 'It's reely grown quite a bit,' he says. By time! he made me mad, an' I up an' says, s' I: 'Yeah. An' ef you'd died fifteen years ago instid o' goin' to Noo Yawk, this town would look now just like she does—an' Noo Yawk'd look just like *she* does, too.' Never forgive me, natchully—didn't speak to me when I met him last summer to say aye, yes, nor no—but wa'n't it the truth?"

"Your deal, Cap'n," said Look, who had thrown around the cards for the first jack, to Swasey.

"I apologize in advance for overplayin' my hands," Bill remarked. "We have a li'l' custom down my way of playing the joker for ace, straight or flush, which always has a tendency to make me reckless when I get into a game up East. Not having table-stakes bothers me some, too, until I get used to it. But I'll get the hang of things after a while, meantime paying cheerful for my ignorance."

"Sounds to me like deceptive language," Mr. Purvear opined. He added "I was out West once and saw that table-stakes business. Seems to me our Yankee game gives a bigger chance for what you might call broad-gauged results."

"Pass," said Mr. Look. "I met a man from Texas once who said he was twelve years old before he knew that 'damned Yankee' was two words."

"He got a better education than me; I was seventeen. Also pass," Bill declared. "That was sometime ago. I've got lots of Yankee friends, now. But they and I don't think the same way—except on essentials."

"Whaddya mean, essentials?" Seth Purvear asked.

THEY had all passed, and Bill was rolling a cigarette while Look dealt. "Well," he said amiably, his attention on his makin's, "things like what is really the matter with McAlester, what it was he did last summer. You aint told me yet."

"I guess he's a friend of ours if he's a friend of yours," Purvear said to Look. "Tell him, Tom."

"It was a girl," the banker said slowly, while the cards lay before them, untouched. "A little, silly, good-looking, rattle-headed girl who lives with her mother here in Longport. Father's been dead some time; he didn't amount to much. Mother runs a little gift-shop and serves meals for sum-

mer transients. I said the girl hasn't got any sense, didn't I? She isn't but twenty. Crazy about clothes. Notions about rich cavaliers seeking out poor but honest working-girls. McAlester came into the gift-shop. Good-looking dog, McAlester."

Bill nodded soberly.

"She was away from town for two weeks. Went the same night the *Minerva* did. Came home by train the same day the papers said McAlester got back to New York. She's been here ever since."

"And dressed, all winter, like a female minstrel parade," ex-Selectman Tucker added bitterly. "Gets a letter with a money-order in it every month regular."

"Jim's brother is postmaster," Captain Swasey explained.

"However that may seem to city folks, we don't take kindly to it here in Longport," Mr. Purvear put in quietly. "She's an absolutely brainless little fool, but that's all the more reason why he shouldn't. Her mother carries her head high; she's that sort. But she's aged a lot, this year."

"Thanky' very kindly, gentlemen," Bill said gravely. "I'll put that confidential information into the scales with one or two other things when I'm making up my mind about this business proposition."

"Open it for a dollar," Captain Swasey declared, as they all picked up their cards and put the unpleasant subject behind them. "It's a cheap one, because, while I got the beginnin's of a hand that might win ef enough more good cards come in with the tide, it's bad luck to win the first pot, and I'd rather one of you fellers did it."

THE game proceeded without further distractions.

"I'm shorely a rotten player," Bill commented an hour later, when he had lost seventy dollars. "Can't get it out of my head there's as much chance to fill a straight or flush here as there is at home. From now on I'm going to play 'em close to my bosom. Any time I draw one card hereafter, you'll know I've got two pairs. . . . . Open it for five."

Two players stayed.

"One card," Bill grinned. "Bet five."

"Call ye!" challenged Captain Swasey, after Tucker had dropped out. "Beat a pair of aces an' take it away."

"It's yours." Bill disgustedly showed a four-flush. "You're the most unsatisfactory collection of friendly players I ever saw—barring a crowd I play with down at a little town called Summerton. I tell the truth, and you believe me. I lie, and you don't. If I could sit in a few times with you gentlemen and get the hang of your failings—"

"Do," urged Look. "You say you don't have to get home in a hurry; stay here with me a week or a fortnight—as long as you can. Mrs. Look will be delighted to have you. I'll have the boys over often—and one or two more that you'll like just as well."

"I'm due back on that yacht in less than an hour; they'll be waiting for me with the launch. Besides, we haven't finished our business, and McAlester is heading for Maine first thing in the mawnin'."

"Come back." Look's invitation was obviously sincere, and the others showed by their faces that they approved it, for every one of them had taken a liking to the ex-Ranger, and he played poker after their own hearts. "Finish up your business and then get him to put you ashore and hop a train for here. Land in any time, at any hour; you'll be welcome. You don't need to send any advance notice. Next week, when the big yacht-races are on, I'm planning to take a vacation and not go in to Boston at all. There are lots of things we could do daytimes. I'll show you Yankeeland—right."

"I may take you up on that. And I appreciate it right sincerely, suh."

"We oughta be able to get more'n seventy dollars out of a stranger that don't know our Yankee tricks, in his first evening," Purvear cried, "and as long as there's less than an hour to do it in, let's be dealing a few cards instead of talking. Because"—he smiled wisely at Bill—"I suspect that about the second or third night he plays against us, after he comes back, he's going to collect it with interest, and I need to put something by for a rainy day."

IN his last pot, having deceived them all perfectly, at a psychological moment, into thinking a pat full was a bluff, Bill recouped his fortunes to the extent of forty dollars, and set forth for the landing in the best of spirits, leaving them to their game. The warmth of their demand that he be sure to come back within a few days was gratifying. He hummed a little tuneless ditty as he crawled into the waiting launch, and was still humming it

when he went up the side of the *Minerva*. As his foot touched the deck, he stopped short, stood silently, and surveyed the picture which presented itself under the electric lights of the after-deck.

McAlester was sitting there, and across from him, a girl—a girl about twenty, of a type very attractive to one who did not care what brains, or lack of them, lay behind her pretty, vapid face; he could see that, even at this distance. Her hat had been laid aside; the remainder of her apparel was a bit startling: white shoes, red stockings, a white dress with a broad red sailor collar. "Like a female minstrel parade," ex-Selectman Tucker had said. Bill knew who had come aboard.

He went quietly to his stateroom, packed his bag and suitcase, and locked them. He picked them up, took a final view of the room, and discovered he had overlooked a pair of military brushes. It was easier to unlock the bag than the suitcase, and so he did so, but could not make room. Impatiently he took from the top of the bag his automatic pistol and squeezed in the brushes. Then, merely because he did not want to fuss any more and it was a natural thing for him to do anyway, he dropped the pistol into the side pocket of his coat. He went up on deck, left his bags in the shadow of a deckhouse and walked aft.

AS McAlester, with a low word or two to the girl, rose to greet him, Bill saw that the yacht owner had had a great many drinks and was not carrying them well. He swayed, and his tongue was thick, as he cried jovially:

"Welcome to our city! Come join the party an' make 'self at home. Little frien' came 'board to go sailin' with us while you was away. Mr. Titus, lemme make you 'quainted with Miss Gracie—Little." He giggled sillily at the inspiration that had supplied him with the obviously fictitious surname.

Bill's hat swept off as he bowed with old-fashioned courtesy. "I'm pleased to meet you, ma'am," he said. Before either she or McAlester could speak, he addressed the man:

"I met an old friend of mine while I was ashore, suh, and he invited me to make him a little visit. I've enjoyed your hospitality; it's been a right pleasant little trip you've given me, but as long as we've had our business talk, perhaps you wont mind if I leave you. If you will ask your men to take me ashore again—"

"Can't go 'shore. Nonsense!" McAlester cried. "Party's only jus' beginnin'. Couldn' think of having you go 'shore. Nice trip comin' yet. Only jus' got started."

"I'm sure it will be just as pleasant a trip without me. So, if you please, suh—"

"But we haven' settled business. Don' wanta talk business tonight, but tomorrow we're goin' talk more business."

"We can settle that right away. I've been considering what you said ever since you proposed it. It's mighty good of you to make me the proposition, and I appreciate it is a good one, and fair, and all that; but I've already got a good many things on, and I've decided not to go into it."

"But hold on! We've gotta talk that over some more."

"It wouldn't do any good, suh. I'm not looking for a better proposition; I just figure I wont take on any new affairs right now."

McAlester clearly realized that he was at a disadvantage trying to discuss business in his present condition. "We'll put off talkin' 'bout it till tomorrow," he insisted stubbornly. "Tomorrow mornin'. Head's always clearer in the mornin'. Come along on the trip, anyway. Need you to make a nice party."

BILL smiled courteously. "I don't believe so," he said. "I don't believe it's necessary for luck to have odd numbers."

This remark, made solely for the sake of saying something amiable to get the difficult conversation over with, struck McAlester as possessing the significance it would have possessed if he had said it under such circumstances.

"Oh-ho!" he laughed. "That's it, is it? Well, say, listen! We c'n make it even numbers. Gracie's nice little girl, but there's others. I got lots o' nice little girls. Know nice little girls in Portland." A red mantle of mortification swept up the young woman's face and suffused her forehead. "We'll make Portland tomorrow, and I'll—"

Bill intended only to slap McAlester's face, but the financier was swaying, and the Texan's flat hand, swinging up from his side with all the weight of his muscu-

lar body back of it, struck under the jaw. McAlester reeled back to the low gunwale, toppled, and went over into the waters of Longport harbor.

"Man overboard!" yelled somebody on the bridge. Sailors of the watch came tumbling aft, shouting confusedly.

Bill, who had leaped to the side, saw McAlester's head come up through the calm water, saw him strike out mechanically toward the gangway, and heard a sputtering of curses that assured him the boat-owner was neither knocked out by the blow nor in any need of assistance. He turned, to see the captain coming on the run behind the watch, and to hear his command: "Grab him! Throw him down and hold him!"

They jumped toward Bill, then stopped and froze into ludicrous postures of rigidity as his pistol waved menacingly. "Anderson! Go into my room and bring my gun!" snapped the skipper.

"Anderson, stay right where you are!" Titus counter-commanded. "You too, Cap'n. We wont have any gun-play if I can help it, but if we do, I'll do the playing. So! Everybody steady. Now, if one of you wants to dive overboard after Mr. McAlester, you can do it, but I reckon, he being a fancy swimmer and all, he don't especially need any help."

The yacht captain expressed himself without restraint.

"That's all right," Bill assured him. "Use all the language you want, so long as you stay still and don't make any threatening motions. This is a matter between Mr. McAlester and me."

PUFFING and spitting salt water, the owner, sobered by the plunge, came over the side. "I didn't aim to knock you overboard," Bill called to him over the heads of the others as he gained the deck and stood there dripping, "but I don't know as I'm apologizing for it, at that. I'm a little fussy about how womenfolks are talked about in my presence. If you want to have me arrested, for assault, violence—whatever the charge is,—I don't know but it's mutiny when a ruckus is pulled off on a boat,—I'll wait here till you do it. I don't reckon you want to do it, though. I can't see how the publicity would be helpful."

McAlester swore even more earnestly than had the captain.

"And now that you've got that off your chest," Bill said, "do you mind, please suh, telling the cap'n to have somebody take me to the landing?"

McAlester was beginning to shiver in the night breeze.

"Oh, get the old devil ashore as quick as you can!" he chattered, and dived for a companionway and dry clothes.

Bill was picking up his bags and moving toward the gangway when a shaky voice spoke at his elbow:

"Will you take me too?"

"It will give me pleasure, ma'am," he assured her, and no great lady was ever handed into a launch at a yacht's side with more respectful gallantry.

"I CAME back," Bill announced, "to get more instruction in the ways of New Englanders—and my thirty dollars."

"Just in time, by gosh!" the ex-selectman cried. "Four-handed makes a darned uninterestin' game; I've been losing ever since you left."

"This is really more pleasure than I hoped for," Look said. "I can't tell you how tickled I am. You are just as welcome as I said you'd be."

"Well, I got to thinking it over, and the farther I got from here and the nearer I got to that yacht, the more homesick I got. Sort of seemed like I was leaving my own kind of folks. I've made my splash in high society, but I got to honing for a quieter life, me not caring much for some kinds of society ways, and excitement, and all such. So, as long as I was coming back, knowing you was planning to stop the game at midnight, I sort of hastened."

"And your business with McAlester?"

"It didn't take him and me long to settle that. We aint got any business together any more."

"How did McAlester take it?" Look queried as he distributed the cards.

"He sputtered a little," Bill replied nonchalantly and glanced at his hand.

"Yes, but what did he say?"

"Not much. He was swimming."

"Swimmin'!" burst in Captain Adoniram Swasey explosively. "What in timenation was he swimmin' out in the harbor for at this hour o' the night?"

Bill's protest was almost plaintive:

"I'm only a Texan, Cap'n. I don't *sabe* the customs of other parts of the country. How do you expect me to know why Yankees do things?"

Easy Street Experts

"The Skeleton Trail" leads two amiable adventurers in rascality along a most interesting road: a specially attractive story by the famous author of "Winsome Winnie."

By Bertram Atkey

IT was when they were returning from an elaborate lunch at the Astoritz—strolling very gently, for sake of their digestions—that those two genial rascals the Honorable John Brass and his wolf-witted friend and partner Colonel Clumber first noted that there was an unaccustomed look about the window of one Hyams, antique dealer, whose shop occupied a moderately obscure position in one of the side-streets through which the two old crooks occasionally meandered on their way back to their flat.

The Honorable John it was who first pointed out the absence of the skeleton which for some months past had basked in a sunny corner of the window.

"I see," he said, stopping to stare at the shop window, "I see that our young friend Bones has pulled his freight!"

"It'll be a long time before I lose any sleep worrying about *that*," grunted the Colonel without much interest. "I never considered him handsome, and he always had a very unburied sort of look to me."

"Yes—me too," replied Mr. Brass thoughtfully. "He was an ugly sight—always looked so damned hungry and kind of empty."

They turned away and slowly resumed their walk, enjoying their cigars.

"I shouldn't wonder but what that he man-eater Hyams was pretty glad to get rid of Bones," mused John presently.

"Well, *I* don't care, one way or the other," declared Colonel Clumber.

They paced tranquilly onward.

"Now, I wonder what sort of figure Hyams would get for a good skeleton," said the Honorable John presently.

The Colonel was satirical.

"The poor devil is dead, aint he?" he demanded.

John smiled.

"Yes—he's dead enough. I've never seen a deader skeleton," he answered.

"He's dead and sold and gone, aint he?" continued the Colonel. "Well, I'd be very glad if you'd leave him where he is—don't drag him back into the conversation for *me*. It's doing my lunch no good!"

BUT the Honorable John stopped abruptly. His brains had reached the objective toward which they had been groping.

"And d'ye think the memory of him is cheering me up at all?" he asked heavily. "Because it aint—only I've been thinking it over, and what I'd like to know, Squire, is this: Who buys skeletons, and what do they buy 'em *for?* They can't work, and they don't pay any interest on the money sunk in 'em, and they're not an ornament to a house. They don't come under my idea of what you might call Regular Trade. No, skeletons aint Regular Trade. . . . . I think I'll just look in on Hyams and inquire."

But Colonel Clumber was skeptical.

"What for?" he said. "I'll save you the trouble. That sportsman with the ribs was purchased by a medical student. They're great lads for bones, those boys."

"Why?" asked John, good-humoredly.

"They dissect 'em!" said the Colonel patiently. "They disassemble 'em and label 'em and reconstruct 'em!"

But the Honorable John was unconvinced.

"Dull work, that," he commented. Nevertheless he moved on again.

"Not a job I should care much about," he said presently.

"What isn't?" asked his partner.

"Taking down skeletons and putting them up again," said Mr. Brass, as though he were talking of motor engines.

"Oh, damn the skeleton, anyway," snapped the Colonel.

But John stopped again.

"Look here, old man, I've got a hunch about that skeleton. A big hunch! I'll just drift back and have a chat with Hyams."

His companion hesitated. "Oh, if you've got a hunch," he grumbled, and resignedly turned with his partner. Hunches—or instincts—were not things which the two old grappling-hooks ever disdained.

"A worn-out skeleton isn't everybody's money," said John soothingly as they retraced their steps to Hyams'.

"I want," said the Honorable John to Mr. Hyams, "to buy a medium quality skeleton. Have you got such a thing for sale. I would go to fifty pounds for a good one."

Only with a violent effort did Mr. Hyams refrain from bursting into tears.

"Only two days ago I sold the best skeleton in London," he declared, "for twenty pounds. *Twenty pounds!* Aint that an awful accident to happen to any man? And I aint got no other man-size skeleton in stock. Wouldn't no other skeleton suit you? I got a fine skeleton of a badger. Only fourteen pounds!"

"No—no badgers need apply—nor polecats—nor skunks! I want a human skeleton," said the Honorable John. "D'ye think your customer would part with his for a profit?"

HYAMS shook his head. He seemed very sure of that.

"My customer was a student of ostosto-something—studied bones, you understand—and he wanted him very badly, that skeleton. He had searched everywhere for one."

"Oh, had he?" The Honorable John seemed very disappointed. He reflected for a moment. Then he took out his notecase.

"Better try it, I suppose," he muttered, "though there's not much chance."

He passed the sovereign to Hyams.

"Now, look here," he said authoritatively, "I'm going to buy that skeleton off that medicine man. I'm a bone-dissector, and a—a—disassembler and reconstructor, and I need that skeleton badly. My name is Sir James Johnson, and I've got an important case, d'ye see? Write me a letter of introduction to the party you sent the skeleton to, and I'll call and try to get him to see that my need of a skeleton is more important than his. There's a sovereign to pay your expenses, and if I get the skeleton, you shall have a fiver for your commission."

Mr. Hyams was a strictly business man, and in less than five minutes the partners were strolling home with the knowledge that the buyer of the skeleton was one Mr. Roy Rainbird, of Alperton West, Hants.

"Alperton West," said the Honorable John. "Let's look—that's the place where they have the big sheep, horse, and fat bullock fair every year, isn't it?"

"It is that," replied the Colonel sarcastically. "What about it? Does it seem to convey anything to you?"

"Not at present," said "Sir James Johnson," failing apparently to notice the sarcasm. "Does it to you?"

"Yes," chuckled Clumber, "it conveys to me the fact that you're a cold quid out of pocket."

"That's all right. I'll take care of *that,* old man," said the Honorable John as they let themselves into their flat.

"I'll take care of *that,*" he repeated presently, as he sank into his shamefully luxurious armchair. "Certainly I will!" He pressed the bell, and Sing, that Chinese cormorant who acted as valet and general conjuror to the partners, entered.

"You can telephone Bloom that we shall be down at Purdston to dine and sleep, Sing, my son. And you can't do it too quick to please me. Then you'd better see about the car and get ready."

"Yes, master," purred the sulphur-hued Celestial.

"Not forgetting to bring in some whisky and soda before you get busy," the Honorable John reminded him.

"I blinging whisky soda allee same this minute."

He disappeared noiselessly, returned like a quick and efficient ghost well trained to work about the house, placed a tray on a table between the partners and vanished again.

"A good lad—a very good lad. That's a well-trained Chink, that lad is. Trained him myself," said Mr. Brass, and liberally helped himself. "You've got Bloom pretty well trained," he referred to the manservant who, with his wife, formed the indoor staff of the partners' tranquil country retreat at Purdston, on the Surrey-Hants border,—"but Sing can give him fifty in a hundred and still take the hide off him!"

Colonel Clumber languidly agreed, and the two friends quietly dropped off into the deep doze with which they usually aided their vitality after lunch.

THE ordinarily somnolent agricultural town of Alperton West being no more than thirty miles from Purdston, the Honorable John and the Colonel were able to rise late, breakfast in absolute leisure, and enjoy a couple of cigars, play a quiet game of billiards, take an eagle-eyed stroll through the hothouse and kitchen garden, on the following morning—a Sunday—and yet reach Alperton West in ample time for a simple but well-cooked lunch (ordered by overnight wire) at the leading hotel of the place.

It was mid-September and a glorious day. The great annual sheep and cattle fair had finished the day before and the two old vultures had the place practically to themselves.

They lunched in a very delightful little summerhouse at the foot of a lawn facing the river which runs through Alperton, and as was their custom, they were attended by Sing, supported by an elderly waiter of the hotel.

It proved a very satisfactory lunch and when, presently, the Honorable John faced the old waiter, there was a mild benevolence in his eye which spoke eloquently of hefty tips to come.

"A neat and gentlemanly little lunch, well cooked and well served, my son," observed the Honorable John.

"Thank you, sir," replied the waiter. "Having your Japanese servant to help made a great difference, gentlemen."

"Chinese, not Japanese. That lad is Chinese, and a very good lad too," corrected John.

HE took out a ten-shilling note.

"Where does Mr. Rainbird live?"

"Mr. Roy Rainbird, the bank manager, sir? He lives at the bank—the West and Home Counties Bank."

"Still over the bank? I understood he had moved from the bank and was living farther out of the town?" continued the Honorable John, who had understood nothing of the kind, nor cared.

"Oh, no sir—not as yet. He still lives at the bank. I haven't heard anything about his living out of the town, sir—and I was talking to Mrs. Doreen Delane, his housekeeper, only the other day, sir. She was having tea on the lawn here, after a row on the river, sir."

"Umph! I must have been mistaken," said the Honorable John.

"I'm afraid so, sir. I fancy, sir, Mrs. Delane would have mentioned something about it—she was having tea with a lady friend of hers, and they talked a good deal, sir."

John put the ten-shilling note back into his pocket, and the waiter's jaw dropped. But his features grew more composed when Mr. Brass brought out a pound note.

"You see, sir," said the waiter, "there's a sort of a rumor going round that Mr. Rainbird and Mrs. Delane mean to make a match of it, sir." He paused, watching the Honorable John.

"And a very handsome pair they'd make, sir," he added—evidently thinking that Rainbird was a friend of Mr. Brass.

"Oh, that's what they say, is it, waiter?" The Honorable John put the pound note on the table and lighted a fresh cigar. "I don't recollect ever meeting her. Pretty stylish, handsome party, is she?"

The waiter brightened up.

"She is that, sir. She don't need to go out of Alperton West to find a husband, not Mrs. Delane, sir. But there aint much doubt that Mr. Rainbird is the man, sir."

THE waiter came closer to Mr. Brass and the pound note.

"It's no business of mine, sir, of course, but I've got what you might call inside information about them two," he said in a lower tone. "He's a pretty dashing gent, Mr. Rainbird, and *she* aint exactly a dull party!" The water smiled.

"I was in London a month back, sir, and called round at the Savoy, where I worked when I was quicker on me feet, to see an old friend of mine, a waiter there. I took a look at the dining-room,—in a quiet sort of way,—and there was Mr. Rainbird and Mrs. Delane tucked away in a corner—seeing life, sir. I asked Jimmy—my friend, sir—about 'em. He hadn't particular listened to their conversation, but he'd sort of gathered, sir, that they'd dined at the Carlton, been to the Lyric, I fancy 'twas, and were winding up at the Savoy, sir. So what I mean to say, sir, it *looks* like a case, sir!"

"Sure!" said the Honorable John. "Well, well, so it does. But I should have thought Mr. Rainbird was too studious a man for much of that round-the-town life."

The waiter was surprised.

"Studious, sir! Mr. Rainbird!"

"He used to be, but maybe he's grown out of it. Doesn't he buy any fossils and things—bones and specimens for his collection nowadays?"

The waiter smiled. "Not that I ever heard of, sir."

"Ah, he must have made a fresh hobby—Mrs. Delane, very likely."

"Ha-ha! Yes sir!" agreed the waiter.

Mr. Brass pushed the pound over.

"There's something for you, my son," he said, though the man was old and garrulous enough to be his father. "A good lunch is worth a good tip—that's my motto."

"Yes sir! Certainly, sir. My motto too, sir." Collecting his loot, the waiter vanished.

The two old wolves stared at each other.

"There was nothing the matter with that hunch of yours," said the Colonel.

Mr. Brass shook his head in agreement. "I knew it was a hunch and a half, all along," he said.

He ruminated silently for a few moments.

"If you can tell me what a good-looking bank manager with a good-looking housekeeper he expects to marry, both with high-priced tastes, needs with a secondhand skeleton, I should be much obliged," he said presently.

The Colonel smiled a half-inch smile.

"Well, it wont dislocate anything particular if we stroll down to the bank and get acquainted with the man, will it?" he suggested.

The Honorable John rose.

"No. But it's a Sunday, and the bank's closed. Still, he lives at the bank, and he might be at home yet—if he values his digestion. Anyhow we might get a look round; that was the idea of coming down here on a Sunday, wasn't it?"

So they strolled in the leisurely way which usually characterized their strolls, down to the West and Home Counties Bank, each pondering in his own way the interesting little problem of the skeleton and its relation to the bank manager and the lady-housekeeper who apparently shared a taste for seeing life.

THE West and Home Counties Bank at Alperton West was not merely one of the newest buildings in the town, but one of the prettiest. It was bank and house in one—the office part of it opening onto the street, and the house part onto a lawn and garden at the side, screened from the street by a well-kept and thriving privet hedge.

The partners paused opposite the bank and openly surveyed it for a few seconds. The street was practically deserted.

"We'd better put the old story across at him," said John. "Think of building

a factory here and want a little information about local conditions and so forth."

The Colonel had no better plan to propose, and they crossed to the gate opening onto the garden, and so to the front door of the house section of the bank.

He knocked—a moderate, reassuring knock. Nothing loud or startling.

There was a longish wait. Then the door was opened by a pale woman, distinctly handsome, with a mass of rather remarkable brownish-gold hair. She was well-dressed, and was wearing a Panama hat and a well-cut blue linen coat and skirt. In one hand she held a pair of gloves, and her coat was unbuttoned so that she gave one the impression of having just entered the house. Tall and remarkably shapely,—though perhaps a thought full-blown,—she was distinctly the type the Honorable John and his partner most admired.

DOWN the front of her skirt was a long, greasy streak like a fresh oilstain, and there was a pronounced odor of paraffin. Also her pallor was not a natural pallor, but apparently that of anger, and her big blue-gray eyes were bright, like blue ice with the sun on it. "Wants a cup of tea, maid's out, got to make it herself, and is having a hell of a struggle with the stove," decided John in his mind, instantly. "She's a queen, all right; but she looks ready to bite just now."

Aloud he said, removing his hat: "Mrs. Delane, I believe? We wish to see Mr. Roy Rainbird—"

She went an angry but attractive pink, and her eyes glinted bluely.

"Very possibly! So do I," she said in a voice that trembled with rage. She was looking them over searchingly, and suddenly her face cleared a little.

"You are the detectives," she said, "aren't you?"

There was in the personal beauty of the two old crooks a certain severity, an austerity, indeed, one might truthfully say, a hardness which on more than one occasion had been the cause of other people's making the same mistake.

The Honorable John hesitated, rather artistically.

Then he said: "Oh, no, not at all, Mrs. Delane. Not detectives! But we'd like a few words with Mr. Rainbird, if he is disengaged."

"Oh, he's disengaged," she said bitterly, and quite obviously not believing Mr. Brass' skilfully hesitant disclaimer.

"*Quite* disengaged—so much so that I fancy he's disengaged himself from the bank, myself and Alperton West forever! Come in, if you like, and look at the place. I think, on the whole, I'd prefer you to."

She stood aside, and they entered. She closed the door and faced them.

"This," she said with bitter sarcasm, "is the hall—not, as perhaps you may imagine, the woodshed and oil-house."

They glanced round and perceived that there was some justification for the sarcasm. The place was piled with shavings and bits of dry wood, and reeked of paraffin.

They surveyed it and smiled.

"It's like that in every room," said the beautiful housekeeper. "And the stairs are too quaint! I knocked an open flower-bowl full of paraffin oil off a bracket on the stairway wall a few moments ago. In the bank it's ridiculous. The only thing that amazes me is that the place isn't burnt to the ground. But something went wrong with the program—the ignition was badly timed, as the motor people say. Come and see it—it's in the bank. Candles and gunpowder and paraffin and string."

They followed her into a comfortable dining-room, looked into the drawing-room, glanced at the highly inflammable stairs, and so through a strong door, plentifully equipped with locks and bolts, into the bank.

Even as she had said, the vanished Mr. Rainbird had made very generous preparations to blot out the bank. On the floor of the manager's office was the "ignition" device of which the dashing-looking lady had spoken. It was a rather complex but well-thought out arrangement involving the use of a small percussion cap, a falling hammer hinged to a weight, a light cord attached to the hand of a big grandfather clock, and a plentiful train of loose gunpowder leading to a pile of well-soaked shavings close by. Everything had quite evidently been thought out and prepared with fastidious care.

MRS. DELANE, clearly, had been studying the methods of the arsonically inclined Rainbird rather closely before the Honorable John and his partner had disturbed her, for she gave them a very instructive little lecture as they looked the device over.

"He was very thorough, wasn't he? Too thorough! The thing, I fancy, which spoiled everything was the fact that he had arranged too completely for *draught*. Not content with spreading round enough fuel and oil to burn a place three times the size of this, he left open the door of the office and other doors, and then—forgot my kitten! I've only had it two days, and it must have completely escaped his memory. The kitten probably wandered in here, and playing with things, knocked the percussion cap out of alignment with the hammer, so that when the movement of the clock-hand tightened sufficiently to trip the catch holding up the hammer against the pressure of the spring, and the hammer fell, exactly like a mouse-trap, it missed the cap by several inches!"

The partners nodded.

"The last train leaves here at nine—and as a rule everybody is in bed by twelve at the very latest. So he had to get away before nine last night, leaving behind a means of getting the fire started at twelve. Beginning at that hour, the place would have been half burnt down before anyone would know it was on fire!"

SHE smiled bitterly. Then she continued: "The cord, as you see—tightened sufficiently to trip the catch—the last pressure would do it—at about twelve. It would have been a great success—but for the kitten."

"Was anyone sleeping in the house?" asked the Honorable John.

"No—yes, one other! But only one!" she said oddly. "I slept with friends in London last night, and the maid had—at his suggestion, I remember now—been given the week-end off. Come this way."

They followed her upstairs into a bedroom.

"This is his room," she said, and went across to the bed—well soaked with oil.

"Yes," she said, "he was very thorough. I'll say that for him!" And deftly she pulled back the quilt.

The partners started slightly—but only slightly, for the occupant of the bed was an old friend of theirs.

It was Bones the skeleton—and in his embrace were two rolled ribs of beef that must have weighed something like fifteen pounds each!

The Honorable John nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes," he said, "he was a thorough party. It isn't often a firebug provides his own remains!"

He surveyed the skeleton for a moment, then turned away.

"It was a pity to waste good beef like that. They look to me like two amazin' goot bits of beef, those joints do! And now we'll have a look at the safe."

The attractive Mrs. Delane laughed sardonically.

"Yes—it would be a pity not to look at *that*," she said. "But what do you expect to find in it? Money?"

They stared at her sadly.

"Why, my dear men," she said. "I don't suppose he left as much as a halfpenny stamp in the bank. You don't imagine that Roy Rainbird is the kind of man who forgets to take away his loot—even if he does forget the kitten—and forgets to tell his *fiancée* that he's leaving home and her forever and for aye, do you?"

"No, naturally, we don't, my dear," said the Honorable John rather feebly. "But it's just as well to have a look!"

"Oh, certainly," she said. "You may look until you get astigmatism in both eyes, but you wont find anything in that safe resembling money. Why, it was the eight thousand pounds' worth of notes which were paid in during the cattle-fair week that decided Master Roy to get rich quick."

"Eight thousand?"

"Oh, quite that—in notes. Heaps more, if you count the checks. Sheep at two to three pounds each, bullocks and cows at thirty pounds to fifty each, mount up, you know. This place has a really big fair—thousands and thousands of sheep and hundreds of cattle and pigs change hands—and the dealers use five- and ten- pound notes to an extraordinary extent!"

The partners nodded. They knew that.

"Of course," said the Honorable John as they went downstairs, "you haven't the faintest idea where he went to?"

Her fine eyes narrowed slightly.

"Not the slightest," she said. "And although I like you very much,—you're *so* sympathetic, you know,—do you imagine for an instant that I should tell anybody if I did?"

They were all standing in the paraffin-scented hall at the foot of the stairs. The Honorable John looked at her carefully, and made a shot in the dark.

"Well, no, Doreen, my dear, I don't," he said deliberately. "But do *you* think

you're man enough to gouge that money out of him all by your little golden-headed self?"

Her eyes narrowed still more as she stared back at him, watchfully, appraisingly, summing him up, as he had already summed her.

There was a tense moment; then she relaxed, smiling.

"And I was innocent enough to think you were detectives!" she said. "Why, you're after the cattle-fair money yourselves!"

"Sure!" nodded John Brass amiably.

"Why not? Weren't you? We're about even, I think. At first we thought you were so fierce because Rainbird had left you, but it's the coin you don't like losing, not Rainbird. That's it, isn't it?"

DOREEN flushed a little, and gave a sigh of relief.

"Well, what do you think I've put in two months' housekeeping for that howling waster for? Certainly, it was the money. That's why I came back here unexpectedly today," she said boldly.

The Colonel broke in heavily.

"And if we stand here long enough, holding inquests on money that's gone, we'll be pinched ourselves," he said with that sour but practical good sense which distinguished him. "So, if you and Doreen here want to flirt, you'd better choose a safer place than this."

"Oh, sure. But if Doreen is coming in with us on the deal, we've got to make some sort of plan, haven't we?" replied John.

Doreen was more than willing. No woman likes to be deserted or "turned down," as the Colonel bluntly put it, and she was quite obviously yearning for revenge on the gentleman who, whether she wanted him or not, certainly did not appear to want her.

The trio went at once into a committee on ways and means, from which it took them not more than five minutes to emerge as a trio of sleuths sworn, as it were, to track down the peccant Rainbird and gouge from him the ill-gotten bales of greasy but valuable notes with which he had so successfully decamped.

It was Colonel Clumber who, prowling with his partner about Rainbird's office, while the brilliant Doreen was changing into something slightly less redolent of garage than her blue linen, discovered in the fireplace the torn label containing these words—on one side: *Mr. Gregory Dunne, Passenger to Parkstone, via Waterloo, L. S. W. R.*, and on the other side: *Mr. Gregory Dunne, Hawksnest, Harbourage Road, Parkstone.*

He passed it to John Brass with a grunt of satisfaction, and the latter was a pleased man.

"I never yet knew or heard of one of these deliberate crooks who didn't make one bloomer—and this sport has made two!" he said. "He forgot the kitten, and he forgot to burn this label. It's pretty clear that he left here by the last train last night as Roy Rainbird. In the train he changed the labels on his baggage to 'Gregory Dunne.' So it's Dunne who arrived at Parkstone probably first thing this morning, or maybe last night; and the remains of Rainbird—a few charred bones—would have been found in the ruins of the bank."

The Colonel nodded.

"Sure. And what we've got to do is to get hold of Dunne about as fast as wheels can get us to Parkstone. Where is it—Bournemouth way, aint it?"

"It is."

The Honorable John lighted a cigar with the air of a conqueror, as the Titian-haired Doreen came in, amazingly well turned out, and fully meriting the frank stares of admiration with which the partners favored her.

"Is that Rainbird's writing, my dear?" asked John, tendering the torn label. She glanced at it, flushing slightly.

"Why, yes. Where did you find that? In the fireplace?" She laughed—rather a hard, ominous laugh. "Why, that's probably the name he intends to go by. He's been too clever this time. What a fool not to burn that label! Why, all we've got to do is to go to Parkstone and—"

"Collect the money," said the Honorable John comfortably.

"And the sooner we start," concluded the Colonel, "the better."

SO they started—back to the Hawbuck Hotel, where tea and so forth was administered to the delightful Doreen—"so forth" including a couple of bottles of champagne designed to maintain the physical well-being of the partners as well as that of the lady.

"It's a longish run—and dusty," said the Honorable John, emptying his glass. "But I think that'll about put us right

for the trip. Well, son, ready?" This latter to the leather-clad Sing, who crossed the lawn as he spoke.

"Yes, master—allee same leddy."

They went out to the big, powerful car, Doreen between them, very vivacious, though still apt to snap when speaking of the vanished Rainbird.

It was half-past five precisely when they left Alperton West, and the clocks were chiming eight when they pulled up outside the best hotel in Bournemouth, dusty, dry, and desperate—so the Honorable John said—with hunger.

Doreen had a headache too. She said she was dizzy with pain, and that she would take two aspirin tablets, a cup of *bouillon,* and lie down for the half-hour it would take the partners to dine.

"The what!" said the Honorable John. "Why, my dear girl, you don't want to think we bolt our food. What's the hurry, anyway? We needn't worry about Dunne for an hour or so. He's probably taking it easy where he is, thinking himself quite safe. It will be a couple of hours at least before we need start out to Parkstone. So take all the rest you need, and when we think we ought to be moving along, we'll send up and let you know."

DOREEN smiled at him gratefully, and the Honorable John had her ushered with considerable ceremony to her room. They then sent Sing to procure a meal, ordering him to report back at ten; and having washed and ordered one or two slight but costly additions and alterations in the *table d'hôte* as served to them, devoted themselves for the next hour and a half to a leisurely meal.

"A very neat bit of work, I think, old man," said the Honorable John in tones of genuine satisfaction and simple pride, when, at half-past nine, he drained his liqueur glass. "This guy Rainbird, or Dunne, will part up with three-quarters of his loot like a little lamb rather than have the police in, and we'll be back in town by midday tomorrow." He glanced at the clock.

"Well, well, I suppose we'd better be waking Doreen," he continued, and beckoned a waiter.

"That's a very charming, attractive, stylish girl, Doreen," he said. "I'd like to see more of her. She's just my style —beautiful and practical. Got her head screwed on right, and very pretty hair. Very pretty tint that red kind of golden hair is—to my mind."

The waiter returned with a large envelope.

"From the lady for you, sir. The chambermaid had instructions that the lady was not to be disturbed, sir, but that when you sent up to her, you were to have this note, sir."

John took it, shaking his head.

"The poor girl's overdone it," he said, and this proved to be the case. Doreen had sent a hasty little scribble to say that she really was not "up" to tackling Rainbird that night, but hoped that they would do so without her. She knew she could trust them to see that her fair third of the plunder was set aside for her. She inclosed them a photograph of Rainbird so that they could recognize him. Also she informed them of several moles of which Mr. Rainbird was the proud possessor—so that, if he were disguised, they yet had a means of surely identifying him. She would thank them at breakfast in the morning, when she would be quite all right again.

The partners were not grieved. It all fitted in beautifully. They preferred it that way.

Women were uncertain, anyway—even beautiful, practical women like Doreen Delane.

"It's better this way, old man," said John. "She might have forgiven him at the last moment and made things awkward!"

"Sure," said the Colonel readily. "Sure!"

"All right, then. We do this on our own—quietly, neatly and scientifically—as it should be done," said the Honorable John.

HALF an hour later the car pulled up at Hawksnest. They alighted and went to the door. A middle-aged maid of severe aspect answered their ring, and in response to their request to see Mr. Gregory Dunne on urgent business, invited them into a sternly furnished hall.

She disappeared, returning a minute or so later with the information that Mr. Dunne would prefer to see them on the following morning unless their business was very pressing indeed.

"It *is* very pressing," said John.

"Come this way, then, sir, please."

They followed her, each quietly assuring

himself that his automatic pistol was at home—not necessarily for publication, but as a guarantee of good business.

"The two gentlemen to see you, sir," said the maid, ushering them into a study and closing the door on them.

A very tall, very lean, very narrow clergyman rose to receive them.

The Honorable John was so surprised that without speaking, he took out the photograph of Rainbird and compared it with the clergyman. Then he consulted his partner.

"Something wrong, Squire, eh?"

"Sure," said the Colonel sullenly.

"Yes, gentlemen?" inquired the Reverend Mr. Dunne, in tones of rigor.

"It looks as if we owe you an explanation," said the Honorable John. "We're detectives, and we're looking for a man called Rainbird, *alias* Dunne, and as I say, it looks as if we've got our money on the wrong pony. I suppose you're pretty well known about here, Mr. Dunne?"

THE austere one reflected.

"If you would care to have the assurance of the local police authorities that I have labored in this parish incessantly for the last thirty years, I shall be glad to walk round to the local police station with you and procure you the assurance personally," said the clergyman.

But the partners thought not.

"That will not be necessary, I think," said the Honorable John. "The man we want is of average height, about thirty years old, and is a bit moley. You are a good six foot three; you're over thirty—"

"Sixty-two, to be precise."

"Sure. And you don't wear an eighth-inch mole behind your left ear, and a three-quarter inch one just under your collar?"

"I do not. And now, as you probably wish to apologize for your intrusion and hurry away, I will take the apology as made and show you out myself. My parlormaid was on the point of retiring for the night."

Unusually silent, the partners followed him. The door closed quietly behind them, and they headed for the car.

"Back to the hotel, Sing, and quick, you yellow scoundrel!" snapped the Honorable John.

They sent up a most urgent note to the fair Doreen, with unmistakable instructions that she must be roused. The most enthusiastic knockings upon her door, however, failed to obtain a response, and presently the door was unlocked by the manager's key.

The room was unoccupied, but on the dressing-table lay a note addressed to the Honorable John in the name of Robertson—the name he was using that day.

He flashed through it as through a telegram, then put it in his pocket.

"It's all right," he said. "She's gone home by train. She forgot something."

The little crowd dispersed, and the Honorable John and his partner adjourned sullenly to the smoking-room.

"She's a she-cat from Catville, that ginger-headed dame is," said Mr. Brass sourly, passing the note to the Colonel.

The Colonel read it in silence. It ran:

> When you two fat men knocked at the bank door, I nearly fainted. Roy and I had everything ready except for packing up the money. But I soon saw that you were easy. You put me to a lot of trouble, but I managed to keep you quiet while Roy packed the money—in my room. What made you jump to the conclusion that Roy had gone the previous night? Was it because *I* said so? You oughtn't to believe everything a woman tells you—if you don't believe me, get married and learn by experience. Thanks for the motor run. I hope you got on well with old Dunne. He was parson at Parkstone last year when I was down there—funny his name should come into my head when I wrote that label for you to find in the grate, wasn't it?
>
> Roy sends you his love, and so do I.
>
> DOREEN
>
> P. S.—If I were you, I'd pass through Alperton West on your way home. Take a look at the bank as you go through.

The Colonel handed the note back without comment.

"Skinned! She skinned us like a brace of innocent little rabbits!" said John intensely.

"She did. And that's what you call a hunch!" snarled the Colonel. "We'll never connect with that cattle-fair coin in this world. Roy's probably spending it somewhere hundreds of miles away by now!"

"Yes—and Doreen is on the way to help him!" added John. "We'll certainly pass through Alperton tomorrow, though."

They did. It was much as usual, they observed, with the exception that the bank was burnt to the ground.

"Well, well," said Mr. Brass, as the car slid out of the town, "she was sure some housekeeper, Doreen was."

It was his only comment. But the Colonel was far too disgusted to reply.

Witchcraft

"The oldest magic in the world" works through the newest in this unusual story of love and wireless, by the gifted author of "The Greater Crime"

By Frank Parker Stockbridge

BEFORE the war everybody thought Pete Laing was going to marry Ann Waterhouse, and that I was going to marry Hilda Nelson. Well, I did, but Pete didn't; and the reason was that girl he met up on the Island of Westray.

We didn't know that at first. I had a sort of suspicion of it, when Pete didn't go round to see Ann until we'd been home all of three days; and I kidded him about it later, seeing how easily he took the news that Ollie Thomas, who never got any nearer to Scapa Flow than Pelham Bay Training Station, had cut him out with her. Ollie was about the first "hero" from our town to get back; Ann saw him first, and that settled Ollie.

We were back in our old rooms, Pete and I, with everything the same as it was before we went across, except a lot of souvenirs we'd picked up and strung around the walls and such places; but I wasn't around much, except to change my clothes and sleep. Between trying to pick up all the loose ends of my old job, and wondering whether the directors would stand for a raise if they were properly approached, and helping Hilda hunt for a flat or a bungalow or something we could live in, to say nothing of all the fussing a fellow has to do when he's going to be married in six weeks, I didn't see much of Pete those first few weeks after we got back, unless he happened to get up in time to eat breakfast with me.

Pete didn't have anything to worry him, that I could see. The potteries his father had left him—you know, this art stuff—Ravensfield they call it—well, Pete owned that, and does yet, and it brought him enough to keep up the *Esmeralda* and a sporting car and a few other things, and leisure enough to enjoy them. So when he didn't put the *Esmeralda* into commission, and never took a girl out in his car, and stuck around the flat all the evening mooning about something or other, I figured at first he must have been pretty hard hit about Ann and Ollie.

Then I remembered he hadn't gone to see Ann for three days after we got back.

"Listen, Pete," I said to him one morning at breakfast, "for heaven's sake, buck up, as they say in dear ol' Lunnon. You're a disgrace to your friends, the way you're keeping yourself hid from the world. Show yourself around town a bit and give the ladies a treat."

"To perdition with the ladies," Pete said, only he said it snappier than that. "They're all alike. Is the mail in yet?"

WE'D been home about three weeks then, and every morning it was just like that; Pete grabbed for the mail the minute Tony, our Filipino boy, brought it in, looked over the outsides of the envelopes, and threw them away. Tony would gather them up later and put them on Pete's desk. This morning the mail was late.

"Don't be so downhearted, Pete," I advised him. "All Ann needs is a little encouragement to throw Ollie into the ash-can."

"Ann can have him, for all of me," Pete answered, and just then Tony brought in the mail. There was a letter for Pete with an English stamp on it, addressed in a woman's handwriting, and I noticed it had a Kirkwall postmark. Pete grabbed for that and threw all the rest away. For a minute he looked more like himself than he had for a fortnight; but when he opened the letter and looked at it, it wasn't anything but a receipted bill from the conscientious landlady of that "pub" down near the foot of the High Street in Kirkwall. If you were over in Scapa Flow with the Grand Fleet, you'll remember it. Pete had a score there, and the day we pulled our mudhooks up and hoisted the homeward-bound pennant, he'd given the sergeant of a shore-going party of marines a five-pound note to pay the bill with. It came to three pounds ten, according to the landlady's receipt.

"Guess the qualified marine lost the change, shooting craps," said Pete. "Anyway, he was honest. He paid the bill."

Then he slumped back again into the same old grouch.

"I suppose you've been writing to her regularly," I remarked.

"Who?" snapped Pete. "What are you talking about?"

"The girl you've been expecting a letter from." I passed it right back to him. "How should I know her name?"

"I didn't know but what you might," he said in a sarcastic way, and I thought it time to change the subject.

I was only kidding Pete, anyway, because he had never been much of a fellow to mix up with the girls on shore-leave. But all that day, whenever I wasn't trying to figure out how to put more pep into our sales-force and wondering why Hilda hadn't called me up, and trying to decide whether to go to the Country Club for dinner or take Hilda round to my sister Nell's, I kept thinking about Pete and trying to remember if there was any particular girl. Then it came to me that it must be that girl we heard singing in the old stone castle up on Westray. But I didn't think Pete had got that far with her.

I HADN'T paid very much attention to her myself—not but what she was a nice enough girl, and she sure could sing; but personally I like 'em rather tall and round, like Hilda. Perhaps that's got something to do with the law of averages, since I'm only five foot six myself. I guess there must be something in that, the way all the ponies take such a shine to Pete, who's over six feet and as big as a house; he likes 'em little, too. And this girl was a little thing, all right. I don't believe she weighed an ounce over ninety pounds. Where she kept that voice of hers I don't know.

We heard her singing in this old castle one night about sunset, along around half-past nine or so. They have long days up there in the Orkneys, in summer—sun comes up about three in the morning and goes down around ten at night, and the rest of the night's just a sort of twilight, bright enough to read a newspaper all night.

The way we happened to be up there, Pete wanted to see if he could find any Laings on Westray. It seems his people came from there, a few hundred years ago or so. We weren't supposed to get any extended shore-leave, but Pete was a kind of favorite with Uncle Hugh Rodman, and he managed it some way, I never knew just how, to get away for two weeks and for me to go with him. I didn't have any missing relations up there that I knew of, though you can find Smiths almost anywhere you want to look for them; but if

Pete asked me to go to the North Pole with him, all the objection I'd make would be to say, "When do we start?" He's that sort of fellow. Besides, anything to break up the monotony of watch duty was a relief.

We sailed straight north from Kirkwall, in a fishing schooner that Pete had pretty nearly to buy before he could get the captain to start out. I found out, on that trip, why Pete's the best yachtsman on the Lakes. I've seen him take the *Esmeralda* through weather that drove the big ore-freighters behind the breakwaters, and think nothing of it. It's his Orkney blood, I know now. Of all the waters where you've got to watch your step, Westray Firth is the worst I've ever seen; but those Orkney fishermen sure did know how to navigate it. Once we were caught in a tide-rip that whirled us around like a cork in a millrace, and we just missed one of the big skerries—rocks that stick up out of water like a church-steeple; but we landed at last at a little place that didn't seem to have any name, only a dozen stone houses, on Westray Island.

WELL, Pete found his Laings all right. There were a couple of families of them still living on the island, and they showed him where to go to dig up the old parish records and the inscriptions on the tombstones, and he got a notebook full of that stuff. Nice people, they were—farmers; and they put us up at their home and gave us some of the best home-brew you ever drank. There was a fine girl there too, Kate Laing her name was—a big good-looker who'd make a hit on Fifth Avenue if she were dressed up right.

They couldn't any of them go round with us much, because it was right in the middle of their farming season and they were awfully short of men. All the young men had gone into the British Navy, and the old men and the women-folk had to do the best they could. But in the evenings, after the day's work was done, we'd sit around in the sun to keep warm, and old Mr. Laing and Kate would tell us interesting things about the island and the people and the old times when the first folks that lived there—they were called the Picts—fought with the Scotch, and then the Norsemen fought the Picts and drove them out. All over the island, they said, you could find places where these old Picts had lived. Some of them were sort of caves they dug out for houses; they call them *weems*. Then there were stones set up on end in circles, that used to be their churches or whatever you would call them before they knew anything about churches. They had a queer sort of writing made by cutting dots and lines in the edges of these stones, and old Mr. Laing had figured some of that out, and he would tell us what it meant in the old Gaelic.

I can't explain it very well, but somehow it made you feel as if you were living way back before anything happened, to hear these stories and legends of the old days, and sit there with your back against a stone wall in the midnight twilight and hear the sea, twenty miles away to the west, pounding on the rocks with all the Atlantic Ocean back of every wave. One night when there was a full gale blowing, the spray carried all the way across the island and drove us into the house.

Pete and I went around the island together and saw a lot of these old places. He was crazy about them. According to the old man, the Laings had been there from the beginning, so they must have come right down from those old Picts; and Pete was one of them. There was a lot of Scotch mixed in, of course, and one night when old Mr. Laing told us about the castle that was built on Westray three or four hundred years ago for Mary Queen of Scots to live in if she could manage to escape from Scotland, Pete said he'd have to see that, sure, before he left. So the next day we started out to walk over there.

We came in sight of the castle about sunset, as I said. It is mostly all ruins now; Mr. Laing said it never was finished, because the English caught Queen Mary and cut her head off, and there wasn't any use going on with the place after that. But part of it seemed to have a roof on it, and when we got up closer, I thought I heard something like music coming out of it. Pete heard it too, and we stopped to listen.

It didn't sound like a voice, at first, but more like some of the notes on a pipe-organ. Of course, it was still light, but it gave a fellow a sort of spooky feeling to hear a sound like that. We went on and around to the front door, or where the front door should have been, and looked in. There was a girl, standing on a big rock, singing!

There was no one else in the place. It was all one big room, fifty or sixty feet long, or maybe longer, and nearly as wide, with stone walls and a stone roof that must have been twenty feet high. The girl wasn't singing any tune, that I could make out, but just one note after another, long-drawn-out, like. From where we stood, the sound seemed to be echoed back from the walls and roof, so the whole place was ful of music and the effect was something so big and grand it made you feel sort of religious.

The girl was standing on a rock, with her head thrown back, and both arms stretched out the way Maude Adams does when she asks you to believe in fairies. She had on a long cape with a hood to it, like the women wear up there in those islands, but the hood was hanging down her back, and there was a ray of sunlight that came through one of the window-spaces and fell on her hair, and it looked exactly like gold.

I LOOKED at Pete, and he was standing there with a look on his face such as I had never seen before. I can't describe it, but it was as if he were looking at something that was a long way off, where nobody else could see it but him, and he was afraid it would vanish if he moved.

The girl did not see us at first. Then she stopped for a minute and discovered she had an audience. I don't think she ever saw me at all, but she certainly did see Pete. He was standing there with his hat off and that far-away look on his face, and when she looked at him, she gave a sort of start, and then her face took on the same sort of expression. Pete took a step or two forward, and as he did, she stepped down off the stone she had been standing on and came toward him.

Both of them steadied up as they approached each other, and Pete said quite calmly:

"What wonderful acoustics this old hall has!"

"It rings like an organ, doesn't it?" the girl responded, and I noticed that she didn't talk like the island folks at all, but more like an Englishwoman, with a bit of a Scotch burr to the *r's*.

Well, we talked a little about the old castle—the girl knew a lot of details about its history; at least, she and Pete talked, while I pretended to be interested in the construction of the front doorway, and then she said suddenly:

"Shall I sing for you again?"

"I have been wanting to ask you to," replied Pete.

She climbed up on the stone again, but this time it was not organ-notes we heard. I don't know enough about music to describe it, but the song she sang didn't sound to me like anything that ever came out of a human mouth. I couldn't understand a word,—it was in some foreign language,—but somehow it made me think of things coming up out of the ground in spring, and waters running in brooks under the ice, and there was something about it that made me think of those old Picts that lived underground. I felt as if they were coming up out of their *weems* and dancing around in a circle, like fairies. That may sound foolish, but all the time the girl was singing, I wouldn't have been surprised to see a million little people making rings around us there. There didn't seem to be any distinct notes to this song, either. You couldn't tell where one tone left off and the next began, like when you run your finger up the string of a violin. It went up and down in a curious sort of cadence, and there were echoes from the stone ceiling that made a kind of accompaniment for the song.

I never had anything get me like that, and Pete got it the same way, only harder. She didn't take her eyes off Pete all the time she sang. We stood still without a word for a long time after the girl stopped singing. Then she smiled and held out her hand to Pete to help her down. He took her hand in his and stood there, holding it.

"That was wonderful!" he said.

"I'm so glad you liked it," she replied. Then she let go of his hand, brushed past us both and ran down the old hall to the doorway as fast as she could go.

WE hurried in that general direction and looked about as soon as we were outside, but the girl had vanished completely. Whether she had hidden somewhere among the ruins, or what had happened to her, neither Pete nor I could guess. We didn't stop to hunt for her, but started back to the Laings'.

I stepped on a loose stone and wrenched my ankle pretty badly on the way back, and Pete had to help me along, so everyone had turned in by the time we reached

the house. They don't lock any doors on Westray, however, so we got in without disturbing the family. I dreamed all night about fairy rings; but Pete, from the looks of him when we got up, didn't sleep long enough to dream about anything. Kate Laing got us some breakfast, though it was the middle of the forenoon, and old Mr. Laing came in from the field to talk with us, as usual.

I told them about the girl we heard singing in the castle, without trying to describe the song. Pete said nothing, which was unusual for him. Kate and her father looked at each other when I described the girl.

"It's the Fay!" Kate exclaimed.

"The Noltland Fay," the old man explained, "is one of the modern superstitions of Westray. They say she first appeared and sang in the great hall of Noltland Castle the night Queen Mary was beheaded. Some say she is the daughter of Nectan, the last king of the Picts, and lord of these isles. The Picts drove the Scots out of the Orkneys; and Nectan's daughter, those who believe in the legend say, comes back whenever there is danger from the Scots, to call the Picts from underground."

"Since we're all more than nine-tenths Scottish, that's utter foolishness, of course," laughed Kate, "but naturally the first thing I thought of was the Fay."

"This one is real flesh and blood, I can assure you," said Pete. "I know, for I touched her."

I thought "touch" was a mild word for the occasion, but decided not to try to kid Pete just then, and we went on to talk about the ruins and other things we had seen on our jaunt.

My ankle was too tender for walking, and Pete said he had some other things to look up around the island, so he went out alone after dinner. That evening, before he returned, the fisherman who had brought us up came to the house to say that he had his cargo aboard for Kirkwall and must sail on the high tide, which would be about six in the morning. If we didn't go along with him, there was no telling when we'd get another chance to return to the ship, and even Pete's pull with Uncle Hugh, if he had any, wouldn't save us from punishment if we overstayed our leave. We had planned to remain on Westray at least a week longer.

I broke the news to Pete when he got in. He didn't say anything, but went outside again, and I could hear him tramping up and down like he does when he's trying to study something out. Then he came in and got some paper out of his bag and went out again, and I could hear his pen scratching under the window of our room. In the morning he took Kate to one side, and I saw him give her something that looked like a letter. Then we went down to the harbor and got aboard and had a quick trip back to Kirkwall. And we had hardly got back before the war was over and we were ordered home.

WELL, I thought of all of the girls I knew of that Pete had ever met, and the more I thought, the more it seemed that this girl in the castle, the Noltland Fay, must be the one, if there really was a girl that Pete expected to hear from. And the way he acted about the mail certainly made it look that way.

I took Hilda to Nell's for dinner that night. On the way I told her how worried I was about Pete, and why. I had to tell her all about our trip to Westray, and the girl in the castle, and all. Of course, I had written her about it, but some way I hadn't mentioned Kate Laing, and Hilda took me up on that right off the bat. We pretty nearly had a lovers' quarrel, but after a while Hilda calmed down and said Kate must be a nice girl, and she would like to meet her sometime; but she acted as if she was glad the Atlantic Ocean lay between us. After that was all over, Hilda said she was sure I must be right, so I knew I was.

Pete was sitting at the piano, poking at the keys with one finger, when I got back to the flat. That surprised me, for Pete has less music in him than I have, and that's not much. We keep a piano for the other fellows that come in sometimes. But here was Pete, picking out some sort of a tune. At least, it wasn't a tune, but just a lot of notes strung together, and somehow it reminded me of the song the girl had sung in the castle.

"If you're so crazy about her, why don't you write to her?" I asked.

Pete hadn't heard me come in, and he whirled on his stool as I spoke, and said the first thing that came into his head, I suppose.

"I don't know her name," was what he said.

Somehow the humor of the situation, a fellow like Pete being crazy in love with a girl whose name he didn't know, was the first thing that struck me, and I began to laugh. It pretty nearly broke up our friendship, Pete got so mad at me. But he cooled down after a while and began to talk. Pete's a secretive sort about personal affairs, and I never try to pry into things, but this night he just had to talk to some one, and as I was the nearest he talked to me.

It seems that the evening he went out alone up there on Westray he had met the girl again. Something—Pete said it was like a magnet—had drawn those two together. It had been love at first sight for both of them. I gathered, though Pete didn't say so exactly, that on that second night she had sung for him again and had run away again, but not until after he had held her in his arms and promised to meet her in the old castle again the next night.

The letter he had given Kate was for the girl, as I suspected. He didn't know her name, nor she his. All he could think of to do was to write her a letter explaining that the call of honor was even more powerful than the call of love. "I'm sure she's the sort that would understand that," Pete said, in telling me—and giving her his name and his home address as well as the name of our ship. He had addressed this to "The Noltland Fay," and Kate had promised to take it over to the castle and either give it to the girl or, if she didn't see her, to leave the letter on top of the stone the girl stood on when she sang. That had been more than ten months back, and he hadn't heard a word.

"They're all alike," Pete said cynically, after he had finished telling me about it all.

I suggested that perhaps she had never got his letter, but Pete wouldn't listen to that, and I had to admit that Kate was the sort that would have gone through with anything she promised to do.

NEXT morning Pete was a bit ashamed of his confession to me the night before. He made me promise I wouldn't tell anyone about it, and of course I promised. I didn't tell him I had already told Hilda; that didn't seem to be necessary. But as early as I could get around to it, I wrote a letter to Kate Laing, telling her that Pete had told me about the letter to the Noltland Fay, and asking her if she had succeeded in delivering it. I showed that letter to Hilda, and Hilda added a little postscript of her own and mailed it herself.

Well, Pete bucked up after a while and got the *Esmeralda* into commission and started in winning regattas in his old style, and Hilda and I were married according to schedule, and in the course of time along came a letter from Kate Laing. I showed that to Hilda too.

"Dear Mr. Smith," it said. "I am writing Cousin Peter"—the Laings of Westray called him that from the first day we were there—"to tell him the misadventure that befell his missive intrusted to me for delivery. I failed to find the person to whom it was addressed and left it in accordance with instructions. Upon receipt of your communication, I journeyed again to Noltland Castle and discovered that the missive had been blown away from the place where I had deposited it and had lodged between two stones, where it evidently had lain for months. Doubtless it escaped the notice of the person to whom it was addressed, and I have forwarded it, with the seal unbroken, to Cousin Peter.

"With great respect and good wishes for your matrimonial venture, I am—

Yours truly—Katherine Laing."

I thought that was a perfectly all-right letter, though I hadn't said anything about matrimony in my letter to Kate; that must have been in Hilda's postscript. At any rate, Hilda went up in the air when she read it.

"The woman who wrote that was boiling mad when she wrote it," she declared, though I don't for the life of me see how she could tell that. "There must have been more between you and this—this Kate Laing—than you have told me, William."

AS Hilda calls me "Bill" except when she's angry, I knew the symptoms and invented a business reason for going out. I went right over to the old flat, which Pete still kept up. He had had a letter, too, from Kate; I could see that by his looks. His whole expression was changed. He had been going around for weeks and weeks with a look on his face that told everybody that he had lost faith in human nature, and especially in feminine nature. Now he was something like the old Pete again, but he was terribly distressed about something, and I had come along just in

time to give him a chance to get it off his chest.

He told me about the letter he had got from Kate. Evidently she had not mentioned my writing, and I felt rather glad of that.

"What must she think of me?" he demanded.

"Who—Kate?" I asked.

"No—the other—the girl—the Fay," he replied. Kate tells me she has left the island, together with the people with whom she was stopping, who were strangers there, and no one has their address."

I wondered a little why Kate hadn't told me this too, but that was all right, anyway. She didn't have to tell me anything I hadn't asked about.

"They knew her, the neighbors around the farm where she was living, only as 'Lady Jean,'" Pete went on. Something else Kate hadn't told me.

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

"What can I do?" he countered. "She probably thinks me a scoundrel, and wouldn't speak to me if I found her. And how on earth to go about finding her is something I wish you'd tell me."

"Why not go over there?" I suggested.

"That's a bright idea," said Pete. "I think I'll do it."

HE went away the next week, and was gone three months. He called me up when he got back. Hilda answered the phone.

"Oh, Pete, I'm so glad to hear your voice again," she said. "Did you find her? Come over and tell us all about it."

I don't know what Pete said, but he came over anyway, quite provoked at me for telling Hilda about his affairs. But my sister Nell dropped in, and as she can wear a number-two shoe and is a wise and seasoned little matron into the bargain, she backed Pete into a corner and wormed the whole story out of him.

It was simple enough. He had gone to Westray and drawn a perfect blank. The name of the people with whom "Lady Jean" had been stopping was, strangely enough, Smith. If I had been looking up ancestors as well as Pete, we'd have found them, sure, and Pete would have met the girl in the regular way and probably would have been happily married by this time. Anyway, the people were entire strangers to Westray. The three of them had come there—Mr. and Mrs. Smith and the girl—and rented a cottage for the summer. They paid their debts, lived to themselves, and then went away, and that was all that anyone on Westray knew about them.

Well, that seemed to settle it, but I noticed that Pete didn't show any more interest in other girls than he had before. I noticed it, that is, when I happened to see him, which wasn't very often. Somehow a fellow never realizes before he gets married how much of a man's time his domestic duties take up.

I heard that Pete had bought a violin. That made me laugh, but I laughed harder when I heard that he found his hands were so big he couldn't play it, and had smashed it over the back of a chair one night. Then he bought a 'cello, and one night when Hilda had gone down the State to visit her mother and taken the baby with her, I dropped in at the old flat and found him fiddling with the thing.

"I didn't know you could play anything, Pete, as long as I've known you," I said.

"I can't," he replied, "but there's one thing I'm trying to learn to play. You remember that song—the one where all the Picts and fairies came out of the ground and the water ran down under the ice?"

"Did you hear all that in it, too?" I asked, though I ought not to have been surprised.

"Yes—and she sang it for me again the next night," he said.

WELL, he got part of it pretty well. It couldn't be done, I suppose, on anything but a violin or 'cello, unless it was a slide trombone, and there was a lot of it that he couldn't get at all, but I give you my word that just hearing him play the parts he did get gave me that same feeling of growing things coming up out of the ground and the tinkle of a spring brook. It was amazing.

Next thing I heard, Pete was studying Gaelic and the history of the Picts, with old Magnus Traill, who used to be a professor of some sort at the State university until he retired on a Carnegie pension. Old Traill was an Orcadian himself, it turned out. I met Pete at the club one day, and we had luncheon together. He told me he was learning to read those funny inscriptions on the rocks that looked like the marks on some gigantic yardstick. Couldn't keep his mind away from the Orkneys and the girl. He'd em-

ployed a detective agency, he told me, and they had spent twenty-five thousand of his dollars without getting a clew.

"People can't just vanish that way," Pete insisted. "I'm going to find her, if she is still on earth."

"It's a sort of a sporting proposition with you now," I suggested.

"Not that so much, as the apology I owe her," he answered. "I don't suppose she'll accept it, but I can't have any peace of mind until I offer it to her."

Somehow I didn't see much of Pete for the next year or so, and by that time I had become what you might call a settled married man. Once in a while I could drag Pete over to the house for dinner, but with all the care Hilda has to give the youngsters, and good servants so hard to get, we really couldn't do much entertaining—only our own families, you know. So Pete came seldom and left early as a rule, and I wondered whether he was still pining over the girl of the castle or whether he had forgotten her. He didn't seem to be taking notice of anyone else, at any rate.

AFTER we put in our radio set more people began to drop in, for a while. It was quite the finest receiving set in town. Hilda had insisted that if we were going to have any, it must be the best, so I blew a month's salary on an apparatus that filled one side of the living-room comfortably, and it was really wonderful what you could pick up with it.

Pete asked me if I hadn't had enough radio in the Navy, and didn't seem much interested when I told him about the thing, but I urged him to come over some evening and see for himself, and one Monday night he dropped in.

We listened to the regular program from KYW—that's Chicago—and KDKA, which is Pittsburgh; and Pete seemed to enjoy it all right, though there wasn't anything worth while on that evening. Then he asked me how far the thing would pick up signals.

"No limit," I told him. "Let's try some of the longer waves."

I turned the dial around to "1250," and listened for results. It was ten o'clock by our time; that meant eight o'clock in San Francisco.

"We ought to get something from there about now," I said and as I spoke, I heard the "Stand by" from 6XG. The regular evening concert was beginning.

It was surprising how clearly it came through; but as I have said, our receiving set is the best in town. There was the usual sort of a program, with instrumental music and some vocal, and then the speaker introduced some one whose name I couldn't catch, but within ten seconds I knew who she was, all right.

"Pete, here's your girl!" I called, and motioned for him to put on a headpiece, quick. He'd taken it off to listen to Hilda, who was telling him about the funny thing the baby did at supper.

Pete didn't seem to get me at first. I called to him again.

"Listen in here! Your girl's singing!" I cried.

HE smiled in an incredulous sort of way, but put on the headpiece and listened. It was the same song she had sung for us in the old castle, with those queer modulations that didn't seem to belong to any musical scale, but that seemed to sweep across all the strings of your heart and pull the soul right out of your body.

Pete looked just as he had that night in the castle. He gripped the edge of his chair so tight with both hands that his knuckles were white, and he stared at the tuning-dial as if he could see right through the machine and across the world to where the girl was singing. I watched him for a minute, and then I got a bright idea. I went to the telephone and put in a call for San Francisco. Then I called up the general manager of the telephone company, whom I happened to know, and asked him to see if he could accelerate the service for me.

Pete was pale and trembling when, the song finished, he took the receivers from his ears. I think he had long ago given up hope of ever seeing the girl again, and now that he had heard her voice and realized that she was within reach, his courage began to ooze out. At any rate, he seemed perfectly undecided what to do.

Hilda had gone upstairs to look after the baby, and I tried to tell Pete that the only thing for him to do was to take the next train to San Francisco.

"I'm afraid, Bill," he admitted at last. "I'd almost rather carry the memory of her, as I last saw her, to my grave than to risk losing even that by facing her contempt."

"Listen, Pete," I urged. "If she isn't the sort that will listen to reason, the

sooner you get her picture out of your heart the better. Go on and see her—show her that letter she never got—tell her you love her and see how quick she'll forgive you."

THE telephone rang just then. "Ready with San Francisco!" said the long-distance operator. I got the San Francisco manager in person and asked him to rush through a connection to the broadcasting studio at station 6XG. In a few moments I had the studio on the wire.

"I want to speak to the lady who has just been singing," I said. "I couldn't catch her name, but I heard her song."

"Who shall I tell her?" asked the person speaking.

"Tell her it's an old friend from the Orkney Islands," I replied, and passed the phone to Pete. He was trembling so he could hardly hold the receiver in his hand.

Silence for a minute, and then I could faintly hear the echo of a feminine voice in the receiver at Pete's ear.

"You sang for me in Noltland castle nearly four years ago, the same song you sang tonight," said Pete.

This time I heard plainly what she said in reply. You know how, sometimes, when conditions are just right, an ordinary telephone will carry away out into the room? This was one of those times.

"Oh, my dear! My dear! I have looked for you so long!" was what it sounded like.

Apologies from Pete? I should say not!

"How soon can I get to San Francisco, Bill?" he called to me, holding his hand over the transmitter.

"You can catch the Limited going West at eleven-thirty; that'll land you in Chicago tomorrow morning," I said. "If you want to pick up a plane at Checkerboard Field there, you can overtake the Overland at Omaha." Pete nodded assent. "Tell her you'll take her to dinner at the St. Francis on Thursday evening."

He passed the invitation along, and it apparently was accepted.

"But how am I going to find you?" he asked as an afterthought. "I don't even know your name."

I heard a tinkling laugh over the telephone, followed by:

"I'll meet you at the St. Francis restaurant."

"But wont you tell me—" Pete began. Then there was a click. He wiggled the hook vigorously.

"You cut me off, Central!" he exclaimed.

"Beg pardon, but the party has hung up," came the reply. . . . .

"It's magic, isn't it?" said Pete, as we drove down to the station.

"She certainly put a charm on you," I agreed. "Perhaps she is King Nectan's daughter, after all."

"That's right—I don't know her name yet, do I?" laughed Pete as the Limited pulled in. "Never mind—I know what it's going to be."

He wrung my hand in a way that felt like old times again, and I stood there and watched the train out of sight, thinking what a wonderful thing it all was, before I turned away and went home.

THEY came back a couple of weeks later, Pete and the girl. She was Mrs. Laing now. It turned out that her name really was Lady Jean—Lady Jean MacPherson she was. The doctors had sent her up to the Orkneys with her uncle and aunt for a long rest because she had nearly killed herself singing for the boys behind the British front in Flanders. Then when the war was over, and people in England and Scotland could count up their losses, they found there wasn't enough left to go on with, and so she decided to make her voice earn the rest.

The song she had sung for us was one of her own. She had put the story of the old Picts to music, and her uncle had done the words into the Gaelic.

She told us this up at the old flat—oh, yes, they're living right there—and here's the rest of her story: She had gone to Australia first and then come to the States for a concert tour. Some one told her about the new craze for radio broadcasting and she volunteered to sing for 6XG.

"I wasn't singing to anybody in the whole wide world but you, Peter," she said, snuggling up close to him as if she was afraid she was going to lose him again, and smiling over at me. "I knew if you ever heard me sing that song, you'd come to me."

"You're a witch; that's what you are," replied Pete. "You're an uncanny little Pict, and you're full of magic."

"It's the oldest magic in the world, Peter dear," she replied. "The oldest magic working through the newest. Even King Nectan's daughter couldn't call her lover to her through the air across half a continent, could she?"

Two Long and Three Short

A tense little drama that takes place high in the Colorado mountains—a story of unusual plot, skillfully handled.

By Joe Mills

AT the crest of the Continental Divide, Bill Hardy paused. His plans had carried through. He had made good his escape from the road-camp, and he was certain that no one knew the direction he had gone. "Old Sam Kerrigan is a mighty knowing fellow," he exulted to himself, "but I've got him fooled this time. They'll be hunting for me down there." And he nodded toward the smoke-smudges upon the horizon. He chuckled with satisfaction.

For a long time Bill Hardy sat on the crag that guarded the pass over the Divide. He patted his pocket to make sure that he had the map he had taken from the little low ranger's cabin that stood guard in the pass. "I can go the way I want now," he mused. "But over here,"—and he nodded toward the west,—"there's mountains for a hundred miles." He took the map from his pocket and spread it upon the smooth surface of a rock. Then he bent over it and began tracing a route, pausing with sighs of satisfaction whenever he found ranger-stations marked on the map.

Bill Hardy had gone to the road-camp three months before making his escape. He had gone there upon his honor—but what did that matter? They had framed him and sent him up for seven years for something he had not done; so he had little regard for the pledge he had given to old Sam Kerrigan. He had said, upon his honor, that he would not escape. He had told old Sam that, face to face—and Sam had believed him. But now he was free, free!

He stared blankly toward the distant peaks, and his mood changed.

FOR three months Bill had been working with the other convicts of the road-camp. He had done good work—but with an ulterior motive. His watchfulness had been rewarded one day in August, and he had been sent to carry mail to the National Park ranger stationed at the top of the Divide above timber-line.

The National Park ranger was putting in the summer as a fire lookout; and day and night he stuck to his post beside the little cabin that had been built in the pass that overlooked a world of mountains to the westward. With his glasses he could

discern definitely the distant smoke of a forest-fire and mark its exact location upon the big map he had tacked upon the wall of the cabin. By means of the telephone he could direct men who set out to fight the fire.

"How good is the map?" Bill had inquired of the ranger.

"It's drawn to scale," the ranger proudly informed him.

"How many ranger-stations over there?" Bill waved his hand westward.

"Four," the ranger informed him, and he pointed out their locations on the map—putting his finger upon each in turn, and tracing the dotted line that marked the trail connecting them.

"Keep any supplies in the cabins?" Bill demanded after they had talked aimlessly for a few minutes.

"Yes, in summer we stock them up for emergency. But in winter we don't leave much—just a few odds and ends that freezing wont hurt; and sometimes we make a little cache under the floor."

The ranger was glad to have company, and he took pride in explaining the details of his job. Very deftly Bill steered the conversation along the line that would yield the greatest amount of information regarding the region—its trails and how long the rangers stuck to their posts in the fall.

"Leave anything here?" Bill made the inquiry in casual tones.

"Not much," the ranger advised; "too cold up here."

"What about the map?" Bill glanced at it eagerly.

"It stays here," the ranger continued. "You see, it's marked especially for use from this lookout station. I've shaded it in with different colors, so that a stranger can spot the likely places for fires, and locate the regions where trappers set their lines. When a new fire-guard comes up here next summer, he'll be tickled to have this big map."

BILL had visited the ranger cabin at the crest of the Divide late in August. A month later the station stood deserted. A snow had fallen over the region and ended all menace of fire until the next summer. Other snows had followed, and drifts were forming below timber-line. Above timber-line the wind swept the ridge-tops bare and piled the snow beneath the sheltering trees far below.

The vast world of mountains lying west of the Divide was deserted save for lonely trappers. These trappers in the wilds would make safe company for Bill Hardy. They would have supplies too—a very important matter. When the trappers went into the remote regions in the fall, they took their winter's supplies, and did not return to civilization until the spring thaw came. They were lost to the world. They met whatever emergencies arose; or failing, their winter's catch never reached the market.

The series of storms had left a white world behind them. Only the forests of spruce broke the deadly white monotony. North and south and west rose tier upon tier of mountains. And topping all were the higher peaks. The world was a maze of mountains. Over all lay the snow; and beneath the snow the streams rested dormant. Trails were covered, the region deserted.

Bill Hardy was joyful. He had planned his escape to the smallest detail. And he had craftily carried out his plans.

"Reason the other fellows always get caught," he reflected, "is they hit for some town where there's a girl they know. Then it's good night and good-by for them. Back to Cañon City—and hard labor—they go for the rest of their terms. But I'm going to fool 'em all—Sam along with the rest. I'll put in the winter over here." And he nodded toward the distant peaks. "By spring I'll have whiskers as long as old Methuselah himself. I'll get in with some old trapper and stage my comeback to civilization without any band to announce it. May be a bit lonesome." He paused and looked long at the snowy mountains. "But it will be a heap better than seven years."

THE escape of Bill Hardy had been neatly executed. One evening after supper, and roll-call, he had walked boldly out of camp and slipped silently into the darkness down the cañon. This gave him twelve hours' start, for they would not miss him until breakfast-time next morning. He took no pains to hide his trail, which led straight down the cañon toward civilization.

Two miles down the road Bill turned abruptly aside and scaled the cañon wall. Here he left no trail. Upon the smooth dry rocks there would be little scent for the pursuing dogs. Above the cañon wall he

struck a bare, bleak ridge that jutted out from the Continental Divide. Here the wind ripped and tore continually. He crossed a snow-patch, and the wind immediately filled in his tracks.

"Old Sam wont give me credit for this much sense; he'll hunt the towns for me." Bill laughed outright at his cleverness.

The sun dropped beyond the horizon. Sunset clouds were afire with gorgeous colors. Bill watched the sunset, saw the shadows come creeping up the cañons, and listened to the call of the wind as it came hurrying down from the north. As darkness fell and the wind began to howl among the cliffs, he faced the west and started for the ranger-station three miles away. Behind him the wind rose to a shriek; it boomed and thundered among the peaks.

Below timber-line there were thickets of young spruce trees where the snow lay deep and soft. Through these boggy places Bill Hardy forced his way with grim determination. "The harder the going, the harder it'll be to follow," he muttered.

AT last, when Bill reached the ranger-station, he stopped. He glanced upward toward the Divide and listened to the howling of the wind. The wind was his friend. It had erased his tracks and swept away his trail completely—the dogs would never be able to pick up his trail. He laughed aloud, for his escape was complete. He breathed deeply, and gave a sigh of relief. Then he entered the ranger cabin and shut the door behind him.

Within a few minutes he had a fire roaring in the sheet-iron stove. He lay upon the bunk beside the stove and toasted his feet until his shoes were dry. While he rested he munched the last of the food he had pocketed at supper the day before. He had no blankets, and this would be an annoyance, for he would have to tend the fire night and day. But then, he hadn't anything else to do, so it would not be a very great hardship.

"Guess I'll have a look around before I turn in," Bill decided as he arose from the bunk and lighted a candle. "I'll look before I leap—and if things don't look good, I'll go round. I'm not goin' to take chances, or go bulling through anything. I'll use my bean. The trouble with the other fellows is that they can't stand prosperity when they make their get-away. And always it's some Jane that makes them come out of their hiding-place. Well, it's the tall and uncut for me. After the warden gives me up, I'll hit for California, and crowds—then it'll be open season on everything."

BY the light of the flickering candle Bill made a quick survey of the ranger cabin. In a box nailed against the wall he found only some remnants of supplies. A coffee-can filled with rice, three cans of sardines, a lone can of salmon, a broken package of tea and some salt were all he discovered. He took up the ax and began testing the dirt floor. He sank the blade into the dry dirt here and there. Toward the far end of the cabin the ax struck a soft spot, and he dropped down upon his knees and began digging. A few minutes later the ax-blade came in contact with something wooden. It proved to be some loose boards; and beneath the boards was a box, and in the box was food. With a cry of triumph Bill plunged his hands into the box and removed a number of cans which he set upon the table. Corn and beans, hominy and tomatoes—enough food for several weeks.

Bill Hardy ran an appraising eye over the cans and then executed a little dance for joy. He had played in luck. He blessed the fire-guard who had called his attention to the map, and who had told him, too, regarding supplies that were cached beneath dirt floors. He blew out the candle and sat down upon the bunk beside the warm fire. Long he sat and smoked and dozed. At last he lay back upon the couch of soft spruce-boughs. It had been only a day since he left the road-camp. But it seemed so long that time couldn't measure it. He was happy and free, and far from strife.

Abruptly he slept. He sprawled upon the bunk luxuriously. When the cold came creeping in, he arose, half asleep, and replenished the fire. Then he went off to sleep again with the warmth of the fire flooding the snug little cabin.

A bell buzzed faintly. Then the cabin was silent. Again and again the bell called. At last Bill Hardy stirred uneasily in his sleep. The bell cut the stillness sharply, and Bill sat up suddenly and blinked in astonishment. He had heard the bell from the first, but had been too sleepy to realize that he was not dreaming. It was real, after all.

Two long, and three short rings came over and over, insistently.

Bill Hardy considered. Why would anyone be using the deserted ranger's line that zigzagged its way up and down the cañons and over the mountains from one ranger-station to another and had been abandoned when the rangers and fire-guards left the region weeks before? It was a bit uncanny, that was all, that anyone should be calling over the line. And the persistence of the call—would the ringing never end? It made his nerves jumpy to sit there in the flickering firelight and listen to the bell as it jangled over and over its call of two long and three short rings. Surely whoever was being called was out—that was certain.

BILL got up and lighted the candle. Then he went over and stood before the telephone and listened to its monotonous ringing. A little card tacked beside the instrument caught his attention. He stepped nearer and read:

NATIONAL PARK RANGER STATIONS
Private Line
Fall River Station: one long and two short.
Continental Divide Lookout Station: three long.
North Fork Grand River: three short.
Poudre Lakes: two long and three short.

"Hell," Bill rapped out, "this is the Poudre station; they're calling this cabin."

Back and forth before the telephone Bill paced nervously. Sometimes he stopped abruptly when the bell called insistently over and over its code of two long and three short rings. Several times he stepped close beside the telephone and paused uneasily, as though unable to decide something that was in his mind. He set down the candle and stood there uncertainly. The bell rang, and he jumped. He regarded the buzzing bell with unblinking eyes. Then of a sudden he stepped back and put his hands behind him. "Afraid to trust myself," he laughed nervously, and he kept his distance from the telephone.

"Ring, damn you—I'm out," he yelled defiantly from the bunk, where he had once more settled himself. Then he lay down and stretched. He would go to sleep and let the thing ring. So far as he was concerned it could ring on into eternity, and he'd never answer the call. It might not be for him anyhow, but you never could tell what old Sam Kerrigan would do. It would be just as well to play safe. He'd not peep, never.

The bell droned off into silence. After that it rang intermittently, without, however, the sharp insistence that had marked its ringing several times.

Bill finally composed himself to sleep, though he started up several times when the call came insistently. At last he was sound asleep again.

There came a low tinkle as though the bell were timid and afraid of intruding itself into the silence of the cabin. The call came faintly—it fluttered swiftly for a time, repeating over and over—two long and three short.

Of a sudden the bell cut the stillness sharply. It rang insistently. There was in its sharp digits a demand for instant action.

Bill Hardy jumped from the bunk. He caught up the ax and rushed across the room, nearly upsetting the stove on his way to the telephone. With the ax poised for a blow that would forever silence the dogging bell, he paused. He set down the ax and debated.

The bell rang in his face, and he jumped. Timidly he put out an uncertain hand, hesitated and took down the receiver. There came a discordant clutter as the call sputtered out its two long and three short signals through the receiver. When the clutter stopped, he placed the receiver gingerly to his ear. He stiffened. Then very slowly he returned the receiver to its hook. "I'm not such a fool that they can trick me that way," he gritted. "But by thunder, I nearly fell for it." He turned his attention to the stove and put in more wood.

The calling continued.

"If I'm not here, why don't they call another cabin?" Bill demanded suddenly.

Two long and three short answered him.

"They framed up on me once,—gave me seven years,—and I guess I'll not be a silly fish and bite twice at the same bait." He laughed aloud, nervously.

TWO long and three short—two long and three short; over and over with monotonous persistence the bell jangled. Then, getting no reply, it rose to higher cadence. It buzzed with sharper notes and rattled dangerously. It displayed a temper that Bill had never before known in any bell. He stared at it, amazed.

He got up and went over to the telephone. He stood there with his face pressed close and waited.

"What ails you—all at once?" he de-

manded. "Why can't you go on and ring decent?"

The bell answered his challenge. He sprang forward and snatched the receiver.

"What in hell do you want?" he yelled into the instrument.

A voice came over the wire, evenly, distinctly—a familiar voice.

"Bill, oh Bill—you there?" the inquiry was unhurried.

Bill sprang back as though he had been struck. He dropped the receiver and stared at it as it swung back and forth.

Once more the sputter came—but the bell did not ring. Bill listened again, but he did not betray himself. He would not speak. He'd not rush into the trap like a hungry coyote. He hung up very carefully and stepped back. Then he circled around and waited for the thing he hated to hear—the call of two long and three short.

THERE came a long silence. It was worse to bear than the constant ringing. Bill wondered if they had left the line, if they had given him up. He listened in.

"Bill," the word boomed the instant he touched the receiver to his ear, "Bill, I've got something to say to you. Just you hang on a minute." Bill shrugged his shoulders, but he gave no other sign that he had heard.

"Right off I'm going to tell you, Bill Hardy, that you are the biggest damn fool I know. You ran away. What about the honor system now? Answer me that if you can. Maybe you were sent up on a framed charge; but what of that? I've been digging into your case. But running away wont square you; and it will about put the honor system out of business." Bill gripped the telephone and hung on as though it were a life-line.

"Bill, there's forty men here in the road-camp, and all on their honor. Down in Cañon City there's five hundred others hoping and praying for a chance like the forty are getting. The honor system is new—just being tried out. Hell, man, haven't you any brains? Can't you see what your running away will do? The Governor hasn't been very keen for the new idea—and if you get away, it'll sour him for sure. And if he gets sour—smack, bang, and back to the pen for the whole outfit at the road-camp."

SAM KERRIGAN had spoken.

Bill stood first upon one foot, and then upon the other. He scratched his head; then he wagged it slowly as though something quite unexpected had come to him.

"Bill,"—it was Sam Kerrigan again,—"say Bill, I want you to go up to the pass and bring down the big map the fire-guard left at the cabin. We can use that map in camp. I'm sending you for the map, understand? If you get a move on you, you can be back to the road-camp by supper-time."

Slowly Bill Hardy hung up the receiver. He stood for a long time. At last he opened the cabin door and stared upward toward the pass. His hand reached back and closed the door, but he did not turn his head.

At the crest of the Divide, Bill halted. "They'll be hunting for me down there!" He nodded toward smoke-smudges upon the horizon. Then he laughed aloud, nervously. Slowly he faced the west, where lay the maze of mountains, and the wild country where he had planned to hide. Abruptly he turned back to the smoke-smudges.

"The boys will be right glad to see me, I reckon!" He hurried down the eastern slope with his hand pressed to his pocket where reposed the big map he'd taken from the lookout station.

Swift adventure and intriguing mystery in London life are here depicted with a grace and a spirit that no other writer knows quite so well how to achieve. Don't fail to read this already much talked-about novel.

THE EVIL

By E. Phillips

(What Has Already Happened:)

JUST after the distinguished young barrister Francis Ledsam won the acquittal of Oliver Hilditch, he received a severe shock: Mrs. Hilditch sought an interview and informed him that her husband was guilty of the murder with which he had been charged—was guilty, indeed, of many atrocious crimes. So when a little later Hilditch invited Ledsam to dine with them, it was only a certain horrified curiosity that made him accept.

Another shock followed; after dinner Hilditch coolly confessed the murder and showed the weapon with which it was done—a stiletto cleverly concealed in a golf-club handle. Protesting, Ledsam left the house, but before his departure Hilditch made another astonishing confession:

"My death," he observed calmly, "is the one thing in the world which would make my wife happy."

Late that night Ledsam was awakened by the telephone—over which Margaret Hilditch informed him that her husband had committed suicide with the same weapon that had killed Jordan.

Although he suspected Margaret had killed her husband, Ledsam kept silent at the inquest concerning his reasons for this belief. He decided, however, to renounce his career; he would never again defend a man accused of crime unless he knew him innocent. He would, moreover, strike at crime wherever he found it.

At Soto's, shortly afterward, Ledsam met Magaret's father Sir Timothy Brast, who was cynical concerning Ledsam's views about crime—told him, indeed, that if he were looking for a crime, he had only to wait about Soto's. And sure enough it was not long before young Victor Bidlake was brought in fatally shot.

Because of Brast's prophecy, Ledsam suspected him somehow guilty; but a fortnight later, in Soto's American bar, and in the presence of Ledsam and Brast, a young man named Fairfax was arrested by the police for the murder—and immediately made confession by swallowing a fatal dose of poison.

Yet Ledsam couldn't quite abandon his suspicion of Sir Timothy, especially when the brother of his friend Andrew Wilmore,

Mr. Oppenheim's reputation as a master fiction-writer grows with each new novel. "The Zeppelin's Passenger," "The Great Prince Shan" and others were very good indeed. And this one is even better.

SHEPHERD

Oppenheim

the novelist, disappeared, and events seemed to connect him with Brast. So it was that Ledsam held sundry conferences with the Scotland Yard man Shopland.

Meanwhile romance had complicated both Ledsam's situation and Sir Timothy's. Lady Cynthia Milton, one of the most beautiful young women in London, had shown her eager interest in Sir Timothy. And Ledsam and Margaret had fallen frankly in love with one another. When they broke the news to Sir Timothy, however, he received it strangely—and invited Ledsam and his daughter to attend one of the mysterious and much talked-about entertainments he occasionally gave at his country place, the Walled House. Things would be explained on that occasion, he promised. *(The story continues:)*

CHAPTER XXVI

BORED and listless, like a tired and drooping lily in the arms of her somewhat athletic partner, Lady Cynthia brought her dance to an abrupt conclusion.

"There is some one in the lounge there, to whom I wish to speak," she said. "Perhaps you wont mind if we finish later. The floor seems sticky tonight, or my feet are heavy."

Her partner made the best of it, as Lady Cynthia's partners, nowadays, generally had to. She even dispensed with his escort, and walked across the lounge of Claridge's alone. Sir Timothy rose to his feet. He had been sitting in a corner, half sheltered by a pillar, and had fancied himself unseen.

"What a relief!" she exclaimed. "Another turn, and I should have fainted through sheer boredom."

"Yet you are quite wonderful, dancing," he said. "I have been watching you for some time."

"It is one of my expiring efforts," she declared, sinking into the chair by his side. "You know whose party it is, of course? Old Lady Torrington's. Quite a boy-and-girl affair. Twenty-four of us had dinner in the worst corner of the room.

I can hear the old lady ordering the dinner now. Charles with a long menu. She shakes her head and taps him on the wrist with her fan. 'Monsieur Charles, I am a poor woman. Give me what there is—a small, plain dinner—and charge me at your minimum.' The dinner was very small and very plain; the champagne was horribly sweet. My partner talked of a new drill, his last innings for the Household Brigade, and a wonderful round of golf he played last Sunday week. I was turned on to dance with a man who asked me to marry him, a year ago, and I could feel him vibrating with gratitude, as he looked at me, that I had refused. I suppose I am very haggard."

"Does that matter, nowadays?" Sir Timothy asked.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I am afraid it does. The bone-and-hank-of-hair stuff is played out. The dairy-maid style is coming in. Plump little Fanny Torrington had a great success tonight, in one of those simple white dresses, you know, which look like a sack with a hole cut in the top. . . . . What are you doing here by yourself?"

"I have an engagement in a few minutes," he explained. "My car is waiting now. I looked in at the club to dine, found my favorite table taken, and nearly every man I ever disliked sidling up to tell me that he hears I am giving a wonderful party on Thursday. I decided not to dine there, after all, and Charles found me a corner here. I am going in five minutes."

"Where to?" she asked. "Can't I come with you?"

"I fear not," he answered. "I am going down in the East End."

"Adventuring?"

"More or less," he admitted.

Lady Cynthia became beautiful. She was always beautiful when she was not tired.

"Take me with you, please," she begged.

He shook his head. "Not to be done!"

"Don't shake your head like that," she enjoined, with a little grimace. "People will think I am trying to borrow money from you and that you are refusing me! Just take me with you some of the way. I shall scream if I go back into that dancing-room again."

Sir Timothy glanced at the clock.

"If there is any amusement to you in a rather dull drive eastward—"

She was on her feet with the soft, graceful speed which had made her so much admired before her present listlessness had set in.

"I'll get my cloak," she said.

THEY drove along the Embankment, cityward. The heat of the city seemed to rise from the pavements. The wall of the Embankment was lined with people, leaning over to catch the languid breeze that crept up with the tide. They crossed the river and threaded their way through a nightmare of squalid streets, where half-dressed men and women hung from the top windows and were even to be seen upon the roofs, struggling for air. The car at last pulled up at the corner of a long street.

"I am going down here," Sir Timothy announced. "I shall be gone perhaps an hour. The neighborhood is not a fit one for you to be left alone in. I shall have time to send you home. The car will be back here for me by the time I require it."

"Where are you going?" she asked curiously. "Why can't I come with you?"

"I am going where I cannot take you," was the firm reply. "I told you that before I started."

"I shall sit here and wait for you," she decided. "I rather like the neighborhood. There is a gentleman in shirt-sleeves, leaning over the rail of the roof there, who has his eye on me. I believe I shall be a success here—which is more than I can say of a little farther westward."

Sir Timothy smiled slightly. He had exchanged his hat for a tweed cap, and had put on a long dust-coat.

"There is no gauge by which you may know the measure of your success," he said. "If there were—"

"If there were?" she asked, leaning a little forward and looking at him with a touch of the old brilliancy in her eyes.

"If there were," he said, with a little show of mock gallantry, "a very jealously guarded secret might escape me. . . . . I think you will be quite all right here," he continued. "It is an open thoroughfare, and I see two policemen at the corner. Hassell, my chauffeur, too, is a reliable fellow. We will be back within an hour."

"We?" she repeated.

He indicated a man who had silently made his appearance during the conversation and was standing waiting on the sidewalk.

"Just a companion. I do not advise you to wait. If you insist—*au revoir!*"

Lady Cynthia leaned back in a corner of the car. She wondered languidly as to their errand in this unsavory neighborhood. Then she closed her eyes altogether and wondered about many things.

Sir Timothy and his companion walked along the crowded, squalid street without speech. Presently they turned to the right and stopped in front of a public-house of some pretensions.

"This is the place?" Sir Timothy asked.

"Yes sir!"

Both men entered. Sir Timothy made his way to the counter, his companion to a table near, where he took a seat and ordered a drink. Sir Timothy did the same. He was wedged in among a heterogeneous crowd of shabby, depressed but apparently not ill-natured men and women. A man in a flannel shirt and pair of shabby plaid trousers, which owed their precarious position to a pair of worn-out braces, turned a beery eye upon the newcomer.

"I'll 'ave one of with you, guvnor," he said.

"You shall indeed," Sir Timothy assented.

"Strike me lucky but I've touched first time!" the man exclaimed. "I'll 'ave a double tot of whisky," he added, addressing the barman. "Will it run to it, guvnor?"

"Certainly," was the cordial reply, "and the same to your friends, if you will answer a question."

"Troop up, lads," the man shouted. "We've a toff 'ere. He aint a 'tec—I know the cut of them. Out with the question."

"Serve everyone who desires it with drinks," Sir Timothy directed the barman. "My question is easily answered. Is this the place which a man whom I understand they call Billy the Tanner frequents?"

The question appeared to produce an almost uncomfortable sensation. The enthusiasm for the free drinks, however, was only slightly damped, and a small forest of grimy hands was extended across the counter.

"Don't you ask no questions about 'im, guvnor," Sir Timothy's immediate companion advised earnestly. "He'd kill you as soon as look at you. When Billy the Tanner's in a quarrelsome mood, I've see 'im empty this place and the whole street, quicker than if a mad dog was loose. 'E's a fair and 'oly terror, 'e is. 'E about killed 'is wife, three nights ago, but there aint a living soul as'd dare to stand in the witness-box about it."

"Why don't the police take a hand in the matter if the man is such a nuisance?" Sir Timothy asked.

His new acquaintance, gripping a thick tumbler of spirits and water with a hand deeply incrusted with the stains of his trade, scoffed.

"Police! Why, 'e'd take on any three of the police round these parts!" he declared. "Police! You tell one of 'em that Billy the Tanner's on the rampage, and you'll see 'em 'op it. . . . . Cheero, guvnor, and don't you get curious about Billy. It aint 'ealthy."

The swing-door was suddenly opened. A tousle-haired urchin shoved his face in.

"Billy the Tanner's coming!" he shouted. "Cave, all! He's been 'avin' a rare to-do in Smith's Court."

AT this, a curious thing happened. The little crowd at the bar seemed somehow to melt away. Half a dozen left precipitately by the door. Half a dozen more slunk through an inner entrance into some room beyond. Sir Timothy's neighbor set down his tumbler empty. He was the last to leave.

"If you're going to stop 'ere, guvnor," he begged fervently, "you keep a still tongue in your 'ead. Billy aint particular who it is. 'E'd kill 'is own mother, if 'e felt like it. 'E'll swing some day, sure as I stand 'ere, but 'e'll do a bit more mischief first. 'Op it with me, guvnor, or get inside there."

"Jim's right," the man behind the bar agreed. "He's a very nasty customer, Bill the Tanner, sir. If he's coming down, I'd clear out for a moment. You can go in the guvnor's sitting-room, if you like."

Sir Timothy shook his head.

"Billy the Tanner will not hurt me," he said. "As a matter of fact, I came down to see him."

His new friend hesitated no longer but made for the door through which most of his companions had already disappeared. The barman leaned across the counter.

"Guvnor," he whispered hoarsely, "I don't know what the game is, but I've given you the office. Billy wont stand no truck from any one. He's a holy terror."

Sir Timothy nodded.

"I quite understand," he said.

There was a moment's ominous silence. The barman withdrew to the farther end of his domain and busied himself cleaning some glasses. Suddenly the door was swung open. A man entered whose appearance alone was calculated to inspire a certain amount of fear. He was tall, but his height escaped notice by reason of the extraordinary breadth of his shoulders. He had a coarse and vicious face, a crop of red hair, and an unshaven growth upon his face. He looked around the room at first with an air of disappointment. Then he caught sight of Sir Timothy standing at the counter, and he brightened up.

"Where are all the blink-blanked crowd, Tom?" he asked the barman.

"Scared of you, I reckon," was the brief reply. "There was plenty here a few minutes ago."

"Scared of me, eh?" the other repeated, staring hard at Sir Timothy. "Did you 'ear that, guvnor?"

"I heard it," Sir Timothy acquiesced.

Billy the Tanner began to cheer up. He walked all round this stranger.

"A toff! A damn' toff! I'll 'ave a drink with you, guvnor," he declared, with a note of incipient truculence in his tone.

The barman had already reached up for two glasses, but Sir Timothy shook his head.

"I think not," he said.

THERE was a moment's silence. The barman made despairing signs at Sir Timothy. Billy the Tanner was moistening his lips with his tongue.

"Why not?" he demanded.

"Because I don't know you and I don't like you," was the bland reply.

Billy the Tanner wasted small time upon preliminaries. He spat upon his hands.

"I dunno you and I don't like you," he retorted. "D'yer know wot I'm going to do?"

"I have no idea," Sir Timothy confessed.

"I'm going to make you look so that your own mother wouldn't know you. Then I'm going to pitch you into the street," he added, with an evil grin. "That's wot we does with toffs who come 'anging around 'ere."

"Do you?" Sir Timothy said calmly. "Perhaps my friend may have something to say about that."

The man of war was beginning to be worked up.

"Where's your damn' friend?" he shouted. "Come on! I'll take on the two of you."

The man who had met Sir Timothy in the street had risen to his feet. He strolled up to the two. Billy the Tanner eyed him hungrily.

"The two of you, d'yer 'ear?" he shouted. "And 'ere's just a flick for the toff to be going on with!"

He delivered a sudden blow at Sir Timothy—a full, vicious, jabbing blow which had laid many a man of the neighborhood in the gutter. To his amazement, the chin at which he had aimed seemed to have mysteriously disappeared. Sir Timothy himself was standing about half a yard farther away. Billy the Tanner was too used to the game to be off his balance, but he received at that moment the surprise of his life. Sir Timothy, with the flat of his hand full open, struck him across the cheek such a blow that it resounded through the place, a blow that brought both the inner doors ajar, that brought peering eyes from every direction. There was a moment's silence. The man's fists were clenched now; there was murder in his face. Sir Timothy stepped on one side.

"I am not a fighter," he said coolly, leaning back against the marble table. "My friend will deal with you."

Billy the Tanner glared at the newcomer, who had glided in between him and Sir Timothy.

"You can come and join in, too," he shouted to Sir Timothy. "I'll knock your head into pulp when I've done with this little job!"

IN precisely thirty seconds the bully knew what had happened to him. So did the crowds who pressed back into the place through the inner door. So did the barman. So did the landlord, who had made a cautious appearance through a trapdoor. Billy the Tanner, for the first time in his life, was fighting a better man. For two years he had been the terror of the neighborhood, and he showed now that at least he had courage. His smattering of science, however, appeared only ridiculous. Once, through sheer strength and blundering force, he broke down his opponent's guard and struck him in the place that had dispatched many a man before—just over the heart. His present opponent scarcely winced, and Billy the Tanner paid the penalty then for his years of bullying.

His antagonist paused for a single second, as though unnerved by the blow. Red fire seemed to stream from his eyes. Then it was all over. With a sickening crash, Billy the Tanner went down upon the sanded floor. It was no matter of a count for him. He lay there like a dead man, and from the two doors the hidden spectators streamed into the room. Sir Timothy laid some money upon the table.

"This fellow insulted me and my friend," he said. "You see, he has paid the penalty. If he misbehaves again, the same thing will happen to him. I am leaving some money here with your barman. I shall be glad for everyone to drink with me. Presently, perhaps, you had better send for an ambulance or a doctor."

A little storm of enthusiastic excitement, evidenced for the most part in expletives of a lurid note, covered the retreat of Sir Timothy and his companion. Out in the street a small crowd was rushing toward the place. A couple of policemen seemed to be trying to make up their minds whether it was a fine night. An inspector hurried up to them.

"What's doing in the Rising Sun?" he demanded sharply.

"Some one's giving Billy the Tanner a hiding," one of the policemen replied.

"Honest?"

"A fair, ripe, knock-out hiding," was the emphatic confirmation. "I looked in at the window."

The inspector grinned.

"I'm glad you had the sense not to interfere," he remarked.

Sir Timothy and his companion reached the car. The latter took a seat by the chauffeur. Sir Timothy stepped in. It struck him that Lady Cynthia was a little breathless. Her eyes, too, were marvelously bright. Wrapped around her knees was the chauffeur's coat.

"Wonderful!" she declared. "I haven't had such a wonderful five minutes since I can remember! You are a dear to have brought me, Sir Timothy."

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Mean?" she laughed, as the car swung around and they glided away. "You didn't suppose I was going to sit here and watch you depart upon a mysterious errand? I borrowed your chauffeur's coat and his cap, and slunk down after you. I can assure you I looked the most wonderful female Apache you ever saw! And I saw the fight. It was better than any of the prize fights I have ever been to. The real thing is better than the sham, isn't it?"

Sir Timothy leaned back in his place and remained silent. Soon they passed out of the land of tired people, of stalls decked out with unsavory provender, of fetid smells and unwholesome-looking houses. They passed through a street of silent warehouses on to the Embankment. A stronger breeze came down between the curving arc of lights.

"You are not sorry that you brought me?" Lady Cynthia asked, suddenly holding out her hand.

Sir Timothy took it in his. For some reason or other, he made no answer at all.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE car stopped in front of the great house in Grosvenor Square. Lady Cynthia turned to her companion.

"You must come in, please," she said. "I insist—if it is only for five minutes."

Sir Timothy followed her across the hall to a curved recess, where the footman who had admitted them touched a bell, and a small automatic lift came down.

"I am taking you to my own quarters," she explained. "They are rather cut off, but I like them—especially on hot nights."

They glided up to the extreme top of the house. She opened the gates and led the way into what was practically an attic sitting-room, decorated in black and white. Wide-flung doors opened on to the leads, where comfortable chairs, a small table and an electric standard were arranged. They were far above the tops of the other houses, and looked into the green of the Park.

"This is where I bring very few people," she said. "This is where, even after my twenty-eight years of fraudulent life, I am sometimes myself. . . . . Wait."

There were feminine drinks and sandwiches arranged on the table. She opened the cupboard of a small sideboard just inside the sitting-room, however, and produced whisky and a siphon of soda. There was a pail of ice in a cool corner. From somewhere in the distance came the music of violins floating through the window of a house where a dance was in progress. She curled herself up on a settee, flung a cushion at Sir Timothy, who was already ensconced in a luxurious easy-chair, and

with a tumbler of iced sherbet in one hand, and a cigarette in the other, looked across at him.

"I am not sure," she said, "that you have not tonight dispelled an illusion."

"What manner of one?" he asked.

"Above all things," she went on, "I have always looked upon you as wicked. Most people do. I think that is one reason why so many of the women find you attractive. I suppose it is why I have found you attractive."

THE smile was back upon his lips. He bowed a little, and leaning forward, dropped a chunk of ice into his whisky and soda.

"Dear Lady Cynthia," he murmured, "don't tell me that I am going to slip back in your estimation into some normal place."

"I am not quite sure," she said deliberately. "I have always looked upon you as a kind of amateur criminal, a man who loved black things and dark ways. You know how weary one gets of the ordinary code of morals in these days. You were such a delightful antidote. And now—I am not sure that you have not shaken my faith in you."

"In what way?"

"You really seem to have been engaged tonight in a very sporting and philanthropic enterprise. I imagined you visiting some den of vice and mixing as an equal with these terrible people who never seem to cross the bridges. I was perfectly thrilled when I put on your chauffeur's coat and hat and followed you."

"The story of my little adventure is a simple one," Sir Timothy said. "I do not think it greatly affects my character. I believe, as a matter of fact, that I am just as wicked as you would have me be, but I have friends in every walk of life, and as you know, I like to peer into the unexpected places. I had heard of this man Billy the Tanner. He beats women, and had established a perfect reign of terror in the court and neighborhood where he lives. I fear I must agree with you that there were some elements of morality —of conforming, at any rate, to the recognized standards of justice—in what I did. You know, of course, that I am a great patron of every form of boxing, fencing and the various arts of self-defense and attack. I just took along one of the men from my gymnasium, who I knew was equal to the job, to give this fellow a lesson."

"He did it all right," Lady Cynthia murmured.

"But this is where I think I reëstablish myself," Sir Timothy continued, the peculiar nature of his smile reasserting itself. "I did not do this for the sake of the neighborhood. I did not do it from any sense of justice at all. I did it to provide for myself an enjoyable and delectable spectacle."

She smiled lazily.

"That does rather let you out," she admitted. "However, on the whole I am disappointed. I am afraid that you are not so bad as people think."

"People?" he repeated. "Francis Ledsam, for instance—my son-in-law *in posse?*"

"Francis Ledsam is one of those few rather brilliant persons who have contrived to keep sane without becoming a prig," she remarked.

"You know why?" he reminded her. "Francis Ledsam has been a tremendous worker. It is work which keeps a man sane. Brilliancy without the capacity for work drives people to the madhouse."

"Where we are all going, I suppose," she sighed.

"Not you," he answered. "You have just enough—I don't know what we moderns call it—soul, shall I say?—to keep you from the muddy ways."

SHE rose to her feet and leaned over the rails. Sir Timothy watched her thoughtfully. Her figure, notwithstanding its suggestions of delicate maturity, was still as slim as a young girl's. She was looking across the tree-tops toward an angry bank of clouds—long, pencil-like streaks of black on a purple background. Below, in the street, a taxi passed with grinding of brakes and noisy horn. The rail against which she leaned looked very flimsy. Sir Timothy stretched out his hand and held her arm.

"My nerves are going with my old age," he apologized. "That support seems too fragile."

She did not move. The touch of his fingers grew firmer.

"We have entered upon an allegory," she murmured. "You are preserving me from the depths."

He laughed harshly.

"I!" he exclaimed, with a sudden touch

of real and fierce bitterness which brought the light dancing into her eyes and a spot of color to her cheeks. "I preserve you! Why, you can never hear my name without thinking of sin, of crime of some sort! Do you seriously expect me ever to preserve anyone from anything?"

"You haven't made any very violent attempts to corrupt me," she reminded him.

"Women don't enter much into my scheme of life," he declared. "They played a great part once. It was a woman, I think, who first headed me off from the pastures of virtue."

"I know," she said softly. "It was Margaret's mother."

His voice rang out like a pistol-shot. "How did you know that?"

She turned away from the rail and threw herself back in her chair. His hand, however, she still kept in hers.

"Uncle Joe was minister at Rio, you know, the year it all happened," she explained. "He told us the story years ago—how you came back from Europe and found things were not just as they should be between Margaret's mother and your partner, and how—you killed your partner."

His nostrils quivered a little. One felt that the fire of suffering had touched him again for a moment.

"Yes, I killed him," he admitted. "That is part of my creed. The men who defend their honor in the law courts are men I know nothing of. This man would have wronged me and robbed me of my honor. I bade him defend himself in any way he thought well. It was his life or mine. He was a poor fighter, and I killed him."

"And Margaret's mother died from the shock."

"She died soon afterward."

THE stars grew paler. The passing vehicles, with their brilliant lights, grew fewer and fewer. The breeze, which had been so welcome at first, turned into a cold night wind. She led the way back into the room.

"I must go," he announced.

"You must go," she echoed, looking up at him. "Good-by!"

She was so close to him that his embrace, sudden and passionate though it was, came about almost naturally. She lay in his arms with perfect content and raised her lips to his.

He broke away. He was himself again, self-furious.

"Lady Cynthia," he said, "I owe you my most humble apologies. The evil that is in me does not as a rule break out in this direction."

"You dear, foolish person," she laughed, "that was good, not evil. You like me, don't you? But I know you do. There is one crime you have always forgotten to develop—you haven't the simplest idea in the world how to lie."

"Yes, I like you," he admitted. "I have the most absurd feeling for you that any man ever found it impossible to put into words. . . . . We have indeed strayed outside the world of natural things," he added bitterly.

"Why?" she murmured. "I never felt more natural or normal in my life. I can assure that I am loving it. I feel like muslin gowns and primroses and the scent of those first March violets underneath a warm hedge where the sun comes sometimes. I feel very natural indeed—Sir Timothy."

"What about me?" he asked harshly. "In three weeks' time I shall be fifty years old."

She laughed softly.

"And in no time at all I shall be thirty—and entering upon a terrible period of spinsterhood!"

"Spinsterhood!" he scoffed. "Why, whenever the society papers are at a loss for a paragraph, they report a few more offers of marriage to the ever-beautiful Lady Cynthia."

"Don't be sarcastic," she begged. "I haven't yet had the offer of marriage I want, anyhow."

"You'll get one you don't want in a moment," he warned her.

She made a little grimace.

"Don't!" she laughed nervously. "How am I to preserve my romantic notions of you as the emperor of the criminal world, if you kiss me as you did just now—you kissed me rather well—and then ask me to marry you? It isn't your rôle. You must light a cigarette now, pat the back of my hand, and swagger off to another of your haunts of vice."

"In other words, I am not to propose?" Sir Timothy said slowly.

"You see how decadent I am," she sighed. "I want to toy with my pleasures. Besides, there's that scamp of a brother of mine coming up to have a drink—I

saw him get out of a taxi; and you couldn't get it through in time—not with dignity."

The rattle of the lift as it stopped was plainly audible. He stooped and kissed her fingers.

"I fear some day," he murmured, "I shall be a great disappointment to you."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THERE was a great deal of discussion, the following morning at the Sheridan Club, during the gossipy half-hour which preceded luncheon, concerning Sir Timothy Brast's forthcoming entertainment. One of the men—Philip Baker, who had been for many years the editor of a famous sporting weekly—had a ticket of invitation which he displayed to an envious little crowd.

"You fellows who get invitations to these parties," a famous actor declared, "are the most elusive chaps on earth. Half London is dying to know what really goes on there; and yet, if by any chance one comes across a prospective or retrospective guest, he is as dumb about it as though it were some Masonic function. We've got you this time, Baker, though. We'll put you under the inquisition on Friday morning."

"There wont be any need," the other replied. "One hears a great deal of rot talked about these affairs, but so far as I know, nothing very much out of the way goes on. There are always one or two pretty stiff fights in the gymnasium, and you get the best variety show and supper in the world."

"And the rest of the show?" a younger member inquired. "Is it simply dancing and music and that sort of thing?"

"Just a variety entertainment," the proud possessor of the scarlet-hued ticket declared. Here's Ledsam. Very likely he knows more about it."

"Ledsam," some one demanded, as Francis joined the group, "are you going to Sir Timothy's show tomorrow night?"

"I hope so," Francis replied, producing his strip of pasteboard.

"Ever been before?"

"Never."

"Do you know what sort of show it's going to be?" the actor inquired.

"Not the slightest idea. I don't think anyone does. That's rather a feature of the affair, isn't it?"

"It is the envious outsider who has never received an invitation, like myself," some one remarked, "who probably spreads these rumors, for one always hears it hinted that some disgraceful and illegal exhibition is on tap there—a new sort of drugging party, or some novel form of debauchery."

"I don't think," Francis said quietly, "that Sir Timothy is quite that sort of man."

"Dash it all, what sort of man is he?" the actor demanded. "They tell me that financially he is utterly unscrupulous, although he is rolling in money. He has the most Mephistophelian expression of any man I ever met—looks as though he'd set his heel on anyone's neck for the sport of it; and yet they say he has given at least fifty thousand pounds to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and that the whole of the park round that estate of his down the river is full of lamed and decrepit beasts which he has himself bought off the streets."

"The man must have an interesting personality," a novelist who had joined the party observed. "Of course, you know that he was in prison for six months?"

"What for?" some one asked.

"Murder—only they brought it in manslaughter," was the terse reply. "He killed his partner. It was many years ago, and no one knows all the facts of the story."

"I am not holding a brief for Sir Timothy," Francis remarked, as he sipped his cocktail. "As a matter of fact, he and I are very much at cross-purposes. But as regards that particular instance, I am not sure that he was very much to be blamed, any more than you can blame any injured person who takes the law into his own hands."

"Well—he isn't a man I should care to have for an enemy," Baker declared.

THE men drifted in to luncheon, and Francis, leaving them, took a taxi on to the Ritz. Looking about in the vestibule for Margaret, he came face to face with Lady Cynthia. She was dressed with her usual distinction in a gown of yellow muslin and a beflowered hat, and was the cynosure of a good many eyes.

"One would almost imagine, Lady Cynthia," he said, as they exchanged greetings, "that you had found that elixir we were talking about."

"Perhaps I have," she answered, smiling. "Are you looking for Margaret? She is somewhere about. We were just having a chat when I was literally carried off by that terrible Lanchester woman. Let's find her."

They strolled up into the lounge. Margaret came to meet them. Her smile, as she gave Francis her left hand, transformed and softened her whole appearance.

"You don't mind my having asked Cynthia to lunch with us?" she said. "I really couldn't get rid of the girl. She came in to see me this morning—the most aggressively cheerful person I ever knew. I believe that she had an adventure last night. All that she will tell me is that she dined and danced at Claridge's with a party of the dullest people in town."

A tall, familiar figure passed down the vestibule. Lady Cynthia gave a little start; and Francis, who happened to be watching her, was amazed at her expression.

"Your father, Margaret!" she pointed out. "I wonder if he is lunching here."

"He told me that he was lunching somewhere with a South American friend—one of his partners, I believe," Margaret replied. "I expect he is looking for him."

Sir Timothy caught sight of them, hesitated for a moment and came slowly in their direction.

"Have you found your friend?" Margaret asked.

"The poor fellow is ill in bed," her father answered. "I was just regretting that I had sent the car away, or I should have gone back to Hatch End."

"Stay and lunch with us," Lady Cynthia begged, a little impetuously.

"I shall be very pleased if you will," Francis put in. "I'll go and tell the waiter to enlarge my table."

HE hurried off. On his way back, a page-boy touched him on the arm.

"If you please, sir," he announced, "you are wanted on the telephone."

"I?" Francis exclaimed. "Some mistake, I should think. Nobody knows that I am here."

"Mr. Ledsam," the boy said. "This way, sir."

Francis walked down the vestibule to the row of telephone boxes at the farther end. The attendant, who was standing outside, indicated one of them and motioned the boy to go away. Francis stepped inside. The man followed, closing the door behind him.

"I am asking your pardon, sir, for taking a great liberty," he confessed. "No one wants you on the telephone. I wished to speak to you."

Francis looked at him in surprise. The man was evidently agitated. Somehow or other, his face was vaguely familiar.

"Who are you, and what do you want with me?" Francis asked.

"I was butler to Mr. Hilditch, sir," the man replied. "I waited upon you the night you dined there, sir—the night of Mr. Hilditch's death."

"Well?"

"I have a revelation to make with regard to that night, sir," the man went on, "which I should like to place in your hands. It is a very serious matter, and there are reasons why something must be done about it at once. Can I come and see you at your rooms, sir?"

Francis studied the man for a moment intently. He was evidently agitated—evidently, too, in very bad health. His furtive manner was against him. On the other hand, that might have arisen from nervousness.

"I shall be in at half-past three—Number 13 B, Clarges Street," Francis told him.

"I can get off for half an hour then, sir," the man replied. "I shall be very glad to come. I must apologize for having troubled you, sir."

Francis went slowly back to his trio of guests. All the way down the carpeted vestibule, he was haunted by the grim shadow of a spectral fear. The frozen horror of that ghastly evening was before him like a hateful tableau. Hilditch's mocking words ran in his ears: *"My death is the one thing in the world which would make my wife happy."* The court scene, with all its gloomy tragedy, rose before his eyes—only in the dock, instead of Hilditch, he saw another!

CHAPTER XXIX

THERE were incidents connected with that luncheon which Francis always remembered—for instance, the people who stopped to shake hands with Sir Timothy and made more or less clumsy efforts to obtain an invitation to his coming entertainment. Sir Timothy's reply to these

hints was barely cordial. Lady Cynthia, after a somewhat blatant but discomfited peer of the realm had taken his awkward leave of them, laughed softly.

"Of course, I think they all deserve what they get," she declared. "I never heard such brazen impudence in my life—from people who ought to know better, too."

Lord Meadowson, a sporting peer, who was one of Sir Timothy's few intimates, came over to the table. He paid his respects to the two ladies and Francis, and turned a little eagerly to Sir Timothy.

"Well?" he asked.

Sir Timothy nodded. "We shall be quite prepared for you," he said. "Better bring your check-book."

"Capital!" the other exclaimed. "As I hadn't heard anything, I was beginning to wonder whether you would be ready with your end of the show."

"There will be no hitch so far as we are concerned," Sir Timothy assured him.

"More mysteries?" Margaret inquired, as Meadowson departed with a smile of satisfaction.

Her father shrugged his shoulders.

"Scarcely that," he replied. "It is a little wager between Lord Meadowson and myself which is to be settled tomorrow."

LADY TORRINGTON, a fussy little woman, Lady Cynthia's hostess of the night before, stopped on her way down the room and shook hands with her.

"Why, my dear," she asked, "wherever did you vanish to last night? Claude told us all that in the middle of a dance with him, you excused yourself for a moment and he never saw you again. I quite expected to read in the papers this morning that you had eloped."

"Precisely what I did," Lady Cynthia declared. "The only trouble was that my partner had had enough of me before the evening was over, and deposited me once more in Grosvenor Square. It is really very humiliating," she went on meditatively, "how everyone always returns me."

"You talk such nonsense, Cynthia!" Lady Torrington exclaimed, a little pettishly. "However, you found your way home all right?"

"Quite safely, thank you. I was going to write you a note this afternoon. I went away on an impulse. All I can say is that I am sorry. Do forgive me."

"Certainly!" was the somewhat chilly reply. "Somehow or other, you seem to have earned the right to do exactly as you choose. Some of my young men, whom you had promised to dance with, were disappointed; but after all, I suppose that doesn't matter."

"Not much," Lady Cynthia assented sweetly. "I think a few disappointments are good for most of the young men of today."

"What did you do last night, Cynthia?" Margaret asked her presently, when Lady Torrington had passed on.

"I eloped with your father," Lady Cynthia confessed, smiling across at Sir Timothy. "We went for a little drive together and I had a most amusing time. The only trouble was, as I have been complaining to that tiresome woman, he brought me home again."

"But where did you go to?" Margaret persisted.

"It was an errand of charity," Sir Timothy declared.

"It sounds very mysterious," Francis observed. "Is that all we are to be told?"

"I am afraid," Sir Timothy complained, "that very few people sympathize with my hobbies or my prosecution of them. That is why such little incidents as last night's generally remain undisclosed. If you really wish to know what happened," he went on, after a moment's pause, "I will tell you. As you know, I have a great many friends among the boxing fraternity, and I happened to hear of a man down in the East End who has made himself a terror to the whole community in which he lives. I took Peter Fields, my gymnasium instructor, down to the East End last night; and Peter Fields—dealt with him."

"There was a fight!" Margaret exclaimed with a little shudder.

"There was a fight," Sir Timothy repeated, "if you can call it such. Fields gave him some part of the punishment he deserved."

"And you were there, Cynthia?"

"I left Lady Cynthia in the car," Sir Timothy explained. "She most improperly bribed my chauffeur to lend her his coat and hat, and followed me."

"You actually saw the fight, then?" Francis asked.

"I did," Lady Cynthia admitted. "I saw it from the beginning to the end."

Margaret looked across the table curiously. It seemed to her that her friend had turned a little paler.

"Did you like it?" she asked simply.

Lady Cynthia was silent for a moment. She glanced at Sir Timothy. He too was waiting for her answer with evident interest.

"I was thrilled," she acknowledged. "That was the pleasurable part of it. I have been so used to looking on at shows that bored me, listening to conversations that wearied me, attempting sensations which were repellent, that I just welcomed feeling, when it came—feeling of any sort. I was excited. I forgot everything else. I was so fascinated that I could not look away. But if you ask me whether I liked it, and I have to answer truthfully, I hated it! I felt nothing of the sort at the time, but when I tried to sleep, I found myself shivering. It was justice, I know, but it was ugly."

She watched Sir Timothy a little wistfully as she made her confession. He said nothing, but there was a very curious change in his expression. He smiled at her in an altogether unfamiliar way.

"I suppose," she said, appealing to him, "that you are very disappointed in me?"

"On the contrary," he answered, "I am delighted."

"You mean that?" she asked incredulously.

"I do," he declared. "Companionship between our sexes is very delightful so far as it goes, but the fundamental differences between a man's outlook and tastes and a woman's should never be bridged over. I myself do not wish to learn to knit. I do not care for the womenkind, in whom I am interested, to appreciate and understand fighting."

LADY CYNTHIA took a cigarette from her case and leaned over to Francis for a light.

"The world is changing," she declared. "I cannot bear many more shocks. I fancied that I had written myself forever out of Sir Timothy's good books because of my confession just now."

He smiled across at her. His words were words of courteous badinage, but Lady Cynthia was conscious of a strange little sense of pleasure.

"On the contrary," he assured her, "you found your way just a little farther into my heart."

"It seems to me, in a general sort of way," Margaret observed, leaning back in her chair, "that you and my father are becoming extraordinarily friendly, Cynthia."

"I am hopefully in love with your father," Lady Cynthia confessed. "It has been coming on for a long time. I suspected it the first time I ever met him. Now I am absolutely certain."

"It's quite a new idea," Margaret remarked. "Shall we like her in the family, Francis?"

"No airs!" Lady Cynthia warned her. "You two are not properly engaged yet. It may devolve upon me to give my consent."

"In that case," Francis replied, "I hope that we may at least count upon your influence with Sir Timothy?"

"If you'll return the compliment and urge my suit with him," Lady Cynthia laughed. "I am afraid he can't quite make up his mind about me, and I am so nice. I haven't flirted nearly so much as people think, and my instincts are really quite domestic."

"My position," Sir Timothy remarked, as he made an unsuccessful attempt to possess himself of the bill which Francis had called for, "is becoming a little difficult."

"Not really difficult," Lady Cynthia objected, "because the real decision rests in your hands."

"Just listen to the woman!" Margaret exclaimed. "Do you realize, Father, that Cynthia is making the most brazen advances to you? And I was going to ask her if she'd like to come back to the Sanctuary with us this evening!"

Lady Cynthia was suddenly eager. Margaret glanced across at her father. Sir Timothy seemed to stiffen a little.

"Margaret has *carte blanche* at the Sanctuary as regards her visitors," he said. "I am afraid that I shall be busy over at the Walled House."

"But you'll come and dine with us?"

Sir Timothy hesitated. An issue, which had been looming in his mind for many hours, seemed to be suddenly joined.

"Please!" Lady Cynthia begged.

Sir Timothy followed the example of the others and rose to his feet. He avoided Lady Cynthia's eyes. He seemed suddenly a little tired.

"I will come and dine," he assented quietly. "I am afraid that I cannot promise more than that. Lady Cynthia, as she knows, is always welcome at the Sanctuary."

CHAPTER XXX

PUNCTUAL to his appointment that afternoon, the man who had sought an interview with Francis was shown into the latter's study in Clarges Street.

He wore an overcoat over his livery, and directly he entered the room, Francis was struck by his intense pallor.

"Please tell me what you want as quickly as you can," Francis begged. "I am due to start down into the country in a few minutes."

"I wont keep you long, sir," the man replied. "The matter is rather a serious one."

"Are you ill?"

"Yes sir!"

"You had better sit down."

The man relapsed gratefully into a chair. I'll leave out everything that doesn't count, sir," he said. "I'll be as brief as I can. I want you to go back to the night I waited upon you at dinner—the night Mr. Oliver Hilditch was found dead. You gave evidence. The jury brought it in 'suicide.' It wasn't suicide at all, sir. Mr. Hilditch was murdered."

The sense of horror against which he had been struggling during the last few hours, crept once more through the whole being of the man who listened. He was fact to face once more with that terrible issue. Had he perjured himself in vain? Was the whole structure of his dreams about to collapse, to fall about his ears?

"By whom?" he faltered.

"By Sir Timothy Brast, sir."

Francis, who had been standing with his hand upon the table, felt suddenly inclined to laugh. Facile though his brain was, the change of issues was to tremendous for him readily to assimilate it. With shaking fingers he picked up a cigarette from an open box, lit it, and threw himself into an easy-chair. He was all the time quite unconscious of what he was doing.

"Sir Timothy Brast?" he repeated.

"Yes sir," the man reiterated. "I wish to tell you the whole story."

"I am listening," Francis assured him.

"That evening before dinner, Sir Timothy Brast called to see Mr. Hilditch, and a very stormy interview took place. I do not know the rights of that, sir. I only know that there was a fierce quarrel. Mrs. Hilditch came in, and Sir Timothy left the house. His last words to Mr. Hilditch were: 'You will hear from me again.'

"As you know, sir,—I mean as you remember, if you followed the evidence,—all the servants slept at the back of the house. I slept in the butler's room downstairs, next to the plate-pantry. I was awake when you left, sitting in my easy-chair, reading. Ten minutes after you had left, there was a sound at the front door as though some one had knocked with their knuckles. I got up to open it, but Mr. Hilditch was before me. He admitted Sir Timothy. They went back into the library together. It struck me that Mr. Hilditch had had a great deal to drink, and there was a queer look on Sir Timothy's face that I didn't understand. I stepped into the little room which communicates with the library by folding doors. There was a chink already between the two. I got a knife from the pantry and widened it until I could see through.

"I heard very little of the conversation, but there was no quarrel. Mr. Hilditch took up the weapon which you know about, sat in a chair and held it to his heart. I heard him say something like this. 'This ought to appeal to you, Sir Timothy. You're a specialist in this sort of thing. One little touch—and there you are.' Mrs. Hilditch said something about putting it away. My master turned to Sir Timothy and said something in a low tone. Suddenly Sir Timothy leaned over. He caught hold of Mr. Hilditch's hand which held the hilt of the dagger, and—and—well, he just drove it in, sir. Then he stood away. Mrs. Hilditch sprang up and would have screamed, but Sir Timothy placed his hand over her mouth. In a moment I heard her say: 'What have you done?' Sir Timothy looked at Mr. Hilditch quite calmly. 'I have ridded the world of a verminous creature,' he said.

"My knees began to shake. My nerves were always bad. I crept back into my room, took off my clothes and got into bed. I had just put the light out when they called for me."

FRANCIS was himself again. There was an immense relief, a joy in his heart. He had never for a single moment blamed Margaret, but he had never for a single moment forgotten. It was a closed chapter, but the stain was on its pages. It was wonderful to tear it out and scatter the fragments.

"I remember you at the inquest," he said. "Your name is John Walter."

"Yes sir."

"Your evidence was very different."

"Yes sir."

"You kept all this to yourself."

"I did, sir. I thought it best."

"Tell me what has happened since?"

The man looked down at the table. "I have always been a poor man, sir," he said. "I have had bad luck whenever I've made a try to start at anything. I thought there seemed a chance for me here. I went to Sir Timothy, and I told him everything."

"Well?"

"Sir Timothy never turned a hair, sir. When I had finished, he was very short with me—almost curt. 'You have behaved like a man of sense, Walter,' he said. 'How much?' I hesitated for some time. Then I could see he was getting impatient. I doubled what I had thought of first. 'A thousand pounds, sir,' I said. Sir Timothy, he went to a safe in the wall, and he counted out a thousand pounds in notes, there and then. He brought them over to me. 'Walter,' he said, 'there is your thousand pounds. For that sum I understand you promise to keep what you saw to yourself?' 'Yes sir,' I agreed. 'Take it, then,' he said, 'but I want you to understand this: There have been many attempts, but no one yet has ever succeeded in blackmailing me. No one ever will. I give you this thousand pounds willingly. It is what you have asked for. Never let me see your face again. If you come to me starving, it will be useless. I shall not part with another penny.'"

The man's simple way of telling his story, his speech, slow and uneven on account of his faltering breath, seemed all to add to the dramatic nature of his disclosure.

"And then?" Francis asked simply.

"I went off with the money," Walter continued, "and I had cruel bad luck. I put it into a pub. I was robbed a little; I drank a little; my wife wasn't any good. I lost it all, sir. I found myself destitute. I went back to Sir Timothy."

"Well?"

The man shifted his feet nervously. He seemed to have come to the difficult part of his story.

"Sir Timothy was hard as nails," he said slowly. "He saw me. The moment I had finished, he rang the bell. 'Hedges,' he said to the manservant who came in, 'this man has come here to try and blackmail me. Throw him out. If he gives any trouble, send for the police. If he shows himself here again, send for the police.'"

"What happened then?"

"Well, I nearly blurted out the whole story," the man confessed, "and then I remembered that wouldn't do me any good, so I went away. I got a job at the Ritz, but I was took ill a few days afterward. I went to see a doctor. From him I got my death-warrant, sir."

"Is it heart?"

"It's heart, sir," the man acknowledged. "The doctor told me I might snuff out at any moment. I can't live, anyway, for more than a year. I've got a little girl."

"NOW just why have you come to see me?" Francis asked.

"For just this, sir," the man replied. "Here's my account of what happened," he went on, drawing some sheets of foolscap from his pocket. "It's written in my own hand, and there are two witnesses to my signature—one a clergyman, sir, and the other a doctor, they thinking it was a will or something. I had it in my mind to send that to Scotland Yard, and then I remembered that I hadn't a penny to leave my little girl. I began to wonder—think as meanly of me as you like, sir—how I could still make some money out of this. I happened to know that you were none too friendly disposed toward Sir Timothy. This confession of mine, if it woudn't mean hanging, would mean imprisonment for the rest of his life. You could make a better bargain with him than me, sir. Do you want to hold him in your power? If so, you can have this confession, all signed and everything, for two hundred pounds; and as I live, sir, that two hundred pounds is to pay for my funeral, and the balance for my little girl."

Francis took the papers and glanced them through.

"Supposing I buy this document from you," he said, "what is its actual value? You could write out another confession, get that signed, and sell it to another of Sir Timothy's enemies, or you could still go to Scotland Yard yourself."

"I shouldn't do that, sir, I assure you," the man declared nervously, "not on my solemn oath. I want simply to be quit of the whole matter and have a little money for the child."

Francis considered for a moment.

"There is only one way I can see," he said, "to make this document worth the

money to me. If you will sign a confession that any statement you have made as to the death of Mr. Hilditch is entirely imaginary, that you did not see Sir Timothy in the house that night, that you went to bed at your usual time and slept until you were awakened, and that you only made this charge for the purpose of extorting money—if you will sign a confession to that effect and give it to me with these papers, I will pay you the two hundred pounds, and I will never use the confession unless you repeat the charge."

"I'll do it, sir," the man assented.

Francis drew up a document, which his visitor read through and signed. Then he wrote out an open check.

"My servant shall take you to the bank in a taxi," he said. "They would scarcely pay you this unless you were identified. We understand one another?"

"Perfectly, sir!"

Francis rang the bell, gave his servant the necessary orders, and dismissed the two men. Half an hour later, already changed into flannels, he was on his way into the country.

CHAPTER XXXI

SIR TIMOTHY walked that evening among the shadows. Two hours ago, the last of the workmen from the great furnishing and catering establishments who undertook the management of his famous entertainments, had ceased work for the day and driven off in the motors hired to take them to the nearest town. The long, low wing whose use no one was able absolutely to divine, was still full of animation, but the great reception-rooms and stately hall were silent and empty. In the gymnasium, an enormous apartment as large as an ordinary concert hall, two or three electricians were still at work, directed by the man who had accompanied Sir Timothy to the East End on the night before. The former crossed the room, his footsteps awaking strange echoes.

"There will be seating for fifty, sir, and standing room for fifty," he announced. "I have had the ring slightly enlarged, as you suggested, and the lighting is being altered so that the start is exactly north and south."

Sir Timothy nodded thoughtfully. The beautiful oak floor of the place was littered with sawdust and shavings of wood. Several tiers of seats had been arranged on the space usually occupied by swings, punching-bags and other artifices. On a slightly raised dais at the farther end was an exact duplicate of a ring, corded around and with sawdust upon the floor. Upon the walls hung a marvelous collection of weapons of every description, from the modern rifle to the curved and terrible knife used by the most savage of known tribes.

"How are things in the quarters?" Sir Timothy asked.

"Everyone is well, sir. Doctor Ballantyne arrived this afternoon. His report is excellent."

Sir Timothy nodded and turned away. He looked into the great gallery, its waxen floors shining with polish, ready for the feet of the dancers on the morrow; looked into a beautiful concert-room, with an organ that reached to the roof; glanced into the banqueting hall, which extended far into the winter-garden; made his way up the broad stairs, turned down a little corridor, unlocked a door and passed into his own suite. There was a small dining-room, a library, a bedroom, and a well-appointed bathroom. A manservant who had heard him enter, hurried from his own apartment across the way.

"You are not dining here, sir?" he inquired.

Sir Timothy shook his head.

"No, I am, dining late at the Sanctuary," he replied. "I just strolled over to see how the preparations were going on. I shall be sleeping over there, too. Any prowlers?"

"Photographer brought some steps and photographed the horses in the park from the top of the wall this afternoon, sir," the man announced. "Jenkins let him go. Two or three newspaper men sent in their cards to you, but they were not allowed to pass the lodge."

Sir Timothy nodded. Soon he left the house and crossed the park toward the Sanctuary. He was followed all the way by horses, of which there were more than thirty in the great inclosure. One mare greeted him with a neigh of welcome and plodded slowly after him. Another pressed her nose against his shoulder and walked by his side, with his hand upon her neck. Sir Timothy looked a little nervously around, but the park itself lay almost like a deep green pool, unobserved, and invisible from anywhere except the house

itself. He spoke a few words to each of the horses, and producing his key, passed through the door in the wall into the Sanctuary garden, closing it quickly as he recognized Francis standing under the cedar tree.

"HAS Lady Cynthia arrived yet?" he inquired.

"Not yet," Francis replied. "Margaret will be here in a minute. She told me to say that cocktails are here and that she has ordered dinner served on the terrace."

"Excellent!" Sir Timothy murmured. "Let me try one of your cigarettes."

"Everything ready for the great show tomorrow night?" Francis asked as he served the cocktails.

"Everything is in order. I wonder, really," Sir Timothy went on, looking at Francis curiously, "what you expect to see?"

"I don't think we any of us have any definite idea," Francis replied. "We have all, of course, made our guesses."

"You will probably be disappointed," Sir Timothy warned him. "For some reason, or other—perhaps I have encouraged the idea—people look upon my parties as mysterious orgies where things take place which may not be spoken of. They are right to some extent. I break the law, without a doubt, but I break it, I am afraid, in rather a disappointing fashion."

A limousine covered with dust raced in at the open gates and came to a standstill with a grinding of brakes. Lady Cynthia stepped lightly out and came across the lawn to them.

"I am hot and dusty and I was disagreeable," she confided, "but the peace of this wonderful place, and the sight of that beautiful silver thing have cheered me. May I have a cocktail before I go up to change? I am a little late, I know," she went on, "but that wretched garden-party! I thought my turn would never come to receive my few words. Mother would have been broken-hearted if I had left without them. What slaves we are to royalty! Now shall I hurry and change? You men have the air of wanting your dinner, and I am rather that way myself. You look tired, dear host," she added, a little hesitatingly.

"The heat," he answered.

"Why you ever leave this spot I can't imagine," she declared as she turned away, with a lingering glance around. "It seems like paradise to come here and breathe this air. London is a furnace."

THE two men were alone again. In Francis' pocket were the two documents, which he had not yet made up his mind how to use. Margaret came out to them presently, and he strolled away with her toward the rose-garden.

"Margaret," he said, "is it my fancy or has there been a change in your father during the last few days?"

"There is a change of some sort," she admitted. "I cannot describe it. I only know it is there. He seems much more thoughtful and less hard. The change would be an improvement," she went on, "except that somehow or other it makes me feel uneasy. It is as though he were grappling with some crisis."

They came to a standstill at the end of the pergola, where the masses of drooping roses made the air almost faint with their perfume. Margaret stretched out her hand, plucked a handful of the creamy petals and held them against her cheek. A thrush was singing noisily. A few yards away they heard the soft swish of the river.

"Tell me," she asked curiously, "my father still speaks of you as being in some respects an enemy. What does he mean?"

"I will tell you exactly," he answered. "The first time I ever spoke to your father I was dining at Soto's. I was talking to Andrew Wilmore. It was only a short time after you had told me the story of Oliver Hilditch, a story which made me realize the horror of spending one's life keeping men like that out of the clutch of the law."

"Go on, please," she begged.

"Well, I was talking to Andrew. I told him that in the future I should accept no case unless I not only believed in but was convinced of the innocence of my client. I added that I was at war with crime. I think, perhaps, I was so deeply in earnest that I may have sounded a little flamboyant. At any rate, your father, who had overheard me, moved up to our table. I think he deduced from what I was saying that I was going to turn into a sort of amateur crime-investigator, a person who I gathered later was particularly obnoxious to him. At any rate, he held out a challenge. 'If you are a man who hates crime,' he said,—or something like it,—'I am one who loves it.' He went on to

prophesy that a crime would be committed close to where we were, within an hour or so, and he challenged me to discover the assassin. That night Victor Bidlake was murdered just outside Soto's."

"I remember! Do you mean to tell me, then," Margaret went on, with a little shiver, "that Father told you this was going to happen?"

"He certainly did," Francis replied. "How his knowledge came I am not sure —yet. But he certainly knew."

"Have you anything else against him?" she asked.

"There was the disappearance of Andrew Wilmore's younger brother—Reginald Wilmore. I have no right to connect your father with that, but Shopland, the Scotland Yard detective, who has charge of the case, seems to believe that the young man was brought into this neighborhood, and some other indirect evidence which came into my hands does seem to point toward your father's being concerned in the matter. I appealed to him at once, but he only laughed at me. That matter also remains a mystery."

MARGARET was thoughtful for a moment. Then she turned toward the house. They heard the soft ringing of the gong.

"Will you believe me when I tell you this?" she begged, as they passed arm in arm down the pergola: "I am terrified of my father, though in many ways he is almost princely in his generosity and in the broad view he takes of things. Then his kindness to all dumb animals, and the way they love him, is the most amazing thing I ever knew. If we were alone here tonight, every animal in the house would be around his chair. He has even the cats locked up if we have visitors, so that no one shall see it. But—I am quite honest when I tell you this—I do not believe that my father has the ordinary outlook upon crime. I believe that there is a good deal more of the Old Testament about him, than the New."

"And this change which we were speaking about?" he asked, lowering his voice as they reached the lawn.

"I believe that somehow or other the end is coming," she said. "Francis, forgive me if I tell you this—or rather let me be forgiven; but I know of one crime my father has committed, and it makes me fear that there may be others. And I have the feeling, somehow, that the end is close at hand and that he feels it, just as we might feel a thunderstorm in the air."

"I am going to prove the immemorial selfishness of my sex," he whispered, as they drew near the little table. "Promise me one thing, and I don't care if your father is Beelzebub himself. Promise me that whatever happens, it shall not make any difference to us?"

She smiled at him very wonderfully, a smile which had to take the place of words, for there were servants now within hearing, and Sir Timothy himself was standing in the doorway.

CHAPTER XXXII

LADY CYNTHIA and Sir Timothy strolled after dinner to the bottom of the lawn and watched the punt which Francis was propelling, turn from the stream into the river.

"Perfectly idyllic!" Lady Cynthia sighed.

"We have another punt," her companion suggested.

She shook her head.

"I am one of those unselfish people," she declared, "whose idea of repose is not only to rest oneself but to see others rest. I think these two chairs, plenty of cigarettes, and you in your most gracious and discoursive mood, will fill my soul with content."

"Your decision relieves my mind," her companion declared, as he arranged the cushions behind her back. "I rather fancy myself with a pair of sculls, but a punt-pole never appealed to me. We will sit here and enjoy the peace. Tomorrow night you will find it all disturbed—music and raucous voices and the stampede of my poor, frightened horses in the park. This is really a very gracious silence."

"Are those two really going to marry?" Lady Cynthia asked, moving her head lazily in the direction of the disappearing punt.

"I imagine so."

"And you? What are you going to do then?"

"I am planning a long cruise. I telegraphed to Southampton today. I am having my yacht provisioned and prepared. I think I shall go over to South America."

She was silent for a moment. "Alone?" she asked presently.

"I am always alone," he answered.

"That is rather a matter of your own choice, is it not?"

"Perhaps so. I have always found it hard to make friends. Enemies seem to be more in my line."

"I have not found it difficult to become your friend," she reminded him.

"You are one of my few successes," he replied.

SHE leaned back with half-closed eyes. There was nothing new about their environment—the clusters of roses, the perfume of the lilies in the rock garden, the even sweeter fragrance of the trim border of mignonette. Away in the distance, the night was made momentarily ugly by the sound of a phonograph on a passing launch; yet this discordant note seemed only to bring the perfection of present things closer. Back across the velvety lawn, through the feathery strips of foliage, the lights of the Sanctuary, shaded and subdued, were dimly visible. The dining-table under the cedar tree had already been cleared. Hedges, newly arrived from town to play the major-domo, was putting the finishing touches to a little array of cool drinks. And beyond, dimly seen but always there, the wall. She turned to him suddenly.

"You build a wall around your life," she said, "like the wall which encircles your mystery house. Last night I thought that I could see a little way over the top. Tonight you are different."

"If I am different," he answered quietly, "it is because, for the first time for many years, I have found myself wondering whether the life I had planned for myself, the things which I had planned should make life for me, are the best. I have had doubts—perhaps I might say regrets."

"I should like to go to South America," Lady Cynthia declared softly.

He finished the cigarette which he was smoking and deliberately threw away the stump. Then he turned and looked at her. His face seemed harder than ever, clean-cut, the face of a man able to defy Fate; but she saw something in his eyes which she had never seen before.

"Dear child," he said, "if I could roll back the years, if from all my deeds of sin, as the world knows sin, I could cancel one, there is nothing in the world would make me happier than to ask you to come with me as my cherished companion to just whatever part of the world you cared for. But I have been playing pitch and toss with fortune all my life, since the great trouble came which changed me so much. Even at this moment, the coin is in the air which may decide my fate."

"You mean?" she ventured.

"I mean," he continued, "that after the event of which we spoke last night, nothing in life has been more than an incident, and I have striven to find distraction by means which none of you—not even you, Lady Cynthia, with all your breadth of outlook and all your craving after new things—would justify."

"Nothing that you may have done troubles me in the least," she assured him. "I do wish that you could put it all out of your mind and let me help you to make a fresh start."

"I may put the thing itself out of my mind," he answered sadly, "but the consequences remain."

"There is a consequence which threatens?" she asked.

HE was silent for a moment. When he spoke again, he had recovered all his courage.

"There is the coin in the air of which I spoke," he replied. "Let us forget it for a moment. Of the minor things I will make you my judge. Ledsam and Margaret are coming to my party tomorrow night. You too shall be my guest. Such secrets as lie on the other side of that wall shall be yours. After that, if I survive your judgment of them, and if the coin which I have thrown into the air comes down to the tune I call—after that, I will remind you of something which happened last night—of something which, if I live for many years, I shall never forget."

She leaned toward him. Her eyes were heavy with longing. Her arms, sweet and white in the dusky twilight, stole hesitatingly out.

"Last night was so long ago. Wont you take—a later memory?"

Once again she lay in his arms, still and content. . . . .

As they crossed the lawn an hour or so later, they were confronted by Hedges—who hastened, in fact, to meet them.

"You are being asked for on the telephone, sir," he announced. "It is a trunk call. I have switched it through to the study."

"Any name?" Sir Timothy asked indifferently.

The man hesitated. His eyes sought his master's respectfully, but charged with meaning.

"The person refuses to give his name, sir, but I fancied that I recognized his voice. I think it would be as well for you to speak, sir."

Lady Cynthia sank into a chair.

"You shall go and answer your telephone call," she said, "and leave Hedges to serve me with one of these strange drinks. I believe I see some of my favorite orangeade."

Sir Timothy made his way into the house and into the low, oak-beamed study with its dark furniture and latticed windows. The telephone bell began to ring as he entered. He took up the receiver.

"Sir Timothy?" a rather hoarse, strained voice asked.

"I am speaking," Sir Timothy replied. "Who is it?"

The man at the other end spoke as though he were out of breath. Nevertheless what he said was distinct enough.

"I am John Walter."

"Well?"

"I am just ringing you up," the voice went on, "to give you what's called a sporting chance. There's a boat from Southampton midday tomorrow. If you're wise, you'll catch it. Or better still, get off on your own yacht. They carry a wireless now, these big steamers. Doesn't give a criminal much of a chance, does it?"

"I am to understand, then," Sir Timothy said calmly, "that you have laid your information?"

"I've parted with it, and serve you right," was the bitter reply. "I'm not saying that you're not a brave man, Sir Timothy, but there's such a thing as being foolhardy, and that's what you are. I wasn't asking you for half your fortune—nor even a dab of it; but if your life wasn't worth a few hundred pounds,—you, with all that money,—well, it wasn't worth saving. So now you know. I've spent ninepence to give you a chance to hop it, because I met a gent who has been good to me. I've had a good dinner and I feel merciful. So there you are."

"Do I gather," Sir Timothy asked in a perfectly level tone, "that the deed is already done?"

"It's already done and done thoroughly," was the uncompromising answer. "I'm not ringing up to ask you to change your mind. If you were to offer me five thousand now, or ten, I couldn't stop the bally thing. You've a sporting chance of getting away if you start at once. That's all there is to it."

"You have nothing more to say?"

"Nothing! Only I wish to God I'd never stepped into that Mayfair agency. I wish I'd never gone to Mrs. Hilditch's as a temporary butler. I wish I'd never seen any of you! That's all. You can go to hell which way you like, only, if you take my advice, you'll go by the way of South America. The scaffold isn't every man's fancy."

There was a burr of the instrument and then silence. Sir Timothy carefully replaced the receiver, paused on his way out of the room to smell a great bowl of lavender, and passed back into the garden.

"More applicants for invitations?" Lady Cynthia inquired lazily.

Her host smiled.

"Not exactly! Although," he added, "as a matter of fact my party would have been perhaps a little more complete with the presence of the person to whom I have been speaking."

LADY CYNTHIA pointed to the stream, down which the punt was drifting. The moon had gone behind a cloud; and Francis' figure, as he stood there, was undefined and ghostly. A thought seemed to flash into her mind. She leaned forward.

"Once," she said, "he told me that he was your enemy."

"The term is a little melodramatic," Sir Timothy protested. "We look at certain things from opposite points of view. You see, my prospective son-in-law, if ever he becomes that, represents the law—the Law with a capital "L"—which recognizes no human errors or weaknesses, and judges crime out of the musty books of the law-givers of old. He makes of the law a mechanical thing which can neither bend nor give, and he judges humanity from the same standpoint. Yet at heart he is a good fellow, and I like him."

"And you?"

"My weakness lies the other way," he confessed, "and my sympathy is with those who do not fear to make their own laws."

She held out her hand, white and spectral in the momentary gloom. At the other end

of the lawn Francis and Margaret were disembarking from the punt.

"Does it sound too shockingly obvious," she murmured, "if I say that I want to make you my law?"

CHAPTER XXXIII

IT would have puzzled anybody, except perhaps Lady Cynthia herself, to have detected the slightest alteration in Sir Timothy's demeanor during the following day, when he made fitful appearances at the Sanctuary, or at the dinner which was served a little earlier than usual, before his final departure for the scene of the festivities. Once he paused in the act of helping himself to some dish and listened for a moment to the sound of voices in the hall, and when a taxicab drove up, he set down his glass and again betrayed some interest.

"The maid with my frock, thank heavens!" Lady Cynthia announced, glancing out of the window. "My last anxiety is removed. I am looking forward now to a wonderful night."

"You may very easily be disappointed," her host warned her. "My entertainments appeal more, as a rule, to men. And some of my men guests may not be altogether to your liking."

"Quite content to take my risk," Lady Cynthia declared cheerfully. "The man with the best manners I ever met—it was at one of Maggie's studio dances, too—was a bookmaker. And a retired prize-fighter brought me home once from an Albert Hall dance."

"How did he behave?" Francis asked.

"He was wistful but restrained," Lady Cynthia replied, "quite the gentleman, in fact."

"You encourage me to hope for the best." Sir Timothy said, rising to his feet. "You will excuse me now? I have a few final preparations to make."

"Are we to be allowed," Margaret asked, "to come across the park?"

"You would not find it convenient," her father assured her. "You had better order a car—say for ten o'clock. Don't forget to bring your cards of invitation, and find me immediately you arrive. I wish to direct your proceedings to some extent."

Lady Cynthia strolled across with him to the postern-gate and stood by his side after he had opened it. Several of the animals, grazing in different parts of the park, pricked up their ears at the sound. An old mare came hobbling toward him; a flea-bitten gray came trotting down the field, his head in the air, neighing loudly.

"You waste a good deal of tenderness upon your animal friends, dear host," she murmured.

He deliberately looked away from her.

"The reciprocation, at any rate, has its disadvantages," he remarked, glancing a little disconsolately at the brown hairs upon his coat-sleeve. "I shall have to find another coat before I can receive my guests —which is a further reason," he added, "why I must hurry."

AT the entrance to the great gates of the Walled House, two men in livery were standing. One of them examined with care the red cards of invitation, and as soon as he was satisfied, the gates were opened by some unseen agency. The moment the car had passed through, they were closed again.

"Father seems thoroughly medieval over this business," Margaret remarked, looking about her with interest. "What a quaint courtyard, too! It is quite Italian."

"It seems almost incredible that you have never been here!" Lady Cynthia exclaimed. "Curiosity would have brought me if I had had to climb over the wall!"

"It does seem absurd in one way," Margaret agreed, "but as a matter of fact, my father's attitude about the place has always rather set me against it. I didn't feel that there was any pleasure to be gained by coming here. I wont tell you really what I think. We must keep to our bargain. We are not to anticipate."

At the front entrance, under the covered portico, the white tickets which they had received in exchange for their tickets of invitation, were carefully collected by another man, who stopped the car a few yards from the broad, curving steps. After that, there was no more suggestion of inhospitality. The front doors, which were of enormous size and height, seemed to have been removed, and in the great domed hall beyond, Sir Timothy was already receiving his guests. Being without wraps, the little party made an immediate entrance. Sir Timothy, who was talking to one of the best-known of the foreign ambassadors, took a step forward to meet them.

"Welcome," he said, "you the most

unique party, at least, among my guests. Prince, may I present you to my daughter, Mrs. Hilditch? Lady Cynthia Milton and Mr. Ledsam you know, I believe."

"Your father has just been preparing me for this pleasure," the Prince remarked with a smile. "I am delighted that his views as regards these wonderful parties are becoming a little more—would it be correct to say latitudinarian? He has certainly been very strict up to now."

"It is the first time I have been vouchsafed an invitation," Margaret confessed.

"You will find much to interest you," the Prince observed. "For myself, I love the sport of which your father is so noble a patron. That, without doubt, though, is a side of his entertainment of which you will know nothing."

SIR TIMOTHY, choosing a moment's respite from the inflowing stream of guests, came once more across to them.

"I am going to leave you, my honored guests from the Sanctuary," he said with a faint smile, "to yourselves for a short time. In the room to your left, supper is being served. In front is the dancing-gallery. To the right, as you see, is the lounge leading into the winter-garden. The gymnasium is closed until midnight. Any other part of the place please explore at your leisure, but I am going to ask you one thing: I want you to meet me in a room which I will show you, at a quarter to twelve."

He led them down one of the corridors which opened from the hall. Before the first door on the right a manservant was standing as though on sentry-duty. Sir Timothy tapped the panel of the door with his forefinger.

"This is my sanctum," he announced. "I allow no one in here without special permission. I find it useful to have a place to which one can come and rest quite quietly sometimes. Williams here has no other duty except to guard the entrance.—Williams, you will allow this gentleman and these two ladies to pass in at a quarter to twelve."

The man looked at them searchingly.

"Certainly, sir," he said. "No one else?"

"No one, under any pretext."

Sir Timothy hurried back to the hall, and the others followed him in more leisurely fashion. They were all three full of curiosity.

"I never dreamed," Margaret declared, as she looked around her, "that I should ever find myself inside this house. It has always seemed to me like one great *Bluebeard's* chamber. If ever my father spoke of it at all, it was as of a place which he intended to convert into a sort of miniature hell."

Sir Timothy leaned back to speak to them as they passed.

"You will find a friend over there, Ledsam," he said.

Wilmore turned around and faced them. The two men exchanged somewhat surprised greetings.

"No idea that I was coming until this afternoon," Wilmore explained. "I got my card at five o'clock, with a note from Sir Timothy's secretary. I am racking my brains to imagine what it can mean."

"We're all a little addled," Francis confessed. "Come and join our tour of exploration. You know Lady Cynthia. Let me present you to Mrs. Hilditch."

The introduction was effected, and they all strolled on together. Margaret and Lady Cynthia led the way into the winter-garden, a palace of glass, tall palms, banks of exotics, many flowering shrubs and a fountain, with wonderfuly carved water-nymphs, brought with its basin from Italy. Hidden in the foliage, a small orchestra was playing softly. The atmosphere of the place was languorous and delicious.

"Leave us here," Margaret insisted with a little exclamation of content. "Neither Cynthia nor I want to go any farther. Come back and fetch us in time for our appointment."

THE two men wandered off. The place was indeed a marvel of architecture, a country house, of which only the shell remained, modernized and made wonderful by the genius of a great architect. The first room which they entered when they left the winter-garden, was as large as a small restaurant, paneled in cream color, with a marvelous ceiling. There were tables of various sizes laid for supper, rows of champagne bottles in ice-buckets, and servants eagerly waiting for orders. Already a sprinkling of the guests had found their way here. The two men crossed the floor to the cocktail bar in the far corner, behind which a familiar face grinned at them. It was Jimmy, the bartender from Soto's, who stood there with

a wonderful array of bottles on a walnut table.

"If it were not a perfectly fatuous question, I should ask what you were doing here, Jimmy?" Francis remarked.

"I always come for Sir Timothy's big parties, sir," Jimmy explained. "Your first visit, isn't it, sir?"

"My first," Francis assented.

"And mine," his companion echoed.

"What can I have the pleasure of making for you, sir?" the man inquired.

"A difficult question," Francis admitted. "It is barely an hour and a half since we finished dinner. On the other hand, we are certainly going to have some supper some time or other."

Jimmy nodded understandingly.

"Leave it to me, sir," he begged.

He served them with a foaming white concoction in tall glasses. A genuine lime bobbed up and down in the liquid.

"Sir Timothy has the limes sent over from his own estate in South America," Jimmy announced. "You will find some things in that drink you don't often taste."

The two men sipped their beverage and pronounced it delightful. Jimmy leaned a little across the table.

"A big thing on tonight, isn't there, sir?" he asked cautiously.

"Is there?" Francis replied. "You mean—"

Jimmy motioned toward the open window, close to which the river was flowing by.

"You going down, sir?"

Francis shook his head dubiously. "Where to?"

The bartender looked with narrowed eyes from one to the other of the two men. Then he suddenly froze up. Wilmore leaned a little farther over the counter.

"Jimmy," he asked, "what goes on here besides dancing and boxing and gambling?"

"I never heard of any gambling," Jimmy answered, shaking his head. Sir Timothy doesn't care about cards being played here at all."

"What is the principal entertainment, then?" Francis demanded. "The boxing?"

The bartender shook his head.

"No one understands very much about this house, sir," he said, "except that it offers the most wonderful entertainment in Europe. That is for the guests to find out, though. We servants have to attend to our duties. . . . . Will you let me mix you another drink, sir?"

"No thanks," Francis answered. "The last was too good to spoil. But you haven't answered my question, Jimmy. What did you mean when you asked if we were going down?"

Jimmy's face had become wooden.

"I meant nothing, sir," he said. "Sorry I spoke."

THE two men turned away. They recognized many acquaintances in the supper-room, and in the long gallery beyond, where many couples were dancing now to the music of a wonderful orchestra. By slow stages they made their way back to the winter-garden, where Lady Cynthia and Margaret were still lost in admiration of their surroundings. They all walked the whole length of the place. Beyond, down a flight of stone steps, was a short, paved way to the river. A large electric launch was moored at the quay. The grounds outside were dimly illuminated with cunningly hidden electric lights shining through purple-colored globes into the cloudy darkness. In the background, enveloping the whole of the house and reaching to the river on either side, the great wall loomed up, unlit, menacing almost in its suggestions. A couple of loiterers stood within a few yards of them, looking at the launch.

"There she is, ready for her errand, whatever it may be," one said to the other curiously. "We couldn't play the stowaway, I suppose, could we?"

"Dicky Bell did that once," the other answered. "Sir Timothy has only one way with intruders. He was thrown into the river and jolly nearly drowned."

The two men passed out of hearing.

"I wonder what part the launch plays in the night's entertainment." Wilmore observed.

Francis shrugged his shoulders.

"I have given up wondering," he said. "Margaret, do you hear that music?"

She laughed.

"Are we really to dance?" she murmured. "Do you want to make a girl of me again?"

"Well, I shouldn't be a magician, should I?" he answered.

They passed into the ballroom and danced for some time. The music was seductive and perfect, without any of the blatant notes of too many of the popular orchestras. The floor seemed to sway under their feet.

"This is a new joy come back into life!" Margaret exclaimed as they rested for a moment.

"The first of many," he assured her.

They stood in the archway between the winter-garden and the dancing-gallery, from which they could command a view of the passing crowds. Francis scanned the faces of the men and women with intense interest. Many of them were known to him by sight; others were strangers. There was a judge, a cabinet minister, various members of the aristocracy, a sprinkling from the foreign legations; and although the stage was not largely represented, there were one or two well-known actors. The guests seemed to belong to no universal social order; but to Francis, watching them almost eagerly, they all seemed to have something of the same expression, the same slight air of weariness, of restless and unsatisfied desires.

"I can't believe that the place is real, or that these people we see are not supers," Margaret whispered. "I feel every moment that a clock will strike and that it will all fade away."

"I'm afraid I'm too material for such imaginings," Francis replied, "but there is a quaintly artificial air about it all. . . . We must go and look for Wilmore and Lady Cynthia."

THEY turned back into the enervating atmosphere of the winter-garden, and came suddenly face to face with Sir Timothy, who had escorted a little party of his guests to see the fountain, and was now returning alone.

"You have been dancing, I am glad to see," the latter observed. "I trust that you are amusing yourselves?"

"Excellently, thank you," Francis replied.

"And so far," Sir Timothy went on with a faint smile, "you find my entertainment normal? You have no question yet which you would like to ask?"

"Only one—what do you do with your launch up the river on moonless nights, Sir Timothy?"

Sir Timothy's momentary silence was full of ominous significance.

"Mr. Ledsam," he said after a brief pause, "I have given you almost *carte blanche* to explore my domains here. Concerning the launch, however, I think that you had better ask no questions at present."

"You are using it tonight?" Francis persisted.

"Will you come and see, my venturesome guest?"

"With great pleasure," was the prompt reply.

Sir Timothy glanced at his watch.

"That," he said, "is one of the matters of which we will speak at a quarter to twelve. Meanwhile let me show you something. It may amuse you as it has done me."

The three moved back toward one of the arched openings which led into the ballroom.

"Observe, if you please," their host continued, "the third couple who pass us. The girl is wearing green—the very little that she does wear. Watch the man, and see if he reminds you of anyone."

Francis did as he was bidden. The girl was a well-known member of the chorus of one of the principal musical comedies, and she seemed to be thoroughly enjoying both the dance and her partner. The latter appeared to be of a somewhat ordinary type, sallow, with rather puffy cheeks, and eyes almost unnaturally dark. He danced vigorously, and he talked all the time. Something about him was vaguely familiar to Francis, but he failed to place him.

"Notwithstanding all my precautions," Sir Timothy continued, "there, fondly believing himself to be unnoticed, is an emissary of Scotland Yard. Really, of all the obvious, the dry-as-dust, hunt-your-criminal-by-rule-of-three kind of people I ever met, the class of detective to which this man belongs can produce the most blatant examples."

"What are you going to do about him?" Francis asked.

Sir Timothy shrugged his shoulders.

"I have not yet made up my mind," he said. "I happen to know that he has been laying his plans for weeks to get here, frequenting Soto's and other restaurants, and scraping acquaintances with some of my friends. The Duke of Tadchester brought him—won a few hundreds from him at baccarat, I suppose. His Grace will never again find these doors open to him."

FRANCIS' attention had wandered. He was gazing fixedly at the man whom Sir Timothy had pointed out.

"You still do not fully recognize our

friend," the latter observed carelessly. "He calls himself Manuel Loito, and he professes to be a Cuban. His real name I understood, when you introduced us, to be Shopland."

"Great heavens, so it is!" Francis exclaimed.

"Let us leave him to his precarious pleasures," Sir Timothy suggested. "I am free for a few moments. We will wander round together."

They found Lady Cynthia and Wilmore, and looked in at the supper-room, where people were waiting now for tables, a babel of sound and gayety. The grounds and winter-gardens were crowded. Their guide led the way to a large apartment on the other side of the hall, from which the sound of music was proceeding.

"My theater," he said. "I wonder what is going on."

They passed inside. There was a small stage with steps leading down to the floor, easy-chairs and round tables everywhere, and waiters serving refreshments. A girl was dancing. Sir Timothy watched her approvingly.

"Nadia Ellistoff," he told them. "She was in the last Russian ballet, and she is waiting now for the rest of the company to start again at Covent Garden. You see, it is Metzger who plays there. They improvise. Rather a wonderful performance, I think."

They watched her breathlessly, a spirit in gray tulle, with great black eyes now and then half closed.

"It is 'Wind before Dawn,'" Lady Cynthia whispered. "I heard him play it two days after he composed it, only there are variations now. She is the soul of the south wind."

The curtain went down amidst rapturous applause. The dancer had left the stage, floating away into some sort of wonderfully contrived nebulous background. Within a few moments the principal comedian of the day was telling stories. Sir Timothy led them away.

"But how on earth do you get all these people?" Lady Cynthia asked.

"It is arranged for me," Sir Timothy replied. "I have an agent who sees to it all. Every man or woman who is asked to perform, has a credit at Cartier's for a hundred guineas. I pay no fees. They select some little keepsake."

"No wonder they call this place a sort of Arabian Nights!" she declared.

"Well, there isn't much else for you to see," Sir Timothy said thoughtfully. "My gymnasium, which is one of the principal features here, is closed just now for a special performance, of which I will speak in a moment. The concert hall I see they are using for an overflow dance-room. What you have seen, with the grounds and the winter-garden, comprises almost everything."

THEY moved back through the hall with difficulty. People were now crowding in. Lady Cynthia laughed softly.

"Why, it is like a gala night at the opera, Sir Timothy!" she exclaimed. "How dare you pretend that this is Bohemia!"

"It has never been I who have described my entertainments," he reminded her. "They have been called everything—orgies, debauches—everything you can think of. I have never ventured myself to describe them."

Their passage was difficult. Every now and then Sir Timothy, notwithstanding his rule of not receiving after midnight, was compelled to shake hands with some of his newly arriving guests. At last, however, they reached the little sitting-room. Sir Timothy turned back to Wilmore, who hesitated.

"You had better come in too, Mr. Wilmore, if you will," he invited. "You were with Ledsam, the first day we met, and something which I have to say now may interest you."

"If I am not intruding," Wilmore murmured.

They entered the room, still jealously guarded. Sir Timothy closed the door behind them.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE apartment was one belonging to the older portion of the house, and had been, in fact, an annex to the great library. The walls were oak-paneled, and hung with a collection of old prints. There were easy-chairs, a writing-table, and well-laden bookcases. There were one or two bronze statues of gladiators, a wonderful study of two wrestlers, no minor ornaments. Sir Timothy plunged at once into what he had to say.

"I promised you, Lady Cynthia, and you, Ledsam," he said, "to divulge exactly the truth as regards these much-

talked-of entertainments here. You, Margaret, under present circumstances, are equally interested. You, Wilmore, are Ledsam's friend, and you happen to have an interest in this particular party. Therefore, I am glad to have you all here together. The superficial part of my entertainment you have seen. The part which renders it necessary for me to keep closed doors, I shall now explain. I give prizes here of considerable value, for boxing contests which are conducted under rules of our own. One is due to take place in a very few minutes.

"The contests vary in character, but I may say that the chief officials of the National Sporting Club are usually to be found here—only, of course, in an unofficial capacity. The difference between the contests arranged by me, and others, is that my men are here to fight. They use sometimes an illegal weight of glove, and they sometimes hurt one another. If any two of the boxing fraternity have a grudge against one another, and that often happens, they are permitted here to fight it out, under the strictest control as regards fairness, but practically without gloves at all. You heard of the accident, for instance, to Norris? That happened in my gymnasium. He was knocked out by Burgin. It was a wonderful fight. . . . .

"However, I pass on. There is another class of contest which frequently takes place here. Two boxers place themselves unreservedly in my hands. The details of the match are arranged without their knowledge. They come into the ring without knowing whom they are going to fight. Sometimes they never know, for my men wear masks. . . . . Then we have private matches. There is one tonight. Lord Meadowson and I have a wager of a thousand guineas. He has brought tonight from the East End a boxer who, according to the terms of our bet, has never before engaged in a professional contest. I have brought an amateur under the same conditions. The weight is within a few pounds the same; neither has ever seen the other—only in this case the fight is with regulation gloves and under Queensberry rules."

"Who is your amateur, Sir Timothy?" Wilmore asked harshly.

"Your brother, Mr. Wilmore," was the prompt reply. "You shall see the fight if I have your promise not to attempt in any way to interfere."

WILMORE rose to his feet.

"Do you mean to tell me," he demanded, "that my brother has been decoyed here—kept here against his will, to provide amusement for your guests?"

"Mr. Wilmore, I beg that you will be reasonable," Sir Timothy expostulated. "I saw your brother box at his gymnasium in Holborn. My agent made him the offer of this fight. One of my conditions had to be that he came here to train, and that while he was here he held no communication whatever with the outside world. My trainer has ideas of his own, and this he insists upon. Your brother in the end acquiesced. He was at first difficult to deal with as regards this condition, and he did, in fact, I believe, Mr. Ledsam, pay a visit to your office, with the object of asking you to become an intermediary between him and his relatives."

"He began a letter to me," Francis interposed, "and then mysteriosly disappeared."

"The mystery is easily explained," Sir Timothy continued. "My trainer, Roger Hagon, a Varsity blue, and the best heavyweight of his year, occupies the chambers above yours. He saw from the window the arrival of Reginald Wilmore,—which was according to instructions, as they were to come down to Hatch End together,—went down the stairs to meet him, and to cut a long story short, fetched him out of your office, Ledsam, without allowing him to finish his letter. This absolute isolation seems a curious condition perhaps, but Hagon insists upon it, and I can assure you that he knows his business. The mystery, as you have termed it, of his disappearance that morning, is that he went upstairs with Hagon for several hours to undergo a medical examination, instead of leaving the building forthwith."

"Queer thing I never thought of Hagon," Francis remarked. "As a matter of fact, I never see him in the Temple, and I thought that he nad left."

"May I ask," Wilmore intervened, "when my brother will be free to return to his home?"

"Tonight, directly the fight is over," Sir Timothy replied. "Should he be successful, he will take with him a sum of money sufficient to start him in any business he chooses to enter."

Wilmore frowned slightly.

"But surely," he protested, "that would make him a professional pugilist?"

"Not at all," Sir Timothy replied. "For

one thing, the match is a private one in a private house; and for another the money is a gift. There is no purse. If your brother loses, he gets nothing. . . . . Will you see the fight, Mr. Wilmore?"

"Yes, I will see it," was the somewhat reluctant assent.

"You will give me your word not to interfere in any way?"

"I shall not interfere," Wilmore promised. "If they are wearing regulation gloves, and the weights are about equal, and the conditions are what you say, it is the last thing I should wish to do."

"CAPITAL!" Sir Timothy exclaimed. "Now to pass on. There is one other feature of my entertainments concerning which I have something to say—a series of performances which take place on my launch at odd times. There is one fixed for tonight. I can say little about it except that it is unusual. I am going to ask you, Lady Cynthia, and you, Ledsam, to witness it. When you have seen that, you know everything. Then you and I, Ledsam, can call one another's hands. . . . . I shall have something else to say to you, but that is outside the doings here."

"Are we to see the fight in the gymnasium?" Lady Cynthia inquired.

Sir Timothy shook his head.

"I do not allow women there under any conditions," he said. "You and Margaret had better stay here while that takes place. It will probably be over in twenty minutes. It will be time then for us to find our way to the launch. After that, if you have any appetite, supper. I will order some caviare sandwiches for you," Sir Timothy went on, ringing the bell, "and some wine."

Lady Cynthia smiled.

"It is really a very wonderful party," she murmured.

Their host ushered the two men across the hall,—now comparatively deserted, for everyone had settled down to his or her chosen amusement,—down a long passage, through a private door which he unlocked, and into the gymnasium. There were less than fifty spectators seated around the ring; and Francis, glancing at them hastily, fancied that he recognized nearly everyone of them. There was Baker, a judge, a couple of actors, Lord Meadowson the most renowned of sporting peers, and a dozen who followed in his footsteps, a little man who had once been amateur champion in the bantam class and who was now considered the finest judge of boxing in the world, a theatrical manager, the present amateur boxing champion, and a sprinkling of others. Sir Timothy and his companions took their chairs amid a buzz of welcome. Almost immediately the man who was in charge of the proceedings, and whose name was Harrison, rose from his place.

"Gentlemen," he said, "this is a sporting contest, but one under usual rules and usual conditions. An amateur, who tips the scales at twelve stone seven, who has never engaged in a boxing contest in his life, is matched against a young man from a different sphere of life, who intends to adopt the ring as his profession, but who has never as yet fought in public. Names, gentlemen, as you know, are seldom mentioned here. I will only say that the first in the ring is the nominee of our friend and host Sir Timothy Brast; second comes the nominee of Lord Meadowson."

Wilmore, notwithstanding his preknowledge, gave a little gasp. The young man who stood now within a few yards of him, carelessly swinging his gloves in his hand, was without a doubt his missing brother. He looked well and in the pink of condition—not only well, but entirely confident and at his ease. His opponent, on the other hand, a sturdier man, a few inches shorter, was nervous and awkward, though none the less determined-looking. Sir Timothy rose and whispered in Harrison's ear. The latter nodded. In a very few moments the preliminaries were concluded, and the fight began.

CHAPTER XXXV

FRANCIS, glad of a moment or two's solitude in which to rearrange his somewhat distorted sensations, found an empty space in the stern of the launch and stood leaning over the rail. His pulses were still tingling with the indubitable excitement of the last half-hour. It was all there, even now, before his eyes like a cinematograph picture—the duel between those two men, a duel of knowledge, of strength, of science, of courage. From beginning to end there had been no moment when Francis had felt that he was looking on at what was in any way a degrading or immoral spectacle. Each man had fought in his way to win. Young Wil-

more, graceful as a panther, with a keen, joyous desire of youth for supremacy written in his face and in the dogged lines of his mouth; the budding champion from the East End, less graceful, perhaps, but with even more strength and at least as much determination, had certainly done his best to justify his selection.

There were no points to be scored. There had been no undue feinting, no holding, few of the tricks of the professional ring. It was a fight to a finish, or until Harrison gave the word. And the better man had won. But even that knockout blow which Reggie Wilmore had delivered after a wonderful feint, had had little that was cruel in it. There was something beautiful almost in the strength and grace with which it had been delivered—the breathless eagerness, the waiting, the end.

Francis felt a touch upon his arm and looked around. A tall, sad-looking woman, whom he had noticed with a vague sense of familiarity in the dancing-room, was standing by his side.

"You have forgotten me, Mr. Ledsam," she said.

"For the moment," he admitted.

"I am Isabel Culbridge," she told him, watching his face.

"Lady Isabel?" Francis repeated incredulously. "But surely—"

"Better not contradict me," she interrupted. "Look again."

Francis looked again.

"I am very sorry," he said. "It is some time, is it not, since we met?"

SHE stood by his side, and for a few moments neither of them spoke. The little orchestra in the bows had commenced to play softly, but there was none of the merriment generally associated with a midnight river picnic among the handful of men and women. The moon was temporarily obscured, and it seemed as though some artist's hand had so dealt with the few electric lights that the men, with their pale faces and white shirt-fronts, and the three or four women were like some ghostly figures in some somber procession. Only the music kept up the pretense that this was in any way an ordinary excursion. Among the human element there was an air of tenseness which seemed rather to increase as they passed into the shadowy reaches of the river.

"You have been ill, I am afraid?" Francis said tentatively.

"If you will," she answered. "But my illness is of the soul. I have become one of a type," she went on, "of which you will find many examples here. We started life thinking that it was clever to despise the conventional and the known, and to seek always for the daring and the unknown. New experiences were what we craved for. I married a wonderful husband. I broke his heart and still looked for new things. I had a daughter of whom I was fond—she ran away with my chauffeur and left me; a son whom I adored, and he was killed in the war; a lover who told me that he worshiped me, who spent every penny I had and made me the laughing-stock of town. I am still looking for new things."

"Sir Timothy's parties are generally supposed to provide them," Francis observed.

The woman shrugged her shoulders.

"So far, they seem very much like anybody else's," she said. "The fight might have been amusing, but no women were allowed. The rest was very wonderful in its way, but that is all. I am still hoping for what we are to see downstairs."

They heard Sir Timothy's voice a few yards away, and turned to look at him. He had just come from below, and had paused opposite a man who had been standing a little apart from the others, one of the few who was wearing an overcoat, as though he felt the cold. In the background were the two servants who had guarded the gangway.

"Mr. Manuel Loito," Sir Timothy said, "—or shall I say Mr. Shopland?—my invited guests are welcome. I have only one method of dealing with uninvited ones."

The two men suddenly stepped forward. Shopland made no protest, attempted no struggle. They lifted him off his feet as though he were a baby, and a moment later there was a splash in the water. They threw a life-belt after him.

"Always humane, you see," Sir Timothy remarked as he leaned over the side. "Ah! I see that even in his overcoat our friend is swimmer enough to reach the bank. You find our methods harsh, Ledsam?" he asked, turning a challenging gaze toward the latter.

Francis, who had been watching Shopland come to the surface, shrugged his shoulders. He delayed answering for a moment while he watched the detective, disdaining the life-belt, swim to the opposite shore.

"I suppose that under the circumstances," Francis said, "he was prepared to take his risk."

"You should know best about that," Sir Timothy rejoined. "I wonder whether you would mind looking after Lady Cynthia? I shall be busy for a few moments."

FRANCIS stepped across the deck toward where Lady Cynthia had been sitting by her host's side. They had passed into the mouth of a tree-hung strip of the river. The engine was suddenly shut off. A gong was sounded. There was a murmur—almost a sob of relief—as the little sprinkling of men and women rose hastily to their feet and made their way toward the companion-way. Downstairs, in the saloon, with its satinwood panels and rows of swing chairs, heavy curtains were drawn across the port-holes; all outside light was shut out from the place. At the farther end, raised slightly from the floor, was a sanded circle. Sir Timothy made his way to one of the pillars by its side and turned around to face the little company of his guests. His voice, though it seemed scarcely raised above a whisper, was extraordinarily clear and distinct. Even Francis, who, with Lady Cynthia, had found seats only just inside the door, could hear every word he said.

"My friends," he began, "you have often before been my guests at such small fights as we have been able to arrange in as unorthodox a manner as possible between professional boxers. There has been some novelty about them, but on the last occasion I think it was generally observed that they had become a little too professional, a little ultra-scientific. There was something which they lacked. With that something I am hoping to provide you tonight. . . . . Thank you, Sir Edgar," he murmured, leaning down toward his neighbor.

He held his cigarette in the flame of a match which the other had kindled. Francis, who was watching intently, was puzzled at the expression with which for a moment, as he straightened himself, Sir Timothy glanced down the room, seeking for Lady Cynthia's eyes. In a sense it was as though he were seeking for something he needed—approbation, sympathy, understanding.

"Our hobby, as you know, has been reality," he continued. "That is what we have not always been able to achieve. Tonight I offer you reality. There are two men here, one an East End coster, the other an Italian until lately associated with an itinerant vehicle of musical production. These two men have not outlived sensation, as I fancy so many of us have. They hate one another to the death. I forget their surnames, but Giuseppe has stolen Jim's girl, is living with her at the present moment, and proposes to keep her. Jim has sworn to have the lives of both of them. Jim's career, in its way, is interesting to us. He has already spent six years in prison for manslaughter, and a year for a brutal assault upon a constable. Giuseppe was tried in his native country for a particularly fiendish murder, and escaped, owing, I believe, to some legal technicality. That, however, has nothing to do with the matter. These men have sworn to fight to the death; and the girl, I understand, is willing to return to Jim if he should be successful, or to remain with Giuseppe if he should show himself able to retain her. The fight between these men, my friends, has been transferred from Seven Dials for your entertainment. It will take place before you here and now."

THERE was a little shiver among the audience. Francis, almost to his horror, was unable to resist the feeling of queer excitement which stole through his veins. A few yards away, Lady Isabel seemed to have become transformed. She was leaning forward in her chair, her eyes glowing, her lips parted, rejuvenated, dehumanized. Francis' immediate companion, however, rather surprised him. Her eyes were fixed intently upon Sir Timothy's. She seemed to have been weighing every word he had spoken. There was none of that hungry pleasure in her face which shone from the other woman's and was reflected in the faces of many of the others. She seemed to be bracing herself for a shock. Sir Timothy looked over his shoulder toward the door which opened upon the sanded space.

"You can bring your men along," he directed.

One of the attendants promptly made his appearance. He was holding tightly by the arm a man of apparently thirty years of age, shabbily dressed, barefooted, without collar or necktie, with a mass of black hair which looked as though it had escaped the care of any barber for many weeks. His complexion was sallow; he had high

cheek-bones and a receding chin, which gave him rather the appearance of a fox. He shrank a little from the lights as though they hurt his eyes, and all the time he looked furtively back to the door, through which in a moment or two his rival was presently escorted. The latter was a young man of stockier build, ill-conditioned, and with the brutal face of the lowest of his class. Two of his front teeth were missing, and there was a livid mark on the side of his cheek. He looked neither to the right nor to the left. His eyes were fixed upon the other man, and they looked death.

"The gentleman who first appeared," Sir Timothy observed, stepping up into the sanded space but still half facing the audience, "is Giuseppe, the Lothario of this little act. The other is Jim, the wronged husband. You know their story. Now, Jim," he added, turning toward the Englishman, "I place in your trousers pocket these notes —two hundred pounds, you will perceive. I place in the trousers pocket of Giuseppe here notes to the same amount. I understand you have a little quarrel to fight out. The one who wins will naturally help himself to the other's money, together with that other little reward which I imagine was the first cause of your quarrel. Now. . . . . Let them go."

Sir Timothy resumed his seat and leaned back in leisurely fashion. The two attendants solemnly released their captives. There was a moment's intense silence. The two men seemed fencing for position. There was something stealthy and horrible about their movements as they crept around one another. Francis realized what it was, almost as the little sobbing breath from those of the audience who still retained any emotion, showed him that they too foresaw what was going to happen. Both men had drawn knives from their belts. It was murder which had been let loose.

Francis found himself almost immediately upon his feet. His whole being seemed crying out for interference. Lady Cynthia's death-white face and pleading eyes seemed like the echo of his own passionate aversion to what was taking place. Then he met Sir Timothy's gaze across the room, and he remembered his promise. Under no conditions was he to protest or interfere. He set his teeth and resumed his seat. . . . . The fight went on.

There were little sobs and tremors of excitement, strange banks of silence. Both men seemed out of condition. The sound of their hoarse breathing was easily heard against the curtain of spellbound silence. For a time their knives stabbed the empty air, but from the first the end seemed certain. The Englishman attacked wildly. His adversary waited his time, content with avoiding the murderous blows struck at him, striving all the time to steal underneath the other's guard. And then, almost without warning, it was all over. Jim was on his back in a crumpled heap. There was a horrid stain upon his coat. The other man was kneeling by his side, hate, glaring out of his eyes, guiding all the time the rising and falling of his knife. There was one more shriek—then silence—only the sound of the victor's breathing as he rose slowly from his ghastly task. . . . . Sir Timothy rose to his feet and waved his hand. The curtain went down.

"On deck, if you please, ladies and gentlemen," he said calmly.

No one stirred. A woman began to sob. A fat, unhealthy-looking man in front of Francis reeled over in a dead faint. Two other of the guests near him had risen from their seats and were shouting aimlessly like lunatics. Even Francis was conscious of that temporary imprisonment of the body due to his lacerated nerves. Only the clinging of Lady Cynthia to his arm kept him from rushing from the place.

"You are faint?" he whispered hoarsely.

"Upstairs—air!" she faltered.

THEY rose to their feet. The sound of Sir Timothy's voice reached them as they ascended the stairs.

"On deck, everyone, if you please," he insisted. "Refreshments are being served there. There are inquisitive people who watch my launch, and it is inadvisable to remain here long."

People hurried out then as though their one desire was to escape from the scene of the tragedy. Lady Cynthia, still clinging to Francis' arm, led him to the farthermost corner of the launch. There were real tears in her eyes; her breath was coming in little sobs.

"Oh, it was horrible!" she cried. "Horrible! Mr. Ledsam—I can't help it—I never want to speak to Sir Timothy again!"

One final horror arrested for a moment the sound of voices. There was a dull splash in the river. Something had been thrown overboard. . . . . The orchestra be-

gan to play dance music. Conversation suddenly burst out. Everyone was hysterical. A peer of the realm, red-eyed and shaking like an aspen leaf, was drinking champagne out of the bottle. Everyone seemed to be trying to outvie the other in loud conversation, in outrageous mirth. Lady Isabel, with a glass of champagne in her hand, leaned back toward Francis.

"Well," she asked, "how are you feeling, Mr. Ledsam?"

"As though I had spent half an hour in hell," he answered.

She screamed with laughter.

"Hear this man," she called out, "who will send any poor ragamuffin to the gallows if his fee is large enough! Of course," she added, turning back to him, "I ought to remember you are a normal person, and tonight's entertainment was not for normal persons. For myself I am grateful to Sir Timothy. For a few moments of this aching aftermath of life, I forgot."

Suddenly the music stopped. Sir Timothy came up on deck. On either side of him was a man in ordinary dinner-clothes. The babel of voices ceased. Everyone was oppressed by some vague likeness. A breathless silence ensued.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Sir Timothy said, and once more the smile upon his lips assumed its most mocking curve, "let me introduce you to the two artists who have given us tonight such a realistic performance—Signor Giuseppe Elito, Signor Carlos Marlini. I had the good fortune," he went on, "to witness this very marvelous performance in a small music-hall at Palermo, and I was able to induce the two actors to pay us a visit over here. . . . . Steward, these gentlemen will take some champagne."

The two Sicilians raised their glasses and bowed expectantly to the little company. They received, however, a much greater tribute to their performance than the applause which they had been expecting. There reigned everywhere a deadly, stupefied silence. Only a half-stifled sob broke from Lady Cynthia's lips as she leaned over the rail, her face buried in her hands, her whole frame shaking.

CHAPTER XXXVI

FRANCIS and Margaret sat in the rose-garden on the following morning. Their conversation was a little disjointed, as the conversation of lovers in a secluded and beautiful spot should be, but they came back often to the subject of Sir Timothy.

"If I have misunderstood your father," Francis declared, "and I admit that I have, it has been to some extent his own fault. To me he was always the deliberate scoffer against any code of morals, a rebel against the law, even if not a criminal in actual deeds. I honestly believed that the Walled House was the scene of disreputable orgies, that your father was behind Fairfax in that cold-blooded murder, and that he was responsible in some sinister way for the disappearance of Reggie Wilmore. Most of these things seem to have been shams, like the fight last night."

She moved uneasily in her place.

"I am glad I did not see that," she said with a shiver.

"I think," he went on, "that the reason why your father insisted upon Lady Cynthia's and my presence there was that he meant it as a sort of allegory. Half the vices in life he claims are unreal."

MARGARET passed her arm through his and leaned a little toward him.

"If you knew just one thing I have never told you," she confided, "I think that you would feel sorry for him. I do, more and more every day, because in a way that one thing is my fault."

Notwithstanding the warm sunshine, she suddenly shivered. Francis took her hands in his. They were cold and lifeless.

"I know that one thing dear," he told her quietly.

She looked at him stonily. There was a questioning fear in her eyes.

"You know—"

"I know that your father killed Oliver Hilditch."

She suddenly broke out into a stream of words. There was passion in her tone and in her eyes. She was almost the accuser.

"My father was right, then!" she exclaimed. "He told me this morning that he believed that it was to you or to your friend at Scotland Yard that Walter had told his story. But you don't know—you don't know how terrible the temptation was—how—you see I say it quite coolly—how Oliver Hilditch deserved to die. He was trusted by my father in South America, and he deceived him; he forged the letters which induced me to marry him.

It was part of his scheme of revenge. This was the first time we had any of us met since. I told my father the truth that afternoon. He knew for the first time how my marriage came about. My husband had prayed me to keep silent. I refused. . . . . Then he became like a devil. . . . . We were there, we three, that night after you left; and Francis, as I live, if my father had not killed him, I should have!"

"There was a time when I believed that you had," he reminded her. "I didn't behave like a pedagogic upholder of the letter of the law then, did I?"

She drew closer to him.

"You were wonderful," she whispered.

"Dearest, your father has nothing to fear from me," he assured her tenderly. "On the contrary, I think that I can show him the way to safety."

She rose impulsively to her feet.

"He will be here directly," she said. "He promised to come across at half-past twelve. Let us go and meet him. But, Francis—"

FOR a single moment she crept into his arms. Their lips met; her eyes shone into his. . . . . He held her away from him a moment later. The change was amazing. She was no longer a tired woman. She had become a girl again. Her eyes were soft with happiness; the little lines had gone from about her mouth; she walked with all the spring of youth and happiness.

"It is marvelous," she whispered. "I never dreamed that I should ever be happy again."

They crossed the rustic bridge which led on to the lawn. Lady Cynthia came out of the house to meet them. She showed no signs of fatigue, but her eyes and her tone were full of anxiety.

"Margaret," she cried, "do you know that the hall is filled with your father's luggage, and that the car is ordered to take him to Southampton directly after lunch?"

Margaret and Francis exchanged glances.

"Sir Timothy may change his mind," the latter observed. "I have news for him directly he arrives."

On the other side of the wall they heard the whinnying of the old mare, the sound of galloping feet from all directions.

"Here he comes!" Lady Cynthia exclaimed. "I shall go and meet him."

Francis laid his hand upon her arm.

"Let me have a word with him first," he begged.

She hesitated.

"You are not going to say anything—that will make him want to go away?"

"I am going to tell him something which I think will keep him at home."

Sir Timothy came through the postern gate, a moment or two later. He waved his hat and crossed the lawn in their direction. Francis went alone to meet him, and as he drew near, was conscious of a little shock. His host, although he held himself bravely, seemed to have aged in the night.

"I want one word with you, sir, in your study, please," Francis said.

SIR TIMOTHY shrugged his shoulders and led the way. He turned to wave his hand once more to Margaret and Lady Cynthia, however, and he looked with approval at the luncheon-table which a couple of servants were laying under the cedar tree.

"Wonderful thing, these *al fresco* meals," he declared. "I hope Hedges wont forget the maraschino with the melons. . . . . Come into my den, Ledsam."

He led the way in courtly fashion. He was the ideal host leading a valued guest to his sanctum for a few moments' pleasant conversation. But when they arrived in the little beamed room and the door was closed, his manner changed. He looked searchingly, almost challengingly, at Francis.

"You have news for me?" he asked.

"Yes!" Francis answered.

Sir Timothy shrugged his shoulders. He threw himself a little wearily into an easy-chair. His hands strayed out toward a cigarette box. He selected one and lit it.

"I expected your friend Mr. Shopland," he murmured. "I hope he is none the worse for his ducking."

"Shopland is a fool," Francis replied. "He has nothing to do with this affair, anyway. . . . . I have something to give you, Sir Timothy."

He took the two papers from his pocket and handed them over.

"I bought these from John Walter the day before yesterday," he continued. "I gave him two hundred pounds for them. The money was just in time. He caught a steamer for Australia late in the afternoon. I had this wireless from him this morning."

Sir Timothy studied the two documents, read the wireless. There was little change in his face. Only for a single moment his lips quivered.

"What does this mean?" he asked, rising to his feet with the documents in his hand.

"It means that those papers are yours to do what you like with. I drafted the second one so that you should be absolutely secure against any further attempt at blackmail. As a matter of fact, though, Walter is on his last legs. I doubt whether he will live to land in Australia."

"You know that I killed Oliver Hilditch?" Sir Timothy said, his eyes fixed upon the other's.

"I know that you killed Oliver Hilditch," Francis repeated. "If I had been Margaret's father, I think that I should have done the same."

Sir Timothy seemed suddenly very much younger. The droop of his lips was no longer pathetic. There was a little humorous twitch there.

"You, the great upholder of the law!" he murmured.

"I have heard the story of Oliver Hilditch's life," Francis replied. "I was partly responsible for saving him from the gallows. I repeat what I have said. And if you will—"

HE held out his hand. Sir Timothy hesitated for one moment. Instead of taking it, he laid his hand upon Francis' shoulder.

"Ledsam," he said, "we have thought wrong things of one another. I thought you a prig, moral to your finger-tips, with the morality of the law and the small places. Perhaps I was tempted for that reason to give you a wrong impression of myself. But you must understand this. Though I have had my standard and lived up to it all my life, I am something of a black sheep. A man stole my wife. I did not trouble the law courts. I killed him."

"I have the blood of generations of lawyers in my veins," Francis declared, "but I have read many a divorce case in which I think it would have been better and finer if the two men had met as you and that man met."

"I was born with the love of fighting in my bones," Sir Timothy went on. "In my younger days, I fought in every small war in the Southern hemisphere. I fought, as you know, in our own war. I have loved to see men fight honestly and fairly."

"It is a man's hobby," Francis pronounced.

"I encouraged you deliberately to think," Sir Timothy went on, "what half the world thinks—that my parties at the Walled House were mysterious orgies of vice. They have, as a matter of fact, never been anything of the sort. The tragedies which are supposed to have taken place on my launch, have been just as much mock tragedies as last night's, only I have not previously chosen to take the audiences into my confidence. . . . . The greatest pugilists in the world have fought in my gymnasium, often, if you will, under illegal conditions, but there has never been a fight that was not fair."

"I believe that," Francis said.

"And there is another matter for which I take some blame," Sir Timothy went on, "—the matter of Fairfax and Victor Bidlake. They were neither of them young men for whose loss the world is any the worse. Fairfax to some extent imposed upon me. He was brought to the Walled House by a friend who should have known better. He sought my confidence. The story he told was exactly that of the mock drama upon the launch. Bidlake had taken his wife. He had no wish to appeal to the courts. He wished to fight, a point of view with which I entirely sympathized. I arranged a fight between the two. Bidlake funked it and never turned up.

"My advice to Fairfax was, whenever he met Bidlake, to give him the soundest thrashing he could. That night at Soto's I caught sight of Fairfax some time before dinner. He was talking to the woman who had been his wife, and he had evidently been drinking. He drew me on one side. 'Tonight,' he told me, 'I am going to settle accounts with Bidlake.' 'Where?' I asked. 'Here,' he answered. He went out to the theater, I upstairs to dine. That was the extent of the knowledge I possessed which enabled me to predict some unwonted happening that night. Fairfax was a bedrugged and bedrunken decadent, who had not the courage afterward to face what he had done. That is all."

THE hand slipped from Francis' shoulder. Francis, with a smile, held out his own. They stood there for a moment with clasped hands—a queer, detached moment, as it seemed to Francis, in a life which during the last few months had been full of vivid sensations. Sir Timothy seemed

to have become somehow transformed. It was as though he had dropped a mask and were showing a more human, a more kindly self.

"You'll be good to Margaret?" Sir Timothy begged. "She's had a wretched time."

Francis smiled confidently.

"I'm going to make up for it, sir," he promised. "And this South American trip," he continued, as they turned toward the French-windows, "you'll call that off?"

Sir Timothy hesitated. "I am not quite sure."

WHEN they reached the garden, Lady Cynthia was alone. She scarcely glanced at Francis. Her eyes were anxiously fixed upon his companion.

"Margaret has gone in to make the cocktails herself," she explained. "We have both sworn off absinthe for the rest of our lives, and we know Hedges can't be trusted to make one without."

"I'll go and help her," Francis declared.

Lady Cynthia passed her arm through Sir Timothy's.

"I want to know about South America," she begged. "The sight of those trunks worries me."

Sir Timothy's casual reply was obviously a subterfuge. They crossed the lawn and the rustic bridge, almost in silence, passing underneath the pergola of roses to the sheltered garden at the farther end. Then Lady Cynthia paused.

"You are not going to South America," she pleaded, "—alone?"

Sir Timothy took her hands.

"My dear," he said, "listen, please, to my confession. I am a fraud. I am not a purveyor of new sensations for a decadent troop of weary, fashionable people. I am a fraud sometimes even to myself. I have had good luck in material things. I have had bad luck in the precious, the sentimental side of life. It has made something of an artificial character of me, on the surface at any rate. I am really a simple, elderly man who loves fresh air, clean, honest things, games, and a healthy life. I have no ambitions except those connected with sport. I don't even want to climb to the topmost niches in the world of finance. I think you have looked at me through the wrong-colored spectacles. You have had a whimsical fancy for a character which does not exist."

"What I have seen," Lady Cynthia answered, "I have seen through no spectacles at all—with my own eyes. But what I have seen, even, does not count. There is something else."

"I am within a few weeks of my fiftieth birthday," Sir Timothy reminded her. "And you, I believe, are twenty-nine."

"My dear man," Lady Cynthia assured him fervently, "you are the only person in the world who can keep me from feeling forty-nine."

"And your people—"

"Heavens! My people, for the first time in their lives, will count me a brilliant success," Lady Cynthia declared. "You'll probably have to lend Dad money, and I shall be looked upon as the fairy child who has restored the family fortunes."

Sir Timothy leaned a little toward her.

"Last of all," he said, and this time his voice was not quite so steady, "are you really sure that you care for me, dear? Because I have loved you so long, and I have wanted love so badly, and it is so hard to believe—"

It was the moment, it seemed to her, for which she had prayed. She was in his arms, tired no longer, with all the splendid fire of life in her love-lit eyes and throbbing pulses. Around them the bees were humming, and a soft summer breeze shook the roses and brought little wafts of perfume from the carnation bed.

"There is nothing in life," Lady Cynthia murmured brokenly, "so wonderful as this."

FRANCIS and Margaret came out from the house, the former carrying a silver tray. They had spent a considerable time over their task, but Lady Cynthia and Sir Timothy were still absent. Hedges followed them, a little worried.

"Shall I ring the gong, madam?" he asked Margaret. "Cook has taken such pains with her omelette."

"I think you had better, Hedges," Margaret assented.

The gong rang out—and rang again. Presently Lady Cynthia and Sir Timothy appeared upon the bridge and crossed the lawn. They were walking a little apart. Lady Cynthia was looking down at some roses which she had gathered. Sir Timothy's unconcern seemed a trifle overdone. Margaret laughed very softly.

"A stepmother, Francis!" she whispered. "Just fancy Cynthia as a stepmother!"

THE END.

Strategy Hawkins Gives Counsel

When a business expert like Mr. Woolley writes fiction, you may be sure it deals largely with facts—and contains suggestions of great value to any business man.

By Edward Mott Woolley

STRATEGY Hawkins entered the general office of the Cast Iron Chair Company and laid his card on a table bearing the legend, *"Information."*

"Kindly take it to Mr. Judkin Barnes, the president," he said to the tousled youth who presided.

The boy picked up the card, inspecting it suspiciously. Like Hawkins himself, it was somewhat unusual:

HAWKINS
Strategy Business Counsel
Metropolis

"What's your business here?" demanded the young autocrat.

"At the present moment, an engagement with Chief Barnes," returned Hawkins politely. "It is now exactly ten o'clock—the hour designated."

The youth resumed the book he had been reading, "The Lone Pirate," merely observing: "You'll have to wait; the boss has got somebody on the mat already."

Hawkins turned to take a seat, when an electric bulb, hitherto dark, flashed into life just to the right; and stepping over to read a placard on the wall thus illuminated, Hawkins' eyes met the following:

Keep Smiling
But Don't Park Here
This Is
Our Busy Day

Hawkins read the message. Then with a firm but measured tread he crossed the room, reached inside the rail and manipulated the gate catch. A second later he had the youth by the left ear.

"Now show me to the president's cave," he said; and with protesting howls the boy led the way.

THE dignity of Mr. Judkin Barnes, president of the great Cast Iron Chair Company, was somewhat offended by the unseemly entrance of this ill-matched pair. But Hawkins released the youth, bade him safe return, and shook hands with Barnes.

"You will pardon me," he observed, removing his overcoat, "but in calling to make my personal report on 'Contact' in

your organization, Mr. Barnes, I saw opportunity to emphasize at the beginning my point of view. An office-boy is invariably a symptom, or let us say an echo, of some deeper malady. This chap who presides at the front door of your establishment amuses himself to the discomfiture of callers. Here we start with bad contact.

"But dismiss the incident, Mr. Barnes. . . . . Ah, thank you—just the brand of cigars I fancy! Glad to find you at liberty despite the decree of the guardian of the moat. Now Mr. Barnes, please understand I am not here to burden you with details of the psychological studies my men have made, but merely to picturize the situation—"

"You have begun well," agreed Judkins Barnes, who was a polished but worried gentleman of fifty, with the conventional shave.

Hawkins smiled a little grimly.

"My men, he said, "are all specialists. They get me the facts; my own function is to deduce and construct. You were good enough to give me *carte blanche* to probe as I pleased, to discover why the Cast Iron Chair Company had been obliged to pass three dividends though enjoying larger sales than ever. The selling cost had gone up—"

"In a most incredible and mystifying way," interpolated Barnes.

"Mysteries are often mere combinations of egotism and ignorance, Mr. Barnes. To a dog, a mirror is an unsolvable mystery because his only method of approaching a solution is with his nose—and mirrors cannot be explained by scent.

"Neither can your rising cost of selling cast-iron chairs be explained by Charley Bing, your head cost-wizard," Hawkins added.

"I fear I have trusted too much to Bing," confessed Barnes. "Until you outlined your theory of Contact at your office six weeks ago, I had supposed Bing to be pretty much the whole works."

"Bing thought so too!" exclaimed Hawkins. "Now we come to the point: Ego is the root of bad contact. Once I knew the bassoonist in an orchestra, and unless the director threatened him with the baton, he'd think he was the whole overture."

"Your metaphor makes me think that Bing isn't the only man here who has a wrong estimate of his *solo obbligato* abilities," confessed Barnes. "Take George Tables, my statistician—"

"Ah, yes, Barnes; I have a report on him. He plays his piccolo with tremendous ego, to drown out Tootwell of your Bureau of Public Relations. Tootwell—let us illustrate—plays one of the trombones, and makes a good deal of noise."

"Please don't cast reflections on our Bureau of Public Relations!" pleaded Barnes. "The noted Professor Tootwell is a diplomat and scholar."

"I know him well," said Hawkins. "You pay him ten thousand dollars a year; but I think he'd be worth twenty thousand dollars if you reorganized his department and made it the 'Bureau of Private Relations.' In my town Sunny Jim Smiles draws a fat roll every week as Adjustment Manager for the Wrangle Works; but his ex-wife has sued him seven times for unpaid alimony.

"I'VE often observed," added Hawkins, leaning back in his big leather chair and blowing rings, "that some men never hear their own dogs bark, but can't sleep if the hound across the street discovers the moon. Near my office in Metropolis is a building under construction, and the iron beams are put together by the Noiseless Riveting Concern; yet in the office I must wear ear-muffs.

"Now Barnes, ear-muffs to deaden the noise of the other fellow should never be necessary in an organization. If a chap gets an ego and loses sight of his proportions, it's bad contact and costs you money.

"I was in a paper-weight factory last week. The invention chief didn't give a whoop about the sales-manager's troubles. He kept inventing better weights so fast that half the stuff in the stock-rooms was junk before the salesman could sell it. Also the sales-manager usually had the credit-man sitting on a tack for interfering with *his* (sales-manager's) business. The raw-material man wrote a sassy note to the credit-man, on a pink 'rush' sheet: 'You keep out—I can run *my* department.'

"Each man was the great *Me*. Now, look here, Barnes; the most important of all salesmanship is ability to sell oneself to the other man. That's Contact."

Hawkins took from his pocket a typewritten memorandum.

"Your office manager is one Bitewell—" he began. "A snappy chap, but—"

"An admirable disciplinarian," defended Barnes. "Bitewell was promoted to be office manager by our Mr. Bean, chief of

personnel. Why, Bitewell had the fewest demerits of any man eligible!"

"Demerits!" exclaimed Hawkins, throwing away his burned-out cigar. "They are the hardest microbes to catch and identify. Smallpox and Asiatic cholera are a Sunday-school picnic beside them. We've been making a study of demerits in your establishment, Barnes, and we find that eighty-nine per cent of your catch is not of the Demeritus family at all."

"How so?" demanded Barnes.

"Allow me to illustrate."

Hawkins produced more data, and continued:

"You have a girl in your offices named Violet MacGetit, who acquired one hundred and eighty-two demerits last month, according to Bitewell's count. Her job is to fill in those purple, red and green cost-figures, and she was charged with helping herself to green ink in the supply room without a requisition. The offense cost her ninety-three demerits."

"A rule of the house!" declared Barnes. "Say, Hawkins—"

"Excuse me, Barnes: I was about to remark that Violet is one of those exceptional persons who does not allow rules to stand in the way of duty. Certain green-ink figures were needed before noon by Bing, your cost man, and Violet's supply of green had been abstracted. Knowing that every requisition must be O.K.'d by your assistant treasurer,—who happened to be at the golf links' quarterly convention,—she cut corners and got the ink—just as Teddy Roosevelt got the Panama Canal.

"I'll tell you something else Violet got," spurted Hawkins, feeling in his vest pocket for a match. "She got a large and ugly scar on the vengeance lobe of her brain, due to those ninety-three bogus demerits. And believe me, Barnes, she'll hand it back to the Cast Iron Chair Company—trust Violet! And when she does, it wont show up in the cost items, either.

HAWKINS got up and sat on the edge of Barnes' desk, oblivious of the fact that sitting on desks fetched twenty-seven demerits. "Scars! Why, Bean and Bitewell have left more scars on the people in your iron-chair ranch, Barnes, than your statistician could tabulate in nine years.

"What's that? Yes, you're right, Barnes. Bean and Bitewell didn't mean it. They're good fellows at home, and sing the babies to sleep. But they never studied the theory of scars."

"It looks interesting," allowed Barnes, calming a bit.

"Over in the Imperial-Jenkins Mills at Factory Center, I once made a special study of scars," explained Hawkins. "Jenkins had accumulated his money in an era of easy profits and loose competition; but when aforesaid competition grew taut, he sent for me to find out where the resistance was. You know there are times when something you can't locate holds your car back.

"It was mostly scars. Jenkins himself was a real humane chap, but he'd been playing golf mostly, and leaving the works to Booter, his manager. Booter had come up from the ranks, and in his varied career had been so tattooed himself with the scars of bad contact, that he thought tattooing was the correct fashion.

"Yes, Booter had all sorts of implements to scar up men's souls. He could cuss with a fair vocabulary when he thought it necessary, but usually he used more subtlety. Booter was a judge of fine art, and could burn men up with his satire and eat into their loyalty until there were only hate and scars left. A gradual accumulation of scars ultimately results in the corrosion of originality.

"Well sir, my observers, acting on my instructions, took a secret vote at the Imperial-Jenkins Mills to learn how much platonic love exuded—and Booter was elected as Grand Tattoo Chief."

BARNES was silent, reflecting perhaps on the curious truth that he hadn't even thought of the theory of scars.

"Hawkins," he said at length, a tear in one eye from cigar smoke, "you've surely voiced a truism. I myself am scarred and seared by memories of wickedly bad contact; and I've passed the scars along to others, never thinking that every scar would cost me enough lucre to pay one of those modiste's bills I find on the breakfast-table."

"Unfortunately, we must talk in terms of dollars," regretted Hawkins, "and leave the higher aspect of scars to the preachers. And by the way, Barnes, your adjustment chief, Short, is also a tattoo-artist of no small repute."

"Short?" Barnes came to attention. "We pay him eight thousand dollars a year."

Hawkins dug down into his documents and brought to light a batch of carbon copies of letters.

"Listen," said Hawkins, "and observe his displeasing diction. Such letters cost more than breach of promise."

" 'Dear Sir: Your complaint has been handed to the different departments involved, and each reports that nothing can be done. You have no reasonable ground for asserting. . . . . Claim is not allowed.

Yours very truly,
B. Short.'

"SPEAKING of demerits recalls my Uncle Saul," volunteered Hawkins. "He reigned over his boys by assessing against them groups of tally-marks on a slate. Uncle Saul had taken this system from the practice of old Deacon Skinnem, who used it on his six sons—five of whom became the Skinnem gang of our town, while one grew rickets and died. Burglarizing the cake-box meant ten marks; extracting cider from the barrel with a straw, fifteen; sneezing during family prayers, twenty-five and so on up. One hundred demerits meant the woodshed and the trunk-strap.

"In doing penance for the calamity of the rickets, probably due to the strap, Uncle Saul flopped to the merit system used by our town philosopher, Billy Thinker, Ph. D. Billy reigned over his seven children with benign splendor and peace. His philosophy of contact was this:

" 'Let the boy want a radio set more than he wants the cake or cider, and fix things so he can get his choice by refraining—et cetera. And show him the scientific way to prevent sneezing during prayers, and make it worth his while not to sneeze.' "

Barnes seemed dazed; his forehead was corrugated.

"Your man Bitewell, in following my Uncle Saul's original philosophy, overlooks the element of incentive," Hawkins resumed. "From his records I ascertain that on January 23 he charged eight demerits against one Jankovic, in your sales-promotion department, for failure to have his inkwell on the right-hand rear margin of his desk, five inches from the corner, as prescribed in Bitewell's standard desk-regulations."

"I approved those regulations myself," admitted Barnes. "They seemed scientifically efficient. With the inkwell thus placed, Jankovic could dip his pen in the writing fluid with the fewest and quickest motions."

"Mathematically accurate," assented Hawkins. "But arithmetic, or even trigonometry, is not always the right ignition-system to fire unexploded impulses going through the human brain.

"Your records show, Barnes, that Jankovic quit his job next day; and my observers learned that he was employed immediately by your competitors, the Wooden Chair Concern. My men also learned that Jankovic had long desired to try out a plan of his own for writing peppy letters to your salesmen on the road, but had been held down by Bitewell to the deadening task of making out sales-quotas by arithmetical progression."

"You don't mean that Jankovic could write gingering letters?" demanded Barnes in surprise.

"Since quitting your employ," Hawkins explained, "he has developed extraordinary technique in metaphor and slang, and has used it to such good advantage for the Wooden Chair Concern that he's been offered double salary to ginger up salesmen elsewhere; but they wont let him go."

"And eight demerits for having his inkwell on the wrong location cost us Jankovic's services!" Barnes gnashed his molars.

"ALREADY Jankovic has cost the Cast Iron Chair Company maybe fifty thousand dollars in sales by your competitors," sighed Hawkins. "Bitewell's psychology was bad. He should have known how Jankovic's gray matter functioned, should have given him the incentive to exercise the genius clamoring for expression should have said to him, *sub rosa:*

" 'Now, Jankovic, just for expedience, keep your inkwell on the preordained spot —I'll appreciate it, old chap. But go ahead with your sales-letters, and if the inkwell gets out of place, I'll probably not have my glasses on.' "

"Besides losing Jankovic," reminded Hawkins, "it may cost you from fifty to one thousand dollars to hire and break in a man to take his place. Once it cost my father three buggies to harness a colt. The cost of harnessing men is less picturesque but more insidious."

"If you have no objection," muttered Barnes, "I'll call in Bing and see if there isn't some mathematical way of adding

these items under our heading, cost of doing business."

His finger was on an electric button, but Hawkins stopped him.

"No, Barnes; you can't add coal and potatoes; there are contact points in the human brain that don't fit into Bing's decimals. Turn a somersault, Barnes, and—"

"I don't get you," interrupted the president. "Somersault—huh?"

"Beg pardon," apologized Hawkins. "I spoke figuratively. I sometimes forget that my imagination has been cultivated more than some men's. I often advise my clients to take mental excursions—somersaults—out of the realms of pure mathematics into the romantic fields of—well, let us say for simplicity, the fields of thinkology.

"I might talk of psychodynamics or psychogeny, my dear Barnes. I might revert to our old friend Aristotle, who devoted decades to philosophical studies which hundreds of years later led indirectly to the invention of the psychodometer—an instrument which measures the duration of mental processes. Some brains show 'off' —no discharge.

"Ah, yes; the science of the mind and soul is a vast romance. To study it for financial profit, Barnes, would be reprehensible except that we benefit others financially also. But no psychodometer could ever measure the duration of the mental processes aroused in Jankovic's brain by those eight inkwell-demerits. His revenge will continue—with gradually diminishing force—for fifty-nine years, assuming he lives that long, and his machinations against the Cast Iron Chair Company during that period will cost it, let us guess, $769,064.42."

BARNES listened with mingled incredulity and astonishment. Then he smiled in a half-sardonic way and observed:

"Apparently it would pay us to hire a thug or gunman and have Jankovic put out of the way."

Hawkins sat up quickly, removed his cigar from his lips, and beamed his satisfaction.

"Your imagination is dawning, Barnes," he congratulated. "You are thinking in more elastic terms. But allow me to advise that your suggestion for the assassination of Jankovic be altered to read: 'Hire Jankovic instead of the thug. Get him back by offering him a small but increasing percentage of the profits on iron chairs.'

"Of course, to accomplish this might require the execution of your office manager Bitewell," reflected Hawkins.

"Couldn't we reform him?" pleaded Barnes. "A hypodermic shot of contact germs—"

"There is always hope," assented Hawkins. "The cortical substance enveloping Bitewell's brain has become toughened and hard to penetrate; but it's possible, Barnes.

"In fact, hereafter your big function as president of the Cast Iron Chair Company must be to break through the fibrous covering of men's intellects and inculcate the Science of Contact. Pardon me, Barnes. The only thing that can justify your fifty-thousand-dollar salary will be to take over the bulk of the big thinking—to recharge the battery in your anatomical attic."

BARNES' secretary came in to say that the weekly conference on inventions was in session; but Barnes waved the summons aside.

"Don't disturb me again unless the plant catches fire!" he ordered, and locked the door. "Go ahead, Hawkins."

"Your secretary's reference to inventions recalls a man named Canister, who years ago was a clerk in your slavery, Barnes. Remember him?"

"No," admitted the president. "Why should I?"

"That's the common slant of presidents," returned Hawkins. "Perhaps you've heard of the Bigfellow Electric Plow Company of Pennsylvania. Sam Bigfellow, head of the works, maintains a tolerable brain affinity with the men in his office through interlocking department committees. Every man rides on some merry-go-round. Bigfellow drops in on them sometimes, and also gets their cranial wavelets through shorthand reports, expurgated for him."

"I haven't time—" began Barnes.

"Through this method Bigfellow discovered Henry Canister, who is now his third vice-president, in charge of the Division of Psychology. After his discharge from your office, Barnes, Canister was a clerk for a time in the sales department of the Ash-wagon Manufacturing Company. In your establishment and in theirs he acquired so many invisible scars

that he'd come to consider himself a human worm. His spirit had a crack the whole length.

"Even in those days Canister was a thinker. He'd sit looking out of the window sometimes, seeing things that weren't there. His immediate boss was Hi Slatt, who'd come along and catch Canister in this gross dereliction of duty—*thinking!*

"Hi was strong on clapping his hands, and he'd call out to Canister: 'No loafing on the beach. Jump in and swim!'

"Canister told me he couldn't help looking out of the window, because what he really saw there was a new kind of ash-wagon. He was building it in his head.

"Hi Slatt, you see, had no method of probing to discover what Canister was thinking about. Canister had all sorts of visionary pictures floating around inside his occipital bone; but because he got no help in developing them, he silently bore the contumely of his associates for two years. Of course he didn't realize the value of his original emanations.

"CANISTER was fundamentally a thinker, not a doer. Few bosses, Barnes, ever catch the brain-waves of the thinkers; they don't use them. I can point out half a dozen thinkers in your own organization, but because you have no wave-finder, they are gradually becoming pickled in their own unused current. You'll 'can' them. You hurrah all the time for leg-stunts, rather than brains. The thinkers could discover new products and strategy, and automatically create bigger sales-quotas; but your quotas are built on the philosophy of the cat which climbs all the trees to catch the birds, but finds only the nestlings. It can't invent any scheme to lure the wise old feathers to *terra firma.*

"Anyhow, they misunderstood Canister—the whole gang at the Ash-wagon works. Some of the fellows took advantage of his unpopularity with Slatt, and handed him the sort of compliments you find in the antonyms.

"Then one day Canister exploded; all the ammunition inside him blew up, and for two minutes he became a doer; and in the fracas, Slatt bit a desk caster.

"Somehow, Canister landed in the Bigfellow Company, where he reverted to thinking. The Ash-wagon Company has long since gone to its mausoleum, but unquestionably Canister could have saved it. And even if Bigfellow had never discovered anybody else through his Psychology Division—which it had been my privilege to organize—Canister would have been dividend enough."

"Please let me have the names of the half-dozen thinkers you mentioned, in my offices," said Barnes in humility.

"YOU perceive that my investigators have not been idle," said Hawkins. "You also had in your employ for a year a young man named Ballance—a cognomen somewhat inappropriate because, like most inventive individuals, he was erratic. Now, Ballance—"

"I don't recall him," said Barnes.

"No; you've worn your reading-glasses too much, studying Bing's cost-figures. You'd have needed long-range spectacles to discover Ballance, who was just an incident of the stock-room. One summer when your man Blister was on his vacation—"

"Blister—head of our Parts Department? We have several Blisters."

"You have—far too many. It was Looie Blister of the Parts Room. Young Ballance originated a scheme for sorting parts while seated on a detachable sliding chair in front of the bins. It was working well when Blister came back.

"'What roller-coaster damness is this?' he shouted, according to our reports. 'Getthehell out o' here—this aint Coney Island!'

"One of my men trailed the subsequent career of young Ballance, who is now Chief of the Experimental Department of the Locomotive Works. Those bull-type engines are his conception."

"What kind of sliding chair was it that Ballance invented?" inquired Barnes with sudden interest. "We've been trying for years to develop a coasting chair for our line of special equipment. Perhaps this boy may have hit on the very idea we wanted."

"Quite likely," said Hawkins. "Blister broke up the chair with an ax after he fired Ballance, and it went into junk; but having learned of your engineers' efforts to invent just the right device, I sent one of my draftsmen to see Ballance and make a drawing. Ballance hadn't forgotten the incident. Ah, *scars!* But I got the idea."

From his leather case he took a blueprint.

"Great guns!" Barnes exclaimed, after studying the plan. "That young man solved our problem—yet we didn't know it."

Hawkins got up and took a turn about the room.

"Barnes," he went on, "your whole scheme of contact has been worse than a bride's biscuits. You have no cogs in your psychic machine that connect with the obscure phenomena taking place in the craniums of your men. Some folks imagine that *psychic* means only ghosts. It may also mean the science of the earth-bound mind. If Blister had recognized the symptoms of true inventive force, he would have pinned this youth Ballance then and there.

"But your front office had no cogs that connected with Blister's brain-phenomena, either," Hawkins went on relentlessly. "So Blister put over his discharge of the boy; and the ax episode never reached the president's inaccessible cavern, known as 'front office.'"

Barnes sat contemplating the blueprint with gulches of remorse and chagrin deeply set in his forehead.

"We've spent thousands of dollars on the invention of a sliding chair," he observed solemnly, "and here was the solution—junked by this bonehead Blister. Junked, Hawkins—think of it, *junked!*"

Hawkins took his seventh cigar and sat down again.

"Don't blame Blister too much," he cautioned. "There was no contact of minds to prevent such costly lapses. You've conducted no exploration of the inside of men's heads to discover what was happening there.

"The man immediately over Blister was one Billywill," he said, consulting his notes, "and over Billywill was Artie Sitwell, hereditary heir of your Vice-President Sitwell. Going still higher up, in succession were Bark, Battle and Petty. Not one of these men possessed even a grammar-school education in psychological research—*i. e.,* contact."

THE noon whistle broadcasted its joyful message, and Barnes proposed an adjournment to the club for luncheon. On the way out, the president paused to ring an inexorably visaged timeclock.

"It's a rule we have," he explained. "Makes for democracy—see! Even the president punches in and out."

Hawkins sighed. Shallowness in logic always grieved him.

"You will forgive me, because you wish my report to be honest no matter if brutal," he said. "I've studied some hundreds of plants where the president pulled the timeclock for democracy's sake. I know the reaction of your proletariat. Democracy must be sincere. . . . . Wait a moment."

From his capacious case Hawkins took a typewritten page.

"I had a man working incognito in this office for six weeks to get the mind of the staff on various points," he elucidated. "Here are a few remarks by Miss Carrie Katz on your boasted democracy. She wrote it, for confidential circulation, in the form of an 'Ode to the Timeclock.'"

Barnes grew dizzy with rage as he read Carrie's poem:

> The Timeclock Barnsey comes punching
> Sometimes roundabout ten,
> And likewise when lunching
> He punches, and lunches on hen.
>
> The Timeclock Barnsey comes punching
> Maybe roundabout three,
> Having finished his lunching
> He punches, and smiles upon me.
>
> The Timeclock . . . .

"I'll discharge that poetical stenographer!" blustered the president. "The hypocritical hussy! She fawns on me—"

"Easy!" advised Hawkins soothingly. "The worst is yet to come. In order that you might realize how little you knew of mental phenomena due to bad contact in your organization, I have compiled a few hundred remarks—"

AT the curb they found Barnes' limousine purring. Its aristocratic and costly luxury were badly emphasized in contrast with the swarming horde from the Cast Iron Chair Company's shops.

"I think we'll walk over and take a trolley-car," suggested Hawkins. . . . . "No, don't misunderstand me, Barnes. I like your big gas-hack. Your chauffeur has the true buckram, and the poodle the proper perk. Your equipage is none too good for a man of your self-achievement. But from the standpoint of contact, Barnes, it would be better not to flaunt your chariot too much around the Works until you establish a coalition of minds.

"Over at Steelburg," he added, "I tried a little experiment, with the aid of President Isaac Swell of the Metal Watchdog

Works. He parked his sixteen-cylinder Imperator indefinitely in his garage at home and bought a secondhand four-cylinder Skidmore runabout.

"Thereafter he drove alone to the office every day in his Skidmore. On the third day a tire I had supplied blew out two blocks from the plant just after quitting time; and getting into the greasy overalls I had furnished, he began to change the tire like a real game sport.

"Sure! Inside thirty seconds one thousand one hundred and fifty men from the Works were assisting, and calling him 'Ike.'

"That's how they started their contact policy at the Watchdog Works. I guess he's 'Ike' for good. What? . . . . I should say so. Ike Swell today can tell you just how his office cat thinks."

Barnes dismissed his limousine and ordered the chauffeur to leave quietly by the alley back of the heat-treating plant.

AS Hawkins and Barnes walked over to the trolley-car they mingled with hundreds of the Cast Iron Chair Company's workers, headed afoot toward frugal repasts, and Hawkins remarked with a tone of regret:

"Unless you establish contact, Barnes, you'll probably fire forty per cent of these men within the year and hire an equal number to take their places; of the other sixty per cent, half will quit, and you'll have to fill their places too. The quits and discharges will cost you as much as a chorus-girl charges to desert a millionaire hubby.

"Tying a can to a good man is expensive, Barnes; but sometimes it's costly to keep a man who should be let through the trap-door. Men of that kind are often crafty. You simply can't get them out. I know one instance where it cost the Acid Plant at Two Bridges twenty-seven thousand dollars to fire a foreman."

"Some grafter must have put up a job," decided Barnes.

"Yes," Hawkins assented cheerfully. "I got the cash. You see, it was this way:

"The foreman in question had been a rat-catcher in his youth, and hadn't outgrown his rodent-snaring methods. In his ratting days he took big contracts to exterminate the pests, using ferrets and long-handled tongs. So when he became a factory foreman, he still used tongs, so to speak. *Zip!*—he had a workman by one ear. *Zing!*—he got another by the nose. *Zang, zung, zook!* The tong method of contact was quick and exciting. But the boss couldn't locate the short circuit.

"Ah!" Hawkins concluded. "That Acid Plant developed such fast labor turnover that the cost of hiring and breaking in men gave the manager *angina pectoris*. He sent for me. Yes, I had quite a chase to run down this foreman, and my bill was something more than the twenty-seven thousand dollars I mentioned."

Barnes groaned. "Do you mean that you are going to charge me that much?" he demanded.

"I'll clip off the seven thousand dollars," offered Hawkins generously. "But between you and me, Barnes, I've waxed rich simply because my clients weren't willing to do some plain thinking for themselves. What you executives need is native psychology. You can get more of it out of your heads, and out of the heads of your staffs, than from high-priced chaps like myself, or from textbooks that dabble in theories of economics and new thought."

At the club half an hour later, Hawkins outlined in pencil, on the heavy linen tablecloth, a chart of his scheme of the Psychology Division as proposed for the Cast Iron Chair Company. Incidentally the company resumed dividends in the second quarter following.

The Crime-Detector

A vivid story of very modern methods in the handling of a murder mystery—by the talented author of "The Perfect Alibi" and other popular stories.

By Charles Phelps Cushing

"I THINK it's simply wicked of you, Chief, to want to torture a woman's curiosity like this. I haven't another guess left in my system."

Miss Mamie Skaggs, Central Office plain-clothes sleuth, was speaking.

"Please, Chief," she pleaded, "tell me! What *is* the thing?"

Ranged alongside of her team-mate Andrew Kerrigan,—an old-time detective who really looked the part,—she respectfully toed the border of a rug in the Chief's office at police headquarters, eying a small oblong, glass-sided box, which was placed conspicuously upon the blotter in the center of the Chief's big rosewood desk.

The Chief paused and grunted "Huh!" before he answered.

A curious sort of box this was, all garnished with colored electric-light bulbs like a Christmas tree, and so new that a few wisps of excelsior still adhered to the glistening red varnish of its frame. The Chief said, with a cynical glint in his eyes as he spoke:

"Well, if you must know—it's a new machine for detectin' crime. And like as not," he added maliciously, "it'll put a couple of you plain-clothes sleuths plumb out of a job—maybe before the end of the week. Sure! Wouldn't surprise me a bit."

"But how does the blame thing work, Chief?" Mamie coaxed.

"Well," the Chief drawled, and his tone now was so clearly one of dry humor that even the features of Kerrigan began to clear, "you set your suspeck down in a chair here—so; and then you snap these little zinc bracelets onto his wrists, this-a-way.

"Then you give him the razz, the third degree. Only you don't paste him in the mouth first, or jump up and yell at him when he aint lookin', or pull any other kind of rough stuff. No. You play this new game under diff'rent rules:

"You just set and reason with him gentle-like, and watch the little red needle here. Then you ask him why he done

it, and call him a liar in a nice way if he says he never did. That's all. The little needle here tells you whether his temperature and his blood pressure and his pulses go up or down. And that's all you need to know. Simple, aint it? Ought to save us a lot of time and trouble?"

The Chief coughed slightly and arched his shaggy eyebrows.

"Professor Alonzo Biggs, our new police commissioner from out on the South Side, invented it himself. It does away with police brutality, the Professor says. So we've got to give it a fair trial, you see. Yeh! Whether we can see any sense in it or not, by heck! And say some kind words about it to the newspaper boys, even if it fizzles."

The glint of malicious humor in the Chief's eyes had become a glitter.

"Here, you!" he commanded to Kerrigan. "Sit down here, will you, and I'll give the old inkkybater a work-out?"

HE snapped the zinc plates onto Kerrigan's wrists and clicked a switch that set the apparatus buzzing.

"Fine!"

Then his tone changed to aggressive sternness:

"Now, you listen to me, Andy Kerrigan! I want to know what's been goin' on around this place behind my back."

Suddenly, then, he boomed out at the top of his voice:

"You've been honeyin' around our Mamie Skaggs! Huh? Aw, don't try to deny it! Say, what the devil you mean, Andy Kerrigan, tryin' to make love to one of my best detectives? Huh?"

Up swept the little red needle on the graph, like the chart of a boom market in Wall Street; and Kerrigan's ears glowed bright red.

"See that, now, will you?" The Chief grinned. "Guilty—and he don't need to say a word. . . . . All right, Miss Skaggs; you put 'em on next."

Mamie obeyed, most reluctantly, with her nose in the air.

"Mamie Skaggs," the Chief continued, "a couple o' eager, earnest lads around here have been makin' advances to you. One of 'em is named"—an impressive pause—"Andrew J. Kerrigan!"

The needle quivered and rose a fraction of an inch, but fell again. Mamie's face, meanwhile, was imperturbable.

"And then there's another young fellow, calls himself Bill Kelly—you hear me?—Snapshot Bill Kelly!"

Again a slight quiver of the needle, again a swift subsidence. In the fading twilight the operator of the machine squinted closely at the chart—then he shook his head.

A loud knock on the door caused the Chief to glance up, but he was so intent upon his experiments that he ignored it.

"Huh!" he grunted, and bent again over the chart. "Not so good. Guess it works better on the men-folks than on the ladies. Maybe it needs some special attachments?"

Mamie rose with queenly dignity and pushed the wristlets off.

"Don't be silly, Chief," she reproved as she swept past him to the wall and turned on the lights of the big chandelier. "Just the same, you never can tell," she observed hopefully. "It might come in handy sometime."

By this time the pounding on the door had become uproarious.

"Aw, come in!" the Chief yelled, all out of patience.

INTO the room, breathless, burst Snapshot Bill Kelly, staff photographer of the *Telegraph,* his battered press camera hugged tight to his chest and a wild stare in his eyes. The relations between Bill and the Chief were such that he sometimes reported to the Chief even before going to his own office.

The telephone bell began to jangle frantically. The Chief gestured to the photographer for silence and snatched up the receiver.

"Hello! All right—shoot it!" He began scribbling in haste on a memorandum-pad. "All right! *All right!* Gotcha! Good-by!"

He slammed the receiver back onto the hook and jumped up.

"Whe-ee-ew!" he whistled, and put his hand to his brow as if he felt slightly dazed. "Another murder! Another big one! Right at the corner of Eleventh and Walnut—and done in daylight!"

"Sure!" the photographer broke in harshly. "That's what I've been tryin' to bust down this door to tell you about for the last five minutes. I was right there when it happened." He tapped the battered camera triumphantly. "And I've got the pictures of it *here.*"

The Chief's eyes widened, and he chortled joyously.

"Good chance I've got the killer's mug, too," the photographer hurried on. "I was right there on the corner, shootin' crowd stuff."

"Holy Saints be praised!" the Chief breathed gratefully. "A little luck at last!"

Snapshot Bill hesitated.

"Yes—yes and no," he answered. "Don't get your hopes up too high, Chief. I've got his mug, all right—but you've got to pick it out of a crowd."

The Chief's face fell.

"Naw—now wait," Bill pleaded. "That may be easier than it sounds. Here's how it was. I was up on a ladder, just enough to get a little elevation. It was about ten minutes past six, and the streets were jammed with people hurryin' home. I'd already shot two pictures to show how the new traffic-tower works, and I was just settin' this spring here, to shoot another. Had to hustle, too, because the sun was sinkin' fast, and Petticoat Lane was all full of red glare—pretty to look at, but bad for pictures—"

SNAPSHOT BILL hastened on without explaining that this corner of Eleventh and Walnut is the busiest crossing in the city of Wyandotte. That signal-tower, you should also know, is a matter of great civic pride in Wyandotte; the traffic rules concerned with its operation are enforced as religiously as those in New York City.

Three lights adorn the tower's roof, duplicate of those that shine up and down Fifth Avenue. When the yellow disk gleams, it is a signal for the north-and-south traffic in Walnut Street to surge forward. When the red glows, all traffic must halt for a second or two until the green flashes an invitation to the tides that flow east-and-west in Petticoat Lane. All this, of course, is according to the best metropolitan traffic etiquette. And so is another rule, quite as rigidly enforced—that pedestrians must abide by the same laws as the vehicles.

Snapshot Bill had mounted to the top of a short folding stepladder "to get his elevation," and he had shot two more films, which he meant to caption, "When the Sapphire Gleams," and another pair to be entitled, "When the Emerald Glows." The photographer had just set the spring of his shutter to snap another picture. The ruby light glowed for a second, and all traffic paused.

A tinkle from the bell in the traffic tower, and the sapphire gleamed. The fat sergeant's whistle shrilled, and he beckoned a white-gloved hand north and south. In the dimming red twilight, two waves of roaring motorcars and hurrying pedestrians surged forward, up and down Walnut Street. And then—

"Just as they started, I heard an awful scream. It came from the north curb. And it sent the shivers up and down my spine.

"Second instinct, I guess, made me do this—I didn't have time to think. I dived my face down into my finder—and aimed—and sprung the shutter. Right in the middle of my ground glass, just as the trigger clicked, I saw a couple of white hands fly up, and a head jerk back, with the mouth and the eyes wide open, and then pitch forward.

"By now, I'd had time to think. So I up and yelled—yelled at the top of my voice. It's an old dodge in my trade, when you want to get the crowd to look toward your lens. It worked, too. I threw in a new film, fast as I could, and set the spring and shot again.

"Then I began to remember I ought to be gettin' excited. Right away I felt so wobbly-legged I pretty near fell off the top of the ladder. But I got down, and tore my way through that jam, and shot another picture—one that showed that poor devil dyin' in the street, flat on his face there, with a black knife stuck into his back. And then I beat it for headquarters, fast as—"

"That's seven pictures in all," Mamie summarized.

"Seven?" A bewildered stare on Snapshot Bill's face as he repeated the word. "Great Scott, you're right! I wonder if I—"

He broke off quickly, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Aw, well, no matter! Most of 'em are all right, anyway. The light was kinda reddish, but I was usin' orthochromatic speed plates and givin' 'em plenty of time. And nobody's got a faster lens than mine, unless it's on a movie camera. So don't you worry—you're gonna get some good sharp prints. The only question is, can you pick out the right mug in that crowd? Wait for me here; I'll be back with my enlargements by seven."

A MOTOR patrol-wagon, laden with a sergeant and a signal-tower operator and six traffic cops sped away, clanging to the corner of Walnut and Petticoat Lane. There it disgorged its passengers, picked up the guard of policemen who had been on duty at the crossing when the murder had occurred, and dashed back with them to police headquarters.

The fat sergeant in command stumped into the Chief's office. His detachment filed in behind him. The sergeant stepped forward and saluted.

"You sent for us, sir?"

"Yeh," the Chief answered. "Shoot us what you've got on this murder. Miss Skaggs here, and Mr. Kerrigan," —he jerked his thumb over his shoulder,—"are to handle the case. Proceed."

The sergeant proceeded tersely.

Evidently enough, from his report, he and his men had responded to the emergency swiftly, and according to the best of police traditions. The moment the sergeant had heard the first scream, he had shrilled his whistle three times. Up in the traffic tower the operator had promptly flashed the red light and halted all traffic. Then, from all corners, the squad of traffic officers had pushed their way hastily to the center of the panic-stricken crowd. There the policemen had gathered the names and addresses of a few bewildered witnesses and had taken from them brief verbal statements of all that they had seen and heard. Yet a résumé of this collected evidence was not impressive:

A commuter recalled that an elbow had jabbed him sharply in the pit of the stomach when the murderer had jerked back his arm to plunge the black knife into his victim's back. This witness recalled the murderer as a big fellow in a reddish-brown suit: "But that's about all I can remember. That jab in the stomach doubled me up."

Another witness also recalled a big fellow in a reddish-brown suit: "He had a short, thick neck. His ears stuck out, and the lobes of them were lumpy and bunged up. But I didn't get a good look at his face."

A third witness testified that he too had noticed the big fellow in the reddish-brown suit, and those "funny" ears:

"He looked like a pug to me, and I tried to place him. I'm a fight-fan, you see, and I know a lot of boxers. This fellow's right ear was red and cauliflowered; that's what made me notice him first. But he wasn't any fighter that I'd ever seen before. I saw him make a pass, and then I heard that scream, and I grabbed at his arm. But just then a photographer fellow across the street let out a loud yell, and it scared me so that I jumped and looked up sudden. When I turned again, this big fellow had slipped away—anyhow, I couldn't see him anywhere."

THE operator in the tower, as soon as he heard the first scream, had taken a quick glance downward toward the north curb. He had to look away a second to turn off the yellow light and flash on the red; then he had focused his gaze again upon the spot where the murdered man had fallen, and he had carefully noted the appearance of all the people close around. This observer, too, recalled that among the crowd was a big fellow in a reddish-brown suit; but the trained eyes in the conning tower had not been able to detect that this man had made any sudden effort to escape. No one, apparently, had broken away abruptly. Hence the operator judged that the murderer had felt that there was safety in numbers, and had taken his time about moving away from the scene.

And that was all they had been able to collect in the way of evidence about the boldest crime ever committed in Wyandotte's history. Right under their eyes, and in daylight, Marcus Vanderbridge, a wealthy broker in stocks and bonds, one of the vice-presidents of the exchange, had been struck down at the busiest street crossing in a busy city; but the murderer had escaped unhindered—and might even now be speeding away on a train.

The Chief snatched for the telephone.

"Station master's office, Union Depot—quick!" he ordered. "I'll hold the phone till you get him. . . . . Is that you, Hampy? Say, Hampy, round up all your depot detectives and all your red-caps right away, will you? Tell 'em the Chief of Police is lookin' for a big fellow in a red-brown suit with cauliflower ears. Got it? Listen, now. Ask everywhere. Look everywhere. Ring me the minute you pick up any clue."

A knock on the door. "Come in!" the Chief bellowed.

Snapshot Bill hurried into the room with what looked like a package of desk blotters under his arm.

"Didn't wait for these prints to dry," he explained. "Brought 'em along wet, between blotters. Clear the decks there, Chief, and I'll spread 'em out. Think I've got just what you want."

The Chief hastily pushed the "crime-detectin' machine" to one side and gestured to the photographer to go ahead.

SNAPSHOT BILL spread the damp enlargements out upon the desk-top. The Chief and the two detectives bent over them. Five clear prints in all, showing dozens of faces in sharp and contrasty high lights and shadows. The photographer beamed in triumph upon the picture that was snapped the moment after the stabbing. Every line of it was sharp as a knife-edge.

For a minute or two no one spoke.

"Well," the photographer demanded, waiting expectantly, "any mugs there that you know, Chief?"

"Yeh—several." The Chief began to stab at the prints with a stubby forefinger. "Here's old Crump, the moll-buzzer—but he wouldn't harm a cat. And this bird here with the hook nose looks sorta familiar. Who's he, Andy?"

"Blondy Jenks," Kerrigan answered. "But he's just a police-court mug—a snowbird. He wouldn't pull any big stuff like this murder. Anyway, he never has before."

"Anybody else you know, Chief?" Bill persisted.

The Chief faltered slightly.

"Well, I guess we all know this handsome old lady here, with the white hair, eh?"

"What a sweet, kind face!" Mamie exclaimed. "Who is she?"

A flush of embarrassment swept across the Chief's features as he answered:

"Her first name's Sadie. I guess that's all you need to know, if you've ever worked the North End any."

"Not Sadie Hussey, who runs that notorious club—"

"The same!" the Chief cut in quickly. "I reckon Sadie had come uptown shopping to buy herself a couple of thousand dollars' worth of new spring clothes."

Mamie Skaggs gazed with wide-eyed incredulity at the patrician features of this famous queen of the North End underworld.

"I simply can't believe it! That distinguished-looking old lady! Why, I never saw a face that had more character in it."

"Oh, she's got character, all right," the Chief answered thoughtfully. "Sadie's never broke but the one law. She believes a rich man has a perfect right to throw his money away on gambling if he wants to. Otherwise she's gone as straight as anybody. Runs a fairly square game and keeps her mouth shut. Any time anybody tells me a woman can't keep a secret, I mention Sadie. If she told only half of what she knows about some of the rich men in this town, big pillars of the church and all—"

Suddenly the Chief's voice cracked.

"Say!" He jabbed his forefinger again at the print. "Get the expression on her face in this one! By the Lord, I believe she saw that murder!"

The four crowded close, peering.

"She saw it, I tell you—she's scared. And there's your big guy—just one side of his head, with the bad ear, showin'. Sadie sees it—but nobody else does. Look close. Am I right?"

Mamie nodded slowly.

"You're right, Chief. If we only can get her to talk—"

The Chief threw up both hands.

"You can't. And I can tell you that right now. If you've got to drag it out of Sadie, that secret's safe forever. We could lock her up for a hundred years and give her the third degree till hell froze over. She'd never peach. I've tried it."

MAMIE glanced hopefully toward the "crime-detectin' machine."

"We might test how that works on her?" she suggested.

"Huh!" The Chief grunted. "It don't work well on the ladies. We've proved that already."

"Excuse me, Chief," Mamie protested, "but you've proved nothing of the sort. If you'll let me, I want to try it out on her, the minute we get some names to work with. Can't we look her up, meanwhile? She's a material witness, you know, and we can hold her for investigation. Please, Chief."

Doubtfully, the Chief reached toward the telephone. But before he could take the receiver off the hook the bell jangled.

"Hello," he drawled. "Yeh, this is the Chief." Then he sat up with a start. "Oh, is that you, Hampy? Good! Shoot it! All right! *All right!* Gotcha. Good-by."

He slammed the receiver back and looked up scowling:

"Our bird's flew the coop, I guess. Hampy says a check-stand man saw a fellow like the description take out a suitcase at about six-fifteen. Ten minutes later, in a lavatory booth in the washroom, they found an empty suitcase, brand new, and a dark-brown suit with blood stains on the front of it. He's changed his clothes and beat it. Nobody on the train-gates remembers him. But they're all so busy punchin' tickets they don't have time to look at people's ears. He's got away." The Chief sighed heavily. "Call in the newspaper boys; I'll give it out that the murderer's left town. It wont hurt to say so, anyway, and we've got to say *something.*"

THE *Telegraph* next morning ran Snapshot Bill's prize photograph in a four-column width on the front page. In screaming headlines above it the story of the murder was blazoned; and a subhead quoted the Chief as declaring that the murderer had escaped town on an evening train.

Shortly after ten o'clock that same morning the Chief summoned Andrew Kerrigan and Mamie Skaggs to his office, and scowling, tossed them an envelope bearing a special-delivery stamp and postmarked: "City Hall Station, 9 A. M."

The envelope contained nothing but a clipping of the front page of the *Telegraph.*

A blue pencil ringed the words *"Murderer flees city on evening train,"* and added this laconic comment:

"Have not left the city, and shall not. As usual, the police show no imagination. Selah!"

Mamie studied the clipping and its message carefully, examined the envelope, front and back, and held it up to the light. Then she strode across the room to the Chief's dusty five-foot shelf of reference books and took down a broken-backed dictionary.

"Well," the Chief demanded, when she had finished, "what do you make of it?"

"I was all wrong," she answered. "I thought *'selah'* meant *'more next week,'* or something like that. What threw me off the track, I guess, was remembering the old lady who used to write the Rosedale News Notes for my home-town paper. She always ended up her letter with it—*'selah.'* But really it's only another way of saying 'Hallelujah.' Funny I never knew that—"

"Very interesting," the Chief cut in dryly, "but what about the message? Is it straight goods or a hoax?"

"Nobody can tell, of course," Mamie answered, "but it sounds to me like the real thing. You can see this fellow's an educated man—notice he writes a good hand, and spells properly, and punctuates carefully, and uses high-toned grammar. Notice this, too, most of all: he says *'shall'* where most people would have said *'will.'* And he bought this envelope" — she pointed to an embossing mark under the flap— "at the best stationery-shop in town. This all makes me think he has class, and isn't trying to pull a hoax. And much as I hate to admit it, when he says we've shown no imagination—"

"NOW, wait a minute," the Chief snapped. "We picked up that depot clue quick enough, didn't we?"

"Yes—his clothes, and an empty suitcase. A lot of good that did us! Andy and I traced the clothes this morning to a big ready-made house that sells thousands of suits every week. Nobody there remembers him. We've traced the suitcase, too, and nobody in the leather-goods store can remember him either. We've simply wasted two hours. But what we *haven't* done and what nobody's done, is to suggest any motive for the murder. We're not getting on very fast, are we?"

"No," the Chief replied doubtfully. "But I guess you know why, don't you? It aint because we didn't ask plenty of questions last night about Vanderbridge. We didn't have any luck; that's all."

"Yes, and what's more," Mamie added, "it isn't likely we're going to strike any luck in the future. Everything we get on this case we'll have to dig for. The man we're after is a mighty clever fellow. He doesn't leave anything to luck. It looks to me as if he planned every tiny detail of this murder long in advance."

"Yeh?"

"Not the least doubt about it. Put your evidence together and see: he has his going-away clothes checked at the depot waiting for him." Mamie began counting the points off on her fingers: "Then he wears a suit of a color that wont show blood-stains. Next, he stabs his man at just the right psychological second, and then lets the crowd excitement

shield him. After that he takes his time about making a get-away—he's figured that out too, in advance. He even stopped to buy a newspaper—another thing we found out this morning—to hold in front of him so that no one could *possibly* notice any stains on his red-brown suit. Yes, he even thought of that! No wonder he says the police 'show no imagination.' He makes us all look like pikers. Give him credit, Chief."

"All right," the Chief grumbled, "now, you've got that out of your system—what do you mean to do about *catchin'* him?"

"Try to use a little imagination myself," Mamie answered gravely, —"try to get a clue to his motive first. Then try to put myself in his place and imagine how he must think and feel today—what must haunt his memory the most, and all such things as that." She grew dreamy-eyed as she went on: "Can't you picture it, what he must keep seeing and hearing as he walks the streets this morning? He waits in that red sunset glare. Then he hears the crossing cop's whistle. Now the yellow light gleams. Now he must do it—he jabs the knife—he hears that awful scream—can't you imagine how it all must haunt him? And tonight, when he tries to sleep, red and green and yellow lights and whistles—"

"ALL very pretty," the Chief assented gruffly. "But when do you start workin', and where?"

"I start on Vanderbridge," Mamie answered, "—on all his letters, personal and business, and right away. At his house last night I nabbed a pack of his private letters out of his desk. This morning I'm going down to his office and go through all the files there. Probably the office wont be open, and I'll have the whole place to myself. Andy's going out meanwhile and take census in the prize-fight joints of all the heavyweights who have battered ears."

"Well, that sounds a lot better," the Chief sighed in relief. "For a minute, when I heard you pull that pipe-dream stuff, I thought maybe you were plannin' to call on Professor Biggs."

"I may do that, too," Mamie retorted. "But not until later, probably. That reminds me, Chief; have you had Sadie locked up?"

The Chief nodded.

"Good," Mamie ended. "Maybe before evening we can give the crime-machine another work-out."

PONDERING, Mamie sauntered slowly down the long, dim corridor outside of the Chief's office. Near the end of it she quickened her step and hurried into a telephone booth. There she called up the *Telegraph* and got Snapshot Bill on the wire.

"Is this Kelly? . . . . Mamie Skaggs talking. Say, could you meet me in the Commerce Building, in about fifteen minutes, at the door of Room 2112? . . . . Here's what I want—some letters there that I need to have photographed. Then I want to put them back in the files, undisturbed. See? . . . . All right; you're the best judge of how to do it. In a quarter of an hour, then? Thanks."

She hastened on out into the street and taxied to the Commerce Building. There a sleepy-eyed janitor unlocked for her the door of Room 2112—the anteroom of Vanderbridge's big suite of brokerage offices—and then departed, yawning.

Mamie closed the door softly and entered.

As she paused outside the railing, she heard no sound but the buzz and click of a stock-ticker. Briskly she stepped forward and felt for the latch of the gate.

Then her quick ear caught something else—a rustle of papers. It frightened her; she had supposed the place deserted. On her guard now, she slowly swung the gate open and tiptoed inside.

Her hand still holding onto the open gate, she leaned forward and peeked around the jamb of the next door down the length of the suite. What she saw there made her catch her breath. In the last room she saw a man, broad-backed, thick-necked, with a shock of long, tawny hair that covered his ear-tips; he was down on his left knee, bending over the bottom drawer of a filing cabinet, digging papers out of the file and scattering them on the floor.

Spellbound, Mamie watched him.

Now he crammed a letter into his pocket. Now he dug again into the drawer, then scattered more papers behind him; now he crammed another sheet into his pocket.

Mamie's heart almost stopped beating. Out of her trembling fingers the gate slipped, creaked shrilly and swung shut with a slam.

Startled, the big fellow twitched and glanced back quickly over his shoulder.

Mamie set her jaws and strode forward.

"Good morning," she faltered, making a desperate effort to appear unconcerned. She marched on into the paper-littered filing room, eying him fixedly.

He made no answer. Deliberately he rose, leaned forward and dusted off the left knee of his trousers with his right hand—a big, gnarled, muscular hand, with a scar across it near the wrist.

WHEN he straightened up, a pair of steely blue eyes searched the detective's face. Unwavering, Mamie stared back. She must stall for time, she was thinking; the photographer would be here in a few more minutes. With Kelly to help her—

She shrugged her shoulders and looked around the room.

"Good gracious! What *have* you been doing here?" she asked. "Papers all over the place!"

A cynical smile flickered as he answered:

"And you? What are *you*—doing here, may I ask?"

Mamie thought fast and decided to try a bluff.

"Why, don't you know? I work here. I got a little behind on my books and—"

The man laughed.

"So that's your game? Well, try another tack, then. I know every face in this office—all too well. You've never been inside it before in your life. Who let you in?"

Mamie groped for words; any answer to hold him there a minute or two more.

"The janitor, of course. And you've no right—"

"Haven't I, though!" He advanced a step and peered at her narrowly, a glitter now in the steely eyes. "Who the devil—" He clicked his fingers and broke off.

"By God! That woman detective!"

Swiftly his fist shot forward and drove against the point of the detective's jaw.

Mamie remembered nothing more but blackness and glittering needle-points, of light, until she came to consciousness later, smothering for breath, and heard herself moaning.

She struggled to rise on one elbow, then had to drop back again gasping. . . . .Now her senses were acute, but all her muscles seemed paralyzed. With another desperate effort she wavered to her feet and lunged to the doorway. She caught the jamb of it and steadied herself, then stumbled on down through the suite to the gate, unlatched it, and plunged, groping, for the knob of the corridor door.

She caught it, flung the door open and pitched forward.

Snapshot Bill Kelly, waiting in the hallway, caught her in his arms just as she was about to topple over.

"Stop him! Catch him!" she screamed. "That big man with the yellow hair!"

"It's too late, Miss," Kelly told her. "I saw a man like that get on the elevator, going down, just as I got off here."

"Oh, don't let him get away!" Mamie clutched the photographer frantically and shook him. "Oh, hurry! Hurry!"

"It's no use," he answered. "He's gone long ago. I've been pounding on the door here for half a minute, and you didn't answer. You'll never catch him now."

Mamie did the only thing possible under the circumstances. She drooped limp in Snapshot Bill's arms for a moment and sobbed on his shoulder.

"I FEEL better now." Mamie drew away and dabbed at her eyes with a small pocket handkerchief. "Silly of me, wasn't it? My nerves went all to pieces. Well, just a minute now; I'll have to ring up the Chief and tell him what's happened. Then we can get right down to business. Come on in."

A minute later she was rummaging in the bottom files of the letter cabinet, in the end room of the suite, and checking by a card-index box all the names listed under "H," "I," and "J"—these were the letters upon the front of the open drawer.

Snapshot Bill stood by, watching her admiringly.

"You work fast, don't you?"

"Oh, this part of it is easy enough," she answered. "With only three letters of the alphabet to worry about, we ought to sift the possible names down to half a dozen or so in a hurry."

"And then what?"

"Trace them and sift them some more. Then this afternoon I want to try an experiment. I want to read the list off to Sadie Hussey and watch how she reacts when she hears each name. She saw this murder, and somehow I feel she knows who did it. Don't you?"

As Mamie talked, she went on scribbling names on a pad.

"Yeh—maybe," Bill assented with a little hesitation. "But if she does know, she'll

never come across with anything. Don't kid yourself about that."

"I don't," Mamie answered gravely. "My idea was to put the zinc bracelets on her and watch the little red needle."

"That crime-machine?"

Mamie nodded, and went on working.

Snapshot Bill made no comment.

Presently, Mamie looked up.

"There now!" She breathed deeply in relief. "I've got fourteen possible names on my list. Can't find any correspondence, though, concerning five of them. He's a clever bird, this murderer. He didn't pull out only his own letters, you see—he took along a bunch of others too. If he'd had another half-hour to work here, he could have muddled things up hopelessly."

"You said it," the photographer responded heartily. "Clever's the word. He's got imagination."

"Yes," Mamie went on after a thoughtful pause, "but imagination works two ways. If we ever land him, we can make it work for us. We can play on his imagination, torture it if we have to, and get results we never could hope for with a duller sort of brain."

The photographer nodded.

"That's true enough," he agreed.

Mamie nodded in turn. Carefully then, she checked over her list of names again.

"That's that," she ended. "Now shoot a flashlight here if you like. We wont need to photostat any letters this morning—the ones we want most are gone."

Bill took a picture of the littered room, then folded up his equipment and threw it over his shoulder by a strap.

"Sure you've got it?" Mamie bantered, smiling.

"Why do you look at me like that?" Kelly demanded. "Don't you know I've got it?"

"No—not after what happened yesterday."

Snapshot Bill flushed.

"You noticed that? I thought you did, but you didn't say anything more about it when I brought the prints in."

"I thought maybe it might involve a point of professional pride," she explained.

"It did," Bill confessed. "And I'm certainly much obliged to you for keeping mum. You're a good sport."

"Oh, it didn't matter a lot, anyway," Mamie comforted him. She paused and smiled again. "And that reminds me—I want to ask a favor of you. If you can, I wish you'd run another picture in the *Telegraph* tomorrow morning, another of those crowd shots."

"Sure! Glad to do it."

"Wait—that isn't all. Underneath it, I want you to say that the police know which face in the crowd at that corner is the murderer's; and that on Sunday morning the *Telegraph* will print an enlargement of the picture you took when you yelled and made everybody look up at your lens—"

"But—I thought you knew—"

"I do know," Mamie cut in, "but the murderer doesn't, and I want to worry him some. I want to play on his imagination, tantalize him, get him fairly on needles and pins. Get the idea?"

"Yes—and it's worth trying."

"One thing more. Lock up those plates of yours in the safe every night. We mustn't take any chances of ever letting him get his hands on them. He thinks fast, you know. We've found that out this morning. Lucky I have those private letters I nabbed last night at the Vanderbridge house, right here with me in my handbag—"

As her fingers tapped the bag, her eyes widened suddenly. In nervous haste she opened the clasp and felt inside.

"What's wrong?" the photographer demanded quickly. "Mislaid 'em?"

"They're gone!" she answered bitterly. "Stolen! Guess I'm not as smart as I thought I was."

LATE afternoon: on the desk in the Chief's office the crime-detector buzzed softly, and the little colored electric bulbs glowed while Mamie Skaggs, in a monotone, slowly read off her list of names to the white-haired and placid-featured proprietor of Wyandotte's notorious gambling "club." Half in the shadows in the background, the Chief and Kerrigan, both silent, watched beside the door.

"Are you listening, Sadie? Was it—Holt Hamilton? You saw that murder, Sadie. Was it—Benjamin Harper? You know who did it. Was it—William Harris? Was it—J. K. Higgs? Was it—Henry H. Hallend?"

Mamie paused a moment, watching the red needle closely.

"Again I ask you: was it—Henry Hallend?"

No answer. On the patrician face of the gambler not a flicker of emotion; but the

detective was bending over the chart excitedly.

"Was it," her voice droned on again, "—Harold Ilwright?

"Was it—Jenkins Jones?"

Through the list and back again she read, repeating with emphasis the names "Jones" and "Hallend." Then she clicked off the switch at the side of the machine; the bulbs went out, and the buzzing ceased.

"That's enough," she announced. "Turn on the chandelier lights, will you please, Andy?"

Kerrigan obeyed. The Chief got up, blinking, and lumbered toward his desk.

"Well, now what?" he inquired. "I'll do anything you say."

"Have Sadie taken back to her cell, please. And give the turnkey strict instructions that she sha'n't be allowed to communicate in any way with anyone before ten o'clock Sunday morning."

"All right." The Chief summoned a jailer, and Sadie was led away. "What next?" he demanded.

"That's all, thanks, for the present."

MAMIE gathered up her gloves and her handbag to depart.

Plainly, the Chief's curiosity was stirred.

"Wait a minute, will you? How's the machine workin'?"

"Well enough," Mamie answered tersely. "It tips me off to one sure thing—Sadie knows this man Hallend. Every time his name was mentioned, the needle hopped way up."

"Ha!" Kerrigan laughed. "Great little machine! I could of told you that much myself. This Hallend's a young sport, a born gambler. We've picked him up in raids a dozen times. Does Sadie know him? I'll say she does!"

"She knows this Jenkins Jones too," Mamie added. "But the needle didn't jump so much, only a notch or two."

"Jenkins Jones?" the Chief repeated. "That must be Jenkins Jones, Jr. He belongs to that same set. Idle rich from out Hyde Park way. Polo-player, all-around sport, another just like Hallend. Say, lady, where'd you pick up these names, anyhow?"

"Out of a card-index in Vanderbridge's office this morning."

The Chief laughed.

"It's a swell list of rich suckers; that's all I got to say." Animation glowed on the Chief's face now: "Say, listen; I got it: What does anybody want to croak a broker for? There's your motive!"

"You think they played the market—and got trimmed?"

"You bet I do! It's a cinch. If Vanderbridge had those names on his sucker list, he trimmed 'em. And he'd take your last nickel."

"You speak feelingly, Chief!"

"I'll say I do! I bought some oil-stocks once."

Mamie considered the idea soberly and at length.

"You may be right," she decided. "I've been reading in the papers lately about a lot of cases like this—rich people in particular. Yes, Chief, you may be right."

Pondering deeply, she went on:

"Hallend?" Musing, she repeated the name. "Hallend! I'm sure I read something in the papers about him this very morning. What the deuce was it? Something in the society notes, I think. Let me have that *Telegraph* a minute." She opened the paper and skimmed hastily down a column of fine print. "Yes, here it is; I knew I had it right. He's to entertain, at a costume dance tonight, the following guests. . . . . Um-m? About a hundred of them. At nine o'clock? Well, thanks for the invitation, Mr. Hallend. I'll be there, among the walk-ins."

"You're goin' to his party?" Kerrigan asked solicitously. "How do you figure you'll get past the door without tippin' him off?"

"I haven't figured that out yet. But I'll get by. There's always a way, you know. If these walk-ins and finale-hoppers can slip in, I guess a city detective can manage it."

"Walk-ins? Finale-hoppers?" the Chief repeated. "I don't savvy?"

"Nervy outsiders, mostly flappers, who butt in on big parties," Mamie explained. "All the society women are complaining about them this season. The reason the little Cinderellas get away with it so often is because most of the idle rich young men are rather amused by it, and don't often expose them."

IT was on her way to the party that Mamie got the big idea. This was how it came about: After she had slipped into her black evening gown and had cut and stitched with nimble fingers a peaked black hood, like an executioner's, to complete her costume; after she had found another

inspiration when she spied an empty violin-case in a pawnshop window on her way downtown, "just the ticket to get me past the butler at the door;" after she had strolled up Wyandotte's glittering "Great White Way," with more than an hour to kill before the party began, and was wondering whether to kill it at the Royal movie theater or in the Palace, just across the street; after she had finally decided upon the Palace, because it advertised an exhibition of "the very latest thing, the color organ," and had cast her half-dollar into the booth and had entered to view that "very latest thing" with all due eagerness—after all this, and after she had been watching there for two or three minutes in the murk and the silence, while upon the screen the clavilux played its "color notes" of red and green, red and sapphire—then it was that Mamie got the big idea, literally in a flash.

Red—green—red—sapphire—red again!

Once more she found herself trying to imagine how she would feel, what she would be thinking about, were she in the murderer's shoes. Suppose he were sitting here now, where she was, watching in the dark silence. How those colored lights would torture her with reminders of her crime! How vividly she would see and hear it all again, that scene at the street crossing. . . . . The green light on the traffic tower fades—the red flashes—the police-whistle shrills and the sapphire gleams. Now she must do it—now she plunges the knife into her victim's back—now that awful scream! In a flash she had it, then—her big idea.

She hurried out of the theater, to a cigar-store next door, consulted a telephone directory for an address, then hailed a taxi and sped to the residence of Professor Alonzo Biggs.

In the book-lined study of the Professor's house she unfolded her plan. As she talked, the Professor gazed at her in solemn silence over the top of his glasses, and at the end nodded in approval.

"Sound psychology," he agreed, "sound and modern. Moreover, the attachments you suggest are perfectly practicable. A few cams, such as you use along the White Way downtown to make the electric light signs flicker, and you can cause the three bulbs to flash alternately: red—green—red—yellow—red. The tinkle of the bell is simple, too. But about the whistle—"

"Get one off of a peanut-stand."

"Good! That ought to be easy, too. How soon must you have it ready?"

"By tomorrow evening, if you can possibly manage."

"Count on it, then; we shall start to work immediately."

"Thanks, Professor. Same to you! Now I've got to run along; I'm on my way to a party."

On she dashed in the taxi to Hyde Park. At the Hallend house she alighted, and with the violin case containing the black hood under her arm, ran up the steps and punched the bell.

"Orchestra!" she told the butler breathlessly, tapping the violin case. "Am I late?"

"Yes, miss; sorry, but I fear you are," he answered. "They've already played the first number. Leave your things in the little hall room, second-floor rear."

She hurried up the staircase.

In the hall room she took out the black hood and slipped it on, then hastily stowed the violin case out of sight under the bed. A minute later she had joined the guests waiting for the second number in the big ballroom downstairs.

THE orchestra struck up. It was sweeter music than any to which Mamie's ear was accustomed; the gowns were richer and more beautiful; the lights were softer. She was Cinderella, and her heart fluttered at the prospect of adventure.

She edged past the dancers to the high casement windows opening upon the garden. She must have a moment to plan. . . . . A fragrance of lilacs floated in on the spring air. She breathed deep of it, and gazed thoughtfully out into the night. What should she do to attract a dancing partner? At the West Side Social Club the trick would be easy. Well, maybe it would work here just as surely.

She threw back her hood, so that the light shimmered golden on her hair. Now she had only to toss her head a certain jaunty way—like this—and Prince Charming would step up and ask Cinderella to dance with him. She waited.

She felt some one touch her arm. Hastily she drew down the black hood and turned.

"Can't fool ol' frien'. Knew you right away. That hair—nobody else like that, 'cept—*hic*—'cept—"

Prince Charming appeared to be having a little difficulty with his speech. The

Prince was attired in a clown costume, with one leg encased in white, the other in black, and this contrast in shades heightened an optical effect that his supports were minded to carry him different directions.

"Nobody else except who?" Mamie prompted.

" 'Cept Daphne. Don't be silly! Can't fool ol' Reggie."

"Well, Reggie, have it your own way," she laughed. "But you'll find out soon enough that you're wrong."

"Tha's—*hic*—tha's what they all say. Can't fool ol' Reggie, though. Come on, ol' girl. Le's toddle."

They toddled; and at this Reggie did decidedly better than at conversation. But he kept on babbling, and after the dance ended he continued to pour forth a stream of aimless chatter.

Cinderella was not listening with much attention; she was busily taking note of the other guests. Only a few of the throng were masked, only such as had costumes demanding one—the Pierrots and the Pierrettes, three pirates, a Dick Turpin and a tall, broad-shouldered, thick-necked Parisian Apache.

"I say—Hal!" Reggie called suddenly to the Apache. "Yo-ho! Come on over here a minute, will you, ol' chap?"

The Apache approached.

MAMIE noted quickly that his baggy black cap, with a long visor, was pulled well down over his ear-tips. A bandanna handkerchief covered the lower part of his face, so that she could see only his eyes. But she startled at the sight of those eyes—they were steely blue, with a strangely familiar glint in them. Swiftly she glanced at his hands. They were gloved.

"Wanchu meet ol' frien' of mine," Reggie introduced. "Eggza—eggza—schu-shushioner lady. Can't say it; but you know what I mean."

The Apache appeared to relish the humor of the introduction.

"Charmed," he said, and bowed and extended his hand.

Mamie, watching him closely, bowed in turn. Could she be sure she caught a glimpse of a scar-mark near the wrist? Her hand trembled.

"Can't guessh who she is, Hal? But I know. Can't fool ol' frien' Reggie. Saw her hair."

She knew the Apache could make out nothing of her features except her eyes, and she thanked her stars for that. For a moment he stared at her intently, but gave no evidence that he could recognize her. Another dance struck up. He bowed again and hurried away.

"Your friend Hal—our host, isn't he?" she asked eagerly.

"Who'd s'pose it was?" Reggie countered. "Say, you!" Suspicion began to glitter in his wavering eyes. "Aren't you Daphne? Take it off! I wanna see!"

He clutched for the hood. Mamie darted back, dodged through the crowd, and hid behind a gilded screen near the orchestra. Reggie lurched past her, mumbling.

As swiftly as she could, she retreated into the corridor, ran upstairs and threw the hood into a corner of the little hall room on the second floor.

From under the bed she snatched up the empty violin-case, then drew her cloak around her shoulders and darted down the front steps.

The butler stared at her puzzled as she asked to be let out.

"What's wrong, miss?"

"I was too late," she choked. "They dismissed me."

"Too bad, miss. Hope you'll have better luck next time."

Cinderella fled without further ceremony.

IT was shortly after ten o'cock the next morning when the Chief arrived at his office, exchanged there terse greetings with Kerrigan and Mamie, and scowled down at a stack of unopened mail upon the blotter of his desk.

"Huh!"

He grunted and picked up the envelope on the top of the pile. He jabbed a stubby index finger under the flap, ripped it open and drew forth a newspaper clipping marked with a blue pencil.

"Your friend Selah again."

He passed the envelope and the clipping over to Mamie.

Mamie inspected the envelope first; it bore a special-delivery stamp and was postmarked, *"City Hall Station,* 9 A. M.," like its predecessor of the day before. Then she carefully studied the clipping—a section of the front page of the morning *Telegraph,* with Snapshot Bill's second picture of the series taken at the street-crossing. Over the face of the cut in blue pencil was written:

If you really have my portrait, why wait until Sunday to print it? Is this a bluff? Another thing—was it luck, merely, or did one of your detectives show a flash of imagination yesterday morning? Frankly, she has me a little puzzled. Thanks for the letters in the handbag.

Selah!

"What do you make of it this time?" the Chief demanded.

"Well, to be fair with him," Mamie replied, "he has me a little puzzled too. He doesn't seem the least bit frightened, and that was just what I was counting on the most—hoping we could worry him, tantalize him, torture his imagination."

"Maybe he's worried a lot more than he makes out," Kerrigan suggested. "Anyway, he aint near as cocky as he was yesterday."

The Chief considered this suggestion gravely.

"That's right; he aint. And another thing that looks that way is a tip I got over the phone at my house this mornin'. Seems somebody tried to burgle your friend Bill Kelly's photos last night. Broke into the *Telegraph's* dark-room about four-thirty A. M. and went through everything in the place. But we had a little luck this time. The plates he wanted were all locked up downstairs in a safe."

"That wasn't luck," Mamie answered. "That was foresight."

The Chief nodded questioningly, then turned to Kerrigan.

"Got anything to report?"

Kerrigan straightened to attention.

"No sir. I checked up on every heavyweight in town that has bunged ears, and they've all come through with alibis. I give it up."

"And you?" the Chief continued, turning to Mamie.

"I've got a couple of good leads; that's all! I think we ought to shadow this Jenkins Jones, and this man Hallend."

"All right. You want to take Hallend, I suppose?"

"No," Mamie decided reluctantly. "I think he knows me now by sight. Andy had better watch him."

"Then you take Jones? That's settled now; get busy."

LATE in the afternoon Mamie had returned to police headquarters. By a grimy window in the detectives' loungingroom she sat bent over a hoop of embroidery, trying to quiet her shattered nerves and think. Everything had gone wrong, all day. Just one disappointment after another!

Jenkins Jones, first—he had turned out to be a stupid little watery-eyed shrimp of a man, only about five feet high, and not to be suspected of either the imagination or the muscle to commit a daring murder. She had fared on to the Commerce Building to seek out the janitor who had let her into the Vanderbridge suite of offices the day before. Did he remember letting a man into those offices shortly before she arrived, she had asked.

Sure, he did; why not?

"Then why wasn't the door left unlocked?"

"He told me to lock it again."

"But why did he do that?"

"Aw, I didn't ask him that. He looked all right."

"Then you let me in right after him?"

"Sure; you looked all right too. Why not?"

Mamie had thrown up both hands at that. What a world! Full of such stupid people!

Thence she had journeyed to the *Telegraph* and sought out Snapshot Bill in his dark-room. Was it true, she had demanded hopefully, that finger-prints leave an indelible mark upon photographic plates?

It was true, emphatically, Bill had assured her.

Eagerly, then, the pair had examined dozens of the plates that had been strewn around the place by the intruder of the night before. But not one of those plates bore a finger-print that Snapshot Bill could not identify; and after hours of futile labor another trail had come to a dead end.

On top of all this, and the most disheartening blow of all, had come news in mid-afternoon from Kerrigan that he had made a close-up inspection of Henry Hallend, and that this suspect's ears, though they were large and reddish, emphatically were not cauliflowered. They looked a little swollen, he reported, but that could be accounted for simply enough. Hallend, the detective explained, turned out to be "one of them society *athaletes*," and Kerrigan had learned that, several days previous to this, Hallend "had took an awful beatin'" in an inter-city boxing tournament held in the Athletic Club gymnasium.

But couldn't a cauliflower ear be restored?

"Not on your life!" Kerrigan had attested. "Once you get a cauliflower, you wear it all the rest of your life."

Mamie sighed again; there seemed to be little hope in her case either. Every trail she followed ended against a stone wall.

Z-z-z! Z-z-z! Z-z-z!

The Chief's call on the buzzer! Mamie jumped up, startled, and dashed through the darkness to the door and ran down the long corridor into the office of the Chief.

Kerrigan stood in front of the Chief's desk with a captive—a tall, broad-shouldered man, with a thick neck and large red ears. The Chief was roaring with anger, and the prisoner roared back at him in tones that rattled the window-panes.

ONE quick glance at the prisoner's face, and Mamie's heart began to flutter wildly. It was a battered and disfigured face now, black and blue in spots, and bleeding from a cut over the left cheek-bone. But those steely blue eyes, with that glint of hatred in them—

The roar of debate ceased abruptly as Mamie stepped forward and stared the captive full in the face. Not a flicker of an eye-lash indicated that he recognized her.

"Ah! My friend Mr. Hallend," she greeted him dryly. "We've—we've been expecting you—" She strove to speak with extreme nonchalance, but ended her speech somewhat breathlessly, betraying her excitement as she repeated: "We've been expecting you Mr. Hallend. . . . . Haven't we, Andy?"

She glanced on toward Kerrigan. Her team-mate's face was bruised and swollen; from his lower lip a little stream of blood trickled steadily down his chin. But in his eyes gleamed triumph.

"He gimme a battle on the way down here from No. 4 Station. But I showed him somethin'."

"On the way from No. 4, did you say?"

"Yeh—a sparrow-cop picked him up first in Chouteau Square. I was trailin' along, about fifty feet behind. This guy was walkin' slow solemn-like, with his head bowed. Then all of a sudden he seemed to go off his nut, and began slashin' with his cane at a flower bed—that red and green and yellow one round the statue.

"The sparrow-cop saw it and ran up and grabbed him. When the cop laid his hand on this guy's shoulder, I thought our friend was gonna pass out, right then and there. He flopped down onto a park bench, with his face white as a sheet, and I heard him sayin' as I ran up: 'Well, you got me at last! Thank God it's over!'

"We hustled him right over to No. 4 Station. He was so scared that his knees knocked together, and he couldn't hardly speak. We had him up before the desk, and I figured he was just about to come through with a confession, when this fat-headed sparrow-cop butts in and says:

" 'The charge is destroyin' park property.'

"Then you should of seen this guy's face change! He throws back his head and laughs out loud, like a crazy fool. All I could do then was to ask to let me have him held for investigation as a nut. So I grabbed him and started to take him downtown. On the way he tries to make his get-away, and we had this battle. Now he wont talk, and he's raisin' hell about bein' held here."

"So? He wont talk?" Mamie answered. "We'll see about that! I'll run on ahead downstairs and see if that room's all ready for him. You bring him right along. I'll bet he has something more to say before morning."

SHE darted down the basement stairs and into a little square room with a thick oak door. From a high window in this room a dim radiance the tint of sunset light sifted down through a pane of red glass onto a stout armchair and a little table whereon the crime-detector machine, now somewhat altered by new attachments, stood ready.

Swiftly she clicked a switch at the side of the machine, and it began to buzz. A green disk gleamed and dimmed; a red disk glowed for two seconds; then a bell tinkled, a whistle shrilled, and a disk of sapphire began to glow.

Kerrigan and the Chief marched their prisoner inside and strapped him firmly to the chair, facing the glowing disk. No one spoke. Watching the captive closely, Mamie saw him tremble and his eyes begin to widen as he stared. Silently they left him; the cell door thumped shut, and he sat in solitude.

Outside the thick oak door Mamie dropped on her knees and peeked through the keyhole. The sapphire dimmed; the red disk glowed for two seconds; the little bell tinkled, and the whistle shrilled

again. For half a minute the green disk shone. Then it dimmed and the red glowed once more. Again the bell tinkled, the whistle shrilled, and the sapphire gleamed. Mamie saw the man's shoulders quiver, and heard a gasp escape him.

Mamie got up and began pacing up and down the corridor. All was working well. Give him time.

She ran upstairs and summoned Snapshot Bill by telephone.

When she came down, she peeked in again through the keyhole. The man was shaking now with an ague of fear, and moaning. Give him time! All was working well!

While she waited, it occurred to her that there was yet a doubtful point in the case which she ought to clear up. If Kerrigan was right in his contention about boxers' disfigured ears, how could this be the murderer? While she had a little time, she must find out about that. She summoned a police surgeon from the emergency hospital and laid the case before him.

The surgeon reassured her. Little blood vessels, burst by a violent impact, caused these so-called "cauliflowers;" but have them lanced quickly enough afterward, he said, and the swelling could be reduced in a few days without leaving any permanent disfigurement.

The surgeon started to leave.

"Wait," she told him. "We may need you here."

AT the end of the corridor the Chief and Kerrigan and the police surgeon, soon joined by Snapshot Bill with a battered camera slung over his shoulder and a tripod under his arm, tipped back in their chairs, talking in undertones, and waited, while Mamie peered again through the keyhole into the cell.

The prisoner was writhing in the chair now and moaning aloud.

Give him time!

Mamie started to pace up and down the corridor again. Then a sudden hoarse scream from the cell startled her. A heavy thump and crash of glass followed. She wheeled and shouted. The men at the end of the corridor jumped up and came running toward her. They pushed open the cell door and scurried inside.

The chair and the table were overturned, the crime-detector had gone down with them in a smash; and on the floor, floundering desperately and sobbing, lay the prisoner.

"If you're ready now to talk—" Mamie began.

The man's lips moved. Staring dumbly, pleadingly, with terror in his distended eyes, the prisoner looked up at her. Then his head bumped back onto the floor, and he fainted.

The police surgeon hastily dropped down beside him and unbound the straps. He stretched his patient out on his back and unloosened his collar. Kerrigan ran for a glass of water.

Groaning, the prisoner came to consciousness. The surgeon lifted him by the shoulders and sat him down in the chair. Again the man's lips moved, but he could not speak.

Mamie, on a sudden impulse, caught at her captive's right hand. She found there the mark she sought, a scar close to the wrist.

"He's the man we want, all right," she declared quietly. "Don't worry any about that."

Snapshot Bill was setting up his camera and preparing to shoot a flashlight.

The Chief turned and scowled.

"Say, what's the idea of this?" he demanded, puzzled. "Why don't you run the picture tomorrow morning that you said you would—that one you took when you jumped up and yelled—"

"I can't make good on that," Bill explained lamely. "I—er—well, I got a little excited and shot another one on the same plate—a double exposure."

"Then you were only bluffin'—"

"Sure!" the photographer cut in hastily. "But Miss Skaggs put me up to that. Anything to tantalize him, she said. Anything to torture his imagination."

Another groan escaped the prisoner. Feebly he lifted a shaky hand in a gesture of piteous appeal.

"Don't—for God's sake! Don't torture me any more!" he whispered hoarsely. "I did it. I confess. . . . . Vanderbridge robbed me. . . . . I killed him for revenge. . . . . What more do you want than that?"

"Nothing more," Mamie agreed, "except to sign your name to a statement. Then we can lock you up and leave you in peace. . . . . Sorry we had to treat you so roughly," she ended. "Here—have a drink of water. Don't gulp it; take your time."

Mountain Madness

A tense little episode of frontier life, by a writer who knows men and mountains, and has a keen sense of drama.

By Reuben Maury

WE have made ourselves believe that the red passions which swayed us when the race was young are dead. They are not. They lie smoldering under the piled-up leaves of drifting ages. Sometimes, winds come which lift the leaves and swirl them about, and fan the old fires to a white heat. And unless the deadening rain which is civilization comes quickly, those thirsty fires devour us.

Civilization falls back at the edge of the clearing. . . . .

McTeague and Congdon, mining man and mining expert respectively, had that week-end driven McTeague's car over to Belton from Butte. They left the car in Belton, and walked five miles up Captain Creek Cañon, trailing Rod Lancaster's dead-ax wagon, in which rode their sleeping and cooking tents and three days' food supplies. They camped in a little level opening in the pines (Rod called it a park) just off the wagon-road which climbs to the New Albion copper workings. Rod went back to Belton.

The two left camp early the next morning for the long hike into the country on the other side of Steamboat Mountain. McTeague held a group of claims in that godless district, and was under contract to pay the consulting engineer many dollars for an inspection of them and a typewritten report of his opinion as to their worth. The mining man had, without such aid, located the ore-bodies which had made his money for him; but he thought it well to buy the best advice to be had and then go ahead as he saw fit.

They climbed, then, through the cold dawn of the Rockies, up the precipitous ore-road to the New Albion, a thousand feet above their camp. They followed the pipe-line which led off into the pines on a tangent from the mine, and when the pipe-line vanished in a fenced spring, they struck squarely uphill.

Their first goal was the top of the saddleback that marked the head of Captain Creek. From there McTeague planned to follow the ridges for three miles and dip down into the lands beyond Steamboat.

"An easy walk," he had promised Congdon. "We'll make it in two hours each way."

It was the middle of July, and the endless wild flowers of the heights bowed to them in the wind.

"We rest here," said Congdon as they topped the ridge.

THEY sat down on a fallen charred pine (forest fires had burned over the ridge the previous summer), and lighted their pipes behind out-held coat fronts. It was an hour past dawn, and the wind which whoops incessantly across the tops of the world had long since risen.

Out from their perch the wild country stretched—a hodgepodge of absurdly tremendous mountains and incredibly deep valleys, flung together without method or aim. Distance and space were the motifs of that landscape. Above it all gloomed a sky of gray iron, on which were mounted stiff, dark clouds like leaden scrolls.

McTeague scanned these sharply.

"Those clouds have snow in them," he observed.

They were sitting within six inches of each other, yet he had to lift his voice against the wind.

Congdon nodded gloomily. Many men are gloomy in the dawn.

"Uh-huh! Still, it's July. Hardly be much snow."

"But this ridge is better than eighty-two hundred feet above sea-level, and all this country's high."

"Uh-huh!"

They were on their way shortly. In a quarter-mile or so they picked up the shadow of a trail, and followed it till it dreamed away into invisibility. They dipped across a gap between parallel hogbacks, and as they were climbing out of it McTeague suggested that they walk henceforth some hundred yards below the crests of the ridges. The wind on the tops was terrific. The day was still gloomy and cold.

It was after they had picked their way across a fan of sliderock which spread down from the base of a granite cliff, that McTeague received a shock. He saw Steamboat Mountain on the wrong part of the skyline. Glancing ahead between two scrub pines as he sat down on a boulder to rest, with Congdon at his side, he saw Steamboat Mountain where it had no right to be.

By the course he had been setting, by all his calculations, it was directly at their backs; he had been about to give the word to cross the ridge and begin the walk down toward his claims. But out in front of them, across a vista of little hills, lay Steamboat Mountain, long and lean and level-topped. Fully three miles off—where it had no right to be! His brain repeated this several times. On the wrong part of the skyline.

Even while he gazed, the dead gray sky seemed to dip down and blot out the single pine that crowned the mountain's nose. A wandering breath of icy air knocked at the back of his neck.

He stood up and faced his companion.

"Congdon," he said, "snow's coming, and I've lost my bearings. We've got to hit for the top of the ridge and have a look around."

They quartered up through second-growth jack-pines which snapped their faces and tarred their hands with resin and wrapped about their scrambling legs. From the crest McTeague surveyed the prospect: an endless chaos of wild mountain panorama, blurring out in gray distance to the horizon, and over it all the iron sky. Around, and, it seemed, through the two men, howled the wind of the up-country.

THE mountain was gone now. It was the outstanding elevation of the district, visible from any open high point; but a giant's curtain had hung itself across that quadrant of the sky in which McTeague had last seen the landmark. Below them in the little hill country, the curtain was advancing, licking up the pines into its misty oblivion. He estimated that the snow was moving toward the ridge along a front of fully ten miles, while its right flank curved inward on a long slant. As McTeague watched, and tried to calculate their location, the wind suddenly died away to a gentle, dead-cold breeze.

"Well?" Congdon questioned.

McTeague answered him: "We're somewhere in Montana, Congdon. About eight thousand feet up in the air. I thought I knew this country."

"Oh, we'll make it out all right. I think I've spotted a trail down there—coming over that little saddleback."

Congdon pointed downhill in the direction from which the snow was coming; McTeague looked, and presently made out

a thin, light-colored string wandering through the green of the open rise.

"We'll try that," he decided. "Probably she goes somewhere."

They struck down-grade again. At length they reached the trail, a deep-worn ribbon in the hills, a thread to guide them —somewhere. As they tacked into it, the first flakes of snow began to dance about their heads.

"Which way?" Congdon asked.

"One's as good as another."

"We'll toss."

IT came tails. By that time the snow was all about them, in force. Congdon drew his head into the storm-collar of his sweater. McTeague turned his hat-brim down all around, and led the silent march off into the misted distance.

Fat, heavy, moist flakes of snow: they would be rain in the lowlands, but here on the rafters of the world they drifted endlessly, whispering like ghosts as they struck the pines or the needle-blanketed trail. For a time they melted, the instant they reached the ground, making the going heavy; then they got the better of the summer-warmed earth and built a skin of slush upon it, and within the hour a soft white quilt.

In time, the pines became weighted with frozen fur. Their branches, which normally slant upward from the trunk, hung down under the load, edged in white. An aisle of snow-bound pine trees—dark green drooping under the white—suggested a row of mourners ranged beside the grave of the last hope in the world.

McTeague led on at a fast pace. He had no trouble in keeping to the trail at first: it was worn deep. Some human beings must pass this way regularly—or else it was a game trail, leading away from civilization rather than into it. If it should prove to be the latter—but he preferred not to think of that chance, and did not mention it to the man who followed him.

At intervals they rested, sitting down on some fallen tree-bole or jutting rock from which they cuffed the snow with their hats. They said hardly a word during the whole of the day. They were facing reality now. There was nothing to do but to follow the trail.

"Congdon's game," McTeague thought once, after three hours of it. "Thank God for that."

"McTeague doesn't know where we are," reflected Congdon. "But neither do I. Got to keep cool."

It occurred to him that he was cool enough already—the storm was attending to that. This seemed a delightful joke, and he laughed over it to himself for a considerable distance. He wanted to tell McTeague about it, so that they might both laugh, but decided not to.

They fought ahead. It was a fight, now. The snow averaged four inches in depth by three o'clock, and the trail was drifted deep in many places. It led them up and over rocky, untimbered ridges, and down into draws where loaded pines gloomed above their course. These flitted past them like ghosts in a dream. The two were tied to that trail; they could not leave it, for beyond its narrow borders they knew were rocks and cliffs, fallen timber, fans of slide-rock, gullies where a leg might snap, all masked by the sinister snow.

BUT presently, about four-thirty in the afternoon, the trail left them. In an open space, where tall marsh-grass still pricked above the white, and the ground was rubbery underfoot, McTeague lost the thread among the hummocks of the miniature swamp. He did not tell Congdon. At least, this bog proved that they were getting down into lower country. All he could do was to press on into the storm, into the dark and the cold of the night that was coming.

"I wonder," Congdon said, when they stopped to rest a few minutes later, "I wonder where in hell we're coming out."

A logical question, thought McTeague, but he pretended to ignore it.

"How many matches have you got left?" he asked.

Congdon's hand moved in his trousers pocket.

"Five."

"Keep 'em safe. Mine are all gone."

"What good would they do us? The timber's all wet."

"Keep 'em safe."

McTeague's voice had a cutting edge.

Congdon stared curiously at him, but said nothing. Deep lines had dug themselves about the corners of McTeague's mouth. As he noted them, Congdon felt a thrill go through him as if the horror of these hills had without warning reached at him out of the concealing snows. He

rose; some primitive instinct impelled him to shake the feeling off.

"Let's be on our way," he said.

Dusk came. It saw them floundering downhill, weaving through ranks of endless mourning pines. One of these, overloaded, dropped a bushel of soggy snow on McTeague's head and shoulders.

"Oh, hell!" he bellowed, shaking and pounding himself frantically.

Congdon laughed—a shrill cackle.

"You looked so funny!" he giggled, as McTeague wheeled furiously.

Instantly they were silent, on their grim way again. But their nerves were taut. Terror had them both by the heart. They could not yet feel the fatigue of their long battling. The dark was near. The night would be cold. . . . .

"Wait a minute," Congdon called ahead sometime later. "Let's have a smoke."

"How many matches?" McTeague reverted to his former theme.

"Oh, plenty, plenty. Come on—here's a nice place to sit."

"How many matches have you?"

McTeague had retraced his steps, and now stood facing Congdon. His voice was fighting to be calm, but his eyes burned in the gloom of twilight. His hands were planted in his mackinaw pockets, his hat was piled high with snow, and his feet stood squarely and wide apart.

This time he changed his words:

"Give me the matches."

Here was a different matter. The matches meant fire in the night that was coming. Congdon's nerves gave way in a hoarse roar.

"I'll see you in hell first!" And he thrust his nose into McTeague's face.

"Give me—"

Then Congdon leaped for him.

CENTURIES dropped away, ages faded like a blown candle—and a pair of brute men grappled in the dusk under the silent pines. On the instant they were become savages, battling over fire and the means of fire, that dearest prize of humanity's childhood.

Their rage was not quickly spent. It had been storing through all the maddening day.

Congdon fought blindly for some seconds, striking out with eyes shut and teeth grinding. This fury that had claimed him was too terrible for thought. Red irons were turning in his brain; they tortured him to action. He must kill, or lose three little slivers of wood which meant light and heat for the night. . . . . He fought, hit or miss.

HIS eyes cleared at last to show him McTeague's form advancing, arms upraised. He crouched, charged, caught him about the waist, and rushed him backwards downhill. McTeague's fists pounded his back like hammers, McTeague's scrambling feet plowed snow into his eyes; but still he ran him downhill.

They went on and on. They had forgotten time; it seemed an age-long journey.

Then—a shock; the groan of strained poles and the boom of canvas. McTeague was torn away; Congdon doubled up against the obstacle which had stopped them. He wrenched himself to his feet, looked for McTeague. The other, two yards away, had done likewise. They glared at each other a moment.

McTeague's eyes wavered first. Dazedly he pointed to the left of Congdon. Their cook-tent stood in the clearing, its roof bellied in with piled snow, its walls almost hidden under the drifts. It was the back of the tent that had checked their wild flight. . . . .

They laughed shamefacedly. The day's events, and the battle that had ended them, were already becoming as a nightmare in their minds. They would never be able really to believe it had happened. There were fire and the means of fire in the tent. And the tent was the symbol of the centuries between.

Free Lances in Diplomacy

"The Alliance That Never Was Signed" is the title of this absorbing story by a favorite Blue Book author.

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

THE United States has no professional diplomatic service—no corps of diplomats, that is, trained to make this difficult profession a life vocation. During certain administrations—particularly, that of Roosevelt—attempts have been made to put such a service on a permanent basis, but the result so far has been merely to bring it under Civil Service regulations, which does not and never could produce the result obtained in other countries.

There have been exceptions from time to time—men born with the diplomatic sense or genius, who have benefited their home government in every position where they have happened to be placed. The Honorable Raymond Carter is one of these brilliant exceptions—though, regrettably, no longer officially connected with our State Department. Back in the first year of the McKinley administration, Carter was the man usually selected by the managing editor of the New York *Sun* to get inside facts which no other newspaper man could obtain from leading financiers; and he had just been admitted to the bar after a four-year course at Columbia, specializing on international law—studying in such off hours as he could be spared from the *Sun* staff.

He happened to be the only man McKinley trusted not to garble or magnify what he was willing to say upon a certain public question just before his election. And toward the end of his first year in office McKinley wanted to know the real inwardness of a certain German policy—asked Carter if he would go to the Berlin embassy in a subordinate capacity, and find out.

After a few moments of consideration Carter expressed his belief that it would be impossible to get the information in Berlin because of the very thorough system which Bismarck had worked out to make Wilhelmstrasse leak-proof. He suggested that he be sent to the Paris embassy instead—giving as his reason the fact that the mistresses who had the most compelling influence over three of the leading German ministers were maintained luxuriously by them in Paris and visited much

more frequently than the general public ever knew. How Carter obtained this information, he didn't offer to explain. What reason he had for imagining that an unknown American had the slightest chance for obtaining important disclosures from these mistresses or anyone associated with them, he didn't go into, either. But the President somehow was impressed with the belief that the *Sun* man knew considerably more than he admitted, and sent him to Paris as a duly qualified *attaché* of the American embassy on the Avenue Kléber.

THREE weeks later, an amazingly detailed report upon the German matter was cabled to the President in the State Department code—enabling him to suggest through our Berlin ambassador that the United States would consider a certain course upon the Kaiser's part inimical to our interests, if persisted in. Wilhelm dropped the matter without admitting that he had ever thought of such a thing—but there was a shake-up in Wilhelmstrasse which was felt as far as the uttermost German colony. Carter remained in Paris fifteen years—during part of them as *chargé d'affaires*. Then came a change of administrations and a new party in power—and Carter's resignation from the Service. Another man wanted his job—a politician who didn't speak French and didn't know what to do with the job when he got it.

At this point in Carter's career the usual political appointee in any of the American embassies or legations would have been disgusted enough to call it a day and go into some other line of business at home. But Carter was made of genuine diplomatic timber. Having been for so long playing the big game of international politics, anything else would have been tame in comparison. And Carter was not as dependent upon his salary as most of his political associates—for, being the recipient of inside knowledge upon many proposed actions of other governments, he had been able to use such information to his own advantage in the various stock-markets.

Chiefly because he was conservative, sure of his facts before taking the chance, Carter had made successful investments, so that when he finally resigned from the Service, he was a wealthy man.

Such a man, it would be supposed, might wish to finish his life in less strenuous or dangerous activities—build a fine estate, marry, and settle down at his ease. But that is what your born diplomat finds it almost impossible to do. So it will be readily understood why this brilliantly efficient and wealthy man chose to settle down in a comfortable Paris residence as a man of leisure, a patron of the arts and sciences—and send in to his home government the occasional bits of momentous information which come to such a man without effort upon his part.

Just how Carter happened to be in Berlin upon a certain evening in June is immaterial. He had taken a room at the Adlon upon his arrival—without much definite idea of staying in the city more than a day or so, and after dinner, had strolled down through Lennestrasse and Tiergartenstrasse with no particular object beyond seeing the changes, if any, in the row of formerly stylish mansions facing the Park. Coming, presently, to one which had been the home of Graf von Stendling before the war,—a mansion in which Lord Trevor, whom nobody suspected of being the famous Diplomatic Free Lance, had pulled off one of his most brilliant *coups*, and the secrets of which had been known to Carter himself upon another occasion,—he noticed that it was evidently unoccupied. A renting sign was fastened to one of the veranda posts—the veranda itself, and the lower windows, boarded up.

AS he stood over on the Park side, regarding this house, a storm-door in this boarding was opened, revealing an open vestibule-door behind it, and a dim light burning in the big hall. Evidently the man who came out was a caretaker on his way to the delicatessen. Crossing over to intercept him, the American asked.

"What has become of the Graf von Stendling, who used to live here?"

The fellow was good-natured in spite of a surly manner. "Head blown off by a French seventy-five at Dead Man's Hill, Verdun," he replied.

"And his two sons? The Gräfin?"

"The boys were killed at the Marne—the Gräfin, shot where you're standing on this veranda, in one of the riots. Only remaining relative is a cousin in America—Government permits him to retain the house as his property in recognition of good work he did for us over there—tax-free. It's been rented twice for a few months and the money sent to him, but

my wages have nearly eaten it up already. Nobody will buy the place, now."

"What part of it do you occupy?"

"Front room on the top-floor, east end. Just my Frau and me. We keep house up there, using a big closet as a kitchenette for our breakfasts. Other meals we generally get at the nearest rathskeller. My name? Schumann—Karl Schumann."

"H-m-m! Look here, Schumann! I used to know the Count before the war—when I represented our New York house, in the Friedrichstrasse. I've been a guest here several times—they used to put me in that big second-floor room with the bath adjoining—on the west side. Now, I expect to be in and out of the city for possibly two or three months—don't exactly care about leaving my luggage at the Adlon while I'm out of town. If I were sure the whole house wasn't likely to be rented during that length of time, I think I'd take my old room on any reasonable terms, providing you and your Frau would be responsible for my luggage and not admitting strangers to my room while I'm away. Have you sole charge of the renting—or is it in the hands of an agent?"

"*Nein!* I was the Graf's orderly in the Brandenburg regiment—was managing it for the Gräfin after the war, when she was shot. The cousin in America, he left it in my hands—no other agent. I can say if I like that the whole house is rented. Wait a bit! Suppose I rent you the house—four thousand marks by the month—three months, twelve thousand marks? Less than fifteen dollars a month American money, isn't it? Or—make it twenty of your dollars a month. I'll keep five of it for myself and the Frau—give you the best bed and furniture in the place, clean your clothes, be responsible for everything you leave in the rooms, get up a dinner, if you wish to entertain half a dozen friends. Plenty of sleeping accommodations for them, too. And we'll mind our own business! When you have company, or after I've locked up for the night, we'll stay up on our own floor—wont know anything about what goes on below unless you order me down for something. Eh? Of course if you think twenty dollars high—eh? It would make much difference to myself and the Frau, you see! More beer—a little meat for us occasionally—a cake for the Frau, perhaps?"

"Make it twenty-*five* American dollars the month—out of which you're to see if you can't find a few bottles of wine remaining in the Count's vault, which one used to enter through a trapdoor in the floor of the old butler's pantry. Very likely it has been overlooked in the rioting and political changes. The American relative probably doesn't know of that wine-cellar—and the stuff will cost you nothing. If most of the old vintages are left, I'll buy four-fifths of the entire cellar from you at a fair price and you'll keep the other fifth, yourselves. Eh?"

EXCHANGE on the *mark* being what it was in June, the offer was altogether too good a one for Schumann to hesitate over. Being a simple-minded soul accustomed to receive orders unquestioningly from the "higher-ups," the American's thrifty wish to rent quarters in which he had been a welcome guest, in preference to paying extortionate hotel-charges, seemed a perfectly obvious one needing no further explanation. And if the Count's cellar proved to be still intact, the new tenant would be the gainer by a large supply of wine too fine in quality to be obtainable in any hotel at any price. What Schumann never dreamed and couldn't possibly have understood if he had, was that the American's decision to occupy some portion of the house had been made in less than five seconds when he saw—as they were discussing the matter on the sidewalk—four members of the Ebert cabinet entering the adjoining house with a General von Ludenstein, whom Carter remembered as its owner. At the time of his own and Lord Trevor's dangerous adventures in the Graf's mansion, they had discovered an underground passage between the two houses and had explored it with startling results.

A moment before the cabinet men got out of their car and were admitted to the adjoining house, Carter's interest in the Von Stendling mansion had been entirely casual—the curiosity of one who had been a guest in it as to what had become of his former host—what vicissitudes the family had passed through. But with his recognition of the cabinet ministers had come, instantly, the question as to what their object might be in visiting General von Ludenstein, whom the American knew to be unalterably in favor of the old régime and one of the Charlottenburg Junta which controlled the affairs of present Germany under the surface. With this question,

there had flashed through his mind a vivid recollection of the time when he and Lord Trevor had explored the secret passage between the two houses and what had resulted from that exploration. General von Ludenstein had inherited the property from his uncle the Baron shortly before—and as it proved, had no knowledge whatever of the underground passage, which dated back to a time when the first houses were built along Tiergartenstrasse—when a still older house had been entirely built over, and the adjoining one erected for certain purposes of state.

Here, then, was suddenly a situation of absorbing interest to the former diplomat. Four members of a Republican cabinet evidently coming by appointment to a secret conference with a very influential Imperialist, in a place where there was something more than a possibility of overhearing what they said—if the American acted quickly enough. All this, mind you, had flashed through his brain in the time it took the four to walk from their car to the General's veranda and be admitted to his house. Carter's subsequent talk and arrangement with the caretaker was a matter of less than three minutes—and the two immediately went up to the west room on the second floor, which he was to occupy.

AT this point it would not have been difficult to send the caretaker up to his own quarters and say that the new tenant would himself attend to the locking up—after possibly bringing in a friend to spend the night. But it occurred to Carter that sooner or later the caretaker might wonder why his new tenant didn't fetch in his luggage and prepare to be thoroughly at home before proceeding to look about for guests to spend the night—and this train of speculation might lead to future spying upon his actions in spite of the man's agreement to mind his own business.

It would be a matter of not over half an hour to hail a taxi, drive around to the Adlon, pay his bill and get his luggage—then install himself in his rented quarters for an indefinite stay. In half an hour, he might miss bits of an important discussion between the General and his guests next door, but from long experience in such matters, it seemed to the former diplomat more likely that the better part of an hour might be consumed in preliminaries—wine, cigars, risqué stories, possibly waiting for others to arrive, as the evening was still young. All things considered, he decided to chance the loss of anything important and go for his luggage—instructing Schumann to come down and let him in when he returned. In twenty-five minutes he was back—his luggage taken up to his room, keys handed over to him in case he afterward decided to go out again after some friend, though an extension telephone was in his room, and Schumann went up to the top floor for the rest of the night.

The caretaker had scarcely entered his own room and closed the door when Carter descended the broad oak stairs to the late Graf's study on the parlor floor, making no attempt to do it noiselessly. As the walls of the study were lined with books, and there were both wine and cigars in separate cabinets, it was quite in the natural order of things that the new tenant should go down there to read and smoke, even if he thought of going out afterward.

Closing the door of the study, but leaving the incandescents burning so that a streak of light would show under the door, Carter examined the bookcases against the outer wall of the house until he came to a set of volumes which he was sure he remembered. Removing three of these so that he could get his hand in back of them, he felt about until he located a round steel knob which he pulled toward him. With a slight creaking which indicated that the section hadn't been moved for several years, a portion of the shelving swung around upon counterbalanced hinges, revealing the oak wainscoting of the room behind them. In this he soon located another spring which released one of the panels and permitted it to be pushed into a socket at one side. Then, with the aid of a flashlight, he descended a narrow flight of steps in the thickness of the wall, after swinging the book-shelving into place behind him. On the outside of the building there was a noticeable two or three feet of extra thickness in the west wall as far as the roof—but as four chimneys rose from the top of it, the purpose for providing large open fireplaces in several rooms was apparently unmistakable. The steps descended to a level twenty feet below the gardens and branched off into a white-washed passage. At the other end were similar steps going up to a wainscot-panel behind bookshelves in exactly the same arrangement as the other house—the

library into which it opened having been used by the General as his workroom and conference-chamber ever since he had occupied the house.

FROM the back of the bookcase, after the panel had been slid aside, Carter looked through a space nearly an inch wide between the tops of the books and the next shelf above—seeing everybody in the room from a distance of but a few feet, and catching distinctly every word that was said. From the other side, it was impossible to get the slightest glimpse of *him*, behind the rows upon rows of books even if anyone had known or suspected the secret passage between the two houses. Foreseeing the prospect of a long vigil, mostly on his feet, the American had fetched with him a bottle of wine and three sandwiches—so that all parties concerned were as comfortable as possible in the circumstances.

In his first glance about the room, Carter discovered that to the original five men had been added another guest in the person of a woman, medium in build but of striking appearance. Not pretty, as a doll or a Watteau face is pretty; not handsome, as in the case of a woman in whom nobleness of character is reflected in every perfect feature. And yet—something of both, tinged with a spirit of reckless adventure which risks anything and meets death with a smile if the play happens to work out that way. After the first half-hour, Carter watched this woman with increasing respect—recognizing in her a prominent figure in the mysterious Charlottenburg Junta, of which he knew so much that he was convinced it wasn't a quarter of what he absolutely *should* know as a diplomat with the best interests of the United States and France at heart.

In giving bits of the talk among the six, which he overheard from his place of concealment, it will be readily understood by the reader that the names used in this narrative are necessarily fictitious as far as the author is aware—excepting, of course, those of men prominently before the public which were mentioned by the cabinet members—as for example Rathenau, whom they were discussing when Carter slid back the panel. Raupt was vindictively denouncing the policies favored by the head of the big electric system, and Frohlander was just hinting at something which, even among themselves, was more or less dangerous to put in words.

"Rathenau is nearly through! I think he knows it himself, because some one quoted a remark of his, wondering if it would be his turn next. It was just after the Erzberger affair, I think. The fact is, with Rathenau wielding the influence he does, backed by a majority of the people in accepting conditions laid down by the Entente and making the best of them, we can get nowhere. Germany is not going to pay in full the reparation sums imposed upon her by force; nor have we the slightest intention of bending our necks to any yoke they may choose to put upon us.

"At present we have a weak, makeshift government—but that's only a blind until our arrangements are completed to overthrow it. The preliminaries, of course, are getting rid of such popular leaders as Rathenau and half a dozen others who stand in the way of restoring imperial rule. Well, that'll come before anyone suspects that such things are possible! In fact, it would not surprise me if by tomorrow evening Rathenau were no longer with us. Others will travel the same route, presumably. All this is mere supposition upon upon my part—gathered from hints dropped by men who I infer have been selected to look after such matters, though I have no definite reason for thinking so. The less knowledge one has of that sort, the better."

"What do you suppose the effect would be, Frohlander, if we pulled off our little *coup d'état* during the next year—put an imperial government in power again? Think France would declare war?"

"Depends upon how much she stood to lose by it immediately. If we announced that the terms of Versailles, Cannes and such understanding as they may reach at The Hague would be carried out as far as Germany *could* without financial disaster, I don't think she would attempt another war merely to dictate what form of government we should choose for ourselves—though the French, unquestionably, would consider it a menace. You see, neither Italy nor England would back her in such a war; she'd be playing a lone hand! No! I think she wouldn't quite risk a war! We're safe enough in springing the *coup* whenever we're fairly sure of success and general support from the mass of the people. The Hindenburg demonstrations rather indicate that we'd have popular support from the start."

HERE the cool deliberate voice of Hilda Treubel checked the discussion of imperial plans and switched the talk into another channel.

"What *I* want to know is whether you propose putting through the Japanese alliance with the present government—if it can be done. And if so, whether it is to be something which is to our advantage to ratify after imperial rule is restored? So far, all the conversations have occurred between Cassel, Wormser and Baron Shimbashi, since his arrival at the Japanese embassy. Now, how far have you got with him, Cassel—how far do you mean to go?"

"Well, what we're trying to put through just now is a part trade, part defensive alliance with Japan. As you know, the Jap liners are the only boats at present getting either cargo or passengers for Nagasaki, Kagoshima and a few other ports where there used to be considerable trade in foreign bottoms. Formosa, too! Now, with the new mercantile-marine which we're rapidly building, we want the entry into those ports. If we can get cargo for them at our rates, in open competition, we want the privilege of delivering it there and taking out such Japanese cargo as there may be offering. Japan is losing money at the rate she's obliged to offer in order to keep out the boats under other flags. Of course the explanation presumably is that each of those ports has been made a formidable naval base or has been fortified to receive and protect Jap shipping in time of war. If, however, we have a defensive and trade alliance with Japan, she would be inclined to favor our boats to the exclusion of all others. Her whole government system is more or less copied from our former imperial one. Our ideas on government follow the same lines to a large extent. Knowing, as she does, our capacity for war-preparation, our system of waging war, she might easily consider alliance with us more to her advantage than with any other nation. The Crown Prince, now Regent, has just been in Europe, keeping his eyes open and absorbing a good many Occidental ideas. The men behind him favor alliance with us—particularly since our announcement of the Rapallo agreement with Russia—"

"It is being reported in American newspapers that the Rapallo agreement was more a 'gesture,' made for purely psychological effect at Genoa, than with the idea of definite alliance between the two countries—that Russia has already gained and discounted all she is likely to get from that agreement."

"Oh, naturally—of course! A lot of reports on Russia are being published throughout the United States which are absolutely nothing but bolshevist propaganda—many of them actually paid ads, printed as news columns. For example! The crops are likely to be much better this year than for some time past, owing to the wet spring and the more extensive planting. Lenine and his subordinates are spreading the report that this circumstance is solving the whole of Russia's problem, that there is no longer a possibility of famine, that transportation is greatly improved all through the country, and business picking up everywhere.

"As a matter of fact, they *are* beginning to get results from the work of the eighty thousand Germans who have been scattered throughout Russia for the past four years, organizing, reconstructing, systematically laying the foundation for working business conditions. They've been on the ground and are in position to get such advantage as there is for Germany in preference to other nations. The Rapallo pact was merely a public announcement of working conditions between the two countries for three or four years—and it was something more than a 'gesture,' as the world is likely to find out before long. In a few years we shall practically control Russia—have a Russian army of ten millions trained, supplied and officered by Germans. The more intelligent statesmen of Japan, even the Regent himself, are convinced that the future of Russia is likely to work out this way, and that's why they are in a very receptive mood concerning a serious alliance with us."

"BUT," inquired Hilda, "just what has Germany to gain by such an alliance?"

"For the present, preference in marine trading to and from Japanese ports—very likely the handing over to us of trade with the Pacific islands, formerly our colonies now held by Japan. But far greater than all that as a consideration is the preventing of Japan from contracting alliances with other powers—working with her until we find out most of her strong points and many of her weaker ones, studying the country with German thoroughness until we know how it may be most successfully

developed. And of course, this naturally includes China—since Japan has been commercially exploiting every corner of China for years and no other nation can stop her."

"You say: 'for the present!' How about the future? Suppose our imperial restoration goes through successfully and cannot be overthrown by any force within our boundaries? What will be the bearing of a Japanese alliance upon such a situation as that?"

"You mean—what is our ultimate objective with Japan? Why, that should be perfectly clear! If we control a Germanized Russia with all her vast resources at our disposal, Japan could make no effective resistance. We absorb her—and China too. By that time we shall be so powerful that no combination of other nations will *dare* attack us. Our old Pan-German dream of a German world will become reality—probably without any extensive war!"

"Don't you suppose the Japs are farsighted enough to see that—and watch their step?"

"If they had any idea how much actual penetration we have already accomplished in Russia, they certainly *would* see it. But in spite of their excellent secret service, they have, so far, missed the fact that all of those individual Germans in Russia are but units in an army controlled and directed by our Junta along definite plans for development. Beyond all that,—and with the chaotic conditions in Russia, it's almost impossible to discover traces of a definite system working through it,—Japan undoubtedly has in mind a Chinese army of ten millions or more, supplied and officered by Japan. They probably count upon something like that to safeguard them against anything the Western nations may do."

"Does Baron Shimbashi talk as if such an alliance as you describe might be put through within the next few months?"

"I think that practically everybody at the Japanese embassy would more or less favor the idea if they were satisfied their interests could be safeguarded. Of course, we're merely at the stage of 'conversation,' at present—tentative suggestions, reservations, conditions, potential benefits to be derived by each nation. But Viscount Itoyori is to be in Paris by Saturday. It is the intention of Shimbashi and two or three of their diplomats to join him there for a series of discussions upon the matter—probably with diplomats from the London and Paris embassies, also—"

HERE Hilda Treubel interrupted with an exclamation: "Itoyori! My old admirer?"

"Precisely! That's partly why you're here tonight, Hilda. It's your job to pick up that affair about where you dropped it—and go the limit if necessary! Just how far it is possible for a white woman to fascinate an Oriental beyond his psychic self-control and handle him for her own purposes, has never yet been tried out conclusively. It's been attempted, dozens of times, but always with serious results for the woman, chiefly because she didn't play the game for all there was in her—thought the job was easy, considered her intelligence the superior one, when it was just the other way around. The whole point involved is this: If we can put through a German-Japanese pact *now*, along the lines I've explained to you, it's about the biggest *coup* we can pull off, short of the government restoration we're planning. And its effects will be felt all through the next fifty years. There are other ways I've not touched upon in which such a pact would benefit us immensely in our political relations with the Entente powers. We could probably do without you—but your assistance will make our success almost certain if you're willing to play the whole game through."

"H-m-m! Itoyori is really a fascinating man, light enough to pass for a Caucasian anywhere. But he's nobody's fool! I'll have my work cut out for me! Do you know—the idea is intriguing! I think I'll attempt it! You'll want me to leave for Paris by midnight, I suppose? Is the old studio I had still available? The one just off the Boul' Miche'?"

"It will be ready for you to step into it, just as the place was left six months ago—with some half-finished canvas of yours on the easel, or one near enough your style to pass for it. I think it might be well to put the bedroom and kitchenette in order and live there—rather than in some hotel or apartment suite."

BEFORE Carter finally closed the panel and stretched his cramped legs, he had obtained a more comprehensive idea of what the forces in the background of German political life really had in mind than

anyone outside of the Junta itself. He felt himself the accidental repository of confidential information so momentous—so dangerous to the world at large, if the plans he had overheard were carried out—that he was afraid to trust his own judgment in considering ways or means to render them ineffective. Of course, much of what he heard had been discounted as possibilities among the chancelleries of all the great powers. But there is a vast difference between assuming that the political ambitions of a certain power will lie along certain lines, and actually knowing that campaigns have been perfected to the smallest detail not only to carry out what has been supposed possible, but much more which hadn't been dreamed of. It seemed to Carter that there were just four people in Europe at that moment capable of handling such a situation with any chance whatever of blocking it—a woman and three men whose daring, mysterious exploits had earned for them in war-days the sobriquet Diplomatic Free Lances, though their identity had never been discovered.

It had been decided that Hilda Treubel was to leave for Paris on a midnight train—and she was then motoring to her apartment to pack. Allowing for the fact that her progress would be expedited by all government officials with a general cutting of red tape until she crossed the Rhine into France, she would hardly be in Paris until sometime during the second day following—and Carter felt that every hour he was there ahead of her was that much time gained. To suppose that he could beat her by any combination of railway connections was simply out of the question, he would have been delayed in a dozen different places while she was being assisted through. But he presently decided that there *was* a way to beat her if he could manage it without being caught and locked up.

Calling Schumann down from his quarters on the top floor, Carter explained to the caretaker that he had been figuring up time-tables in the Graf's former study to see what rail-connections he could make in handling several business appointments during the next week or so—and had decided to leave Berlin by a midnight train, returning possibly in four days, or eight to ten if he were delayed. Leaving most of his luggage in his rooms and paying the caretaker a month's rent in advance, he telephoned for a high-powered motorcar and drove away in the general direction of the Hamburg railway station. Once north of the Tiergarten, however, he ordered the chauffeur to reach Nauen as fast as he could get there—and they covered the distance in just under an hour.

THE American had made the acquaintance of two radio-operators in the big Nauen station shortly after the close of the war, and being an expert radio-man himself, had sent them printed matter from time to time illustrating new discoveries and hook-ups. So there was no difficulty in getting them to extend the courtesies of the station, even though it was against strict government regulations, and permit him to call the big new station on the hills south of Paris. The sending of a certain number at once procured a connection through this station to the Paris residence of the Honorable George Llangolen Trevor on the Avenue de Neuilly. Apparently the brief exchange of words related exclusively to the purchase of certain American securities on the London Exchange—but as the remarks were really a carefully worked-out code, the two understood each other perfectly, and a rendezvous was made.

Chatting for another hour or so with his two radio acquaintances, Carter finally left them and motored back to Berlin—as they supposed. Instead of this, however, he was driven twenty miles farther—to the little town of Friesack, at the foot of several hills, and took a room there at an old but fairly comfortable inn—sending the chauffeur back to Berlin with his car, sufficiently well paid to keep his mouth shut as to where he had been.

During the day Carter strolled about the little town, inquired if there were fishing or hunting of any sort to be had in the hills, and toward evening settled his bill, saying that friends of his would be motoring through sometime within an hour or so and that he would stroll along the road to meet them. Leaving the road at a point where he was not likely to be observed, he went up a little valley between the hills until he came to a smooth, level clearing in a spot rather difficult to get at because of swampy ground and rushes on the two otherwise most accessible sides of it—a place never visited by anyone except charcoal-burners, and seldom by them. It had been used a dozen times during the war by Trevor and his companions as a landing-

field for the 'planes in which they had flown over the length and width of Germany. And though they had been seen at least three times in the air over the hills, at a couple of thousand meters, the place where they came down had never been found while they or their 'planes were on it. As the ground was covered with hard white sand and the clearing surrounded by dark coniferous trees, it was possible to distinguish it even by starlight if flying sufficiently low.

It was barely dusk when a 'plane slid easily and surely down into it—the roar of its exhaust having been deadened by Trevor's patent muffler before the engine was stopped. In the 'plane were the Honorable George and his favorite *mecanicien* Harry Archer—a companion of many hair-raising adventures during the war.

One contingency which had made the diplomat rather apprehensive was the possibility that their supply of petrol might be too low to get back. But Trevor and Archer pawed about in a pile of dead twigs and dried rushes at one side of the clearing under the trees, until they dug out a couple of galvanized-iron barrels containing ample fuel. By some means which they didn't explain at the time, they had managed to keep a dozen barrels full of petrol in this hiding-place through the last years of the war and during the three years succeeding it. Before ten o'clock, next morning they came down at Le Bourget in the northern suburbs of Paris—were in Trevor's house conferring with Madame Nan and Earl Lammerford half an hour later.

THROUGH the courtesy of M. le Préfet, Carter and the other Diplomatic Free Lances received a telephone-message at four in the afternoon that Madame Hilda Treubel had just arrived at the Gare du Nord and was proceeding to her studio, off the Boulevard St. Michel—but by that time they not only had located Viscount Itoyori on a Nippon Yusen Kaisha liner approaching Marseilles from Port Said, but had blocked out what seemed a fairly workable plan of action.

Carter had repeated to them, practically word for word, everything he had overheard in Tiergartenstrasse—described the appearance of the cabinet ministers and Hilda Treubel so closely that there was no possibility of doubt as to their identity. When giving them the sinister remarks which had been made concerning Dr. Walter Rathenau, Trevor stopped him with a question:

"Did you do anything about that, Raymond?"

"I certainly did—though I came within an ace of forgetting it, with the mass of other detail I had in mind. Wrote a warning note to him while I was in the radio-station at Nauen and gave it to the chauffeur—who was to mail it in Berlin as soon as he got back!"

"Bully—if the chauffeur didn't carry it in his pocket for several days! That's been done, you know. I'm uneasy about Rathenau—he's much too valuable a man to lose, just now! I think I'll put another warning through to him by radio!"

Crossing to the last word in powerful regenerative sets, which were strung along an operating-bench at the other side of the study, Trevor called the big new station south of Paris, had himself switched on to the five-hundred-meter antenna, and called Nauen—which answered immediately and took the message to Rathenau, warning him against assassination at any moment. Under heavy penalties for neglect to deliver an officially recorded message, the operator who received it took the chance of insuring its delay for several hours, nevertheless. It just happened that for a few moments he was the only man on duty—and that he was an agent of the Charlottenburg Junta, put in that position to carry out its orders without question.

Carter's chauffeur was an admirer of Rathenau—but had spent some of his easily obtained money upon more wine and hard liquor than he could carry. He never thought of the letter given him to mail until two days later, when he found it in the pocket of his night-coat. Meanwhile—one of the world's blackest political crimes had been committed, and the man whom Germany could least afford to spare had been shot to death in his own motorcar.

RETURNING to the Trevors and their friends, in the former Earl's well-protected study at the top of the house: The discussion proceeded until it began to appear that some plan of action was at least possible. Referring to their position in the matter, as private citizens having no connection with any government at the time, Trevor said:

"Raymond brings up the question as to whether anything we can do isn't likely to be futile—whether such a Germano-Japa-

nese pact would actually be enough of a menace to the rest of the world to warrant our interference, anyhow. But he asks this merely to bring out the menace in every possible light. He knows we can't afford *not* to interfere—he's gone to considerable trouble and run pretty serious risks to find some means by which we may block the scheme. Putting it briefly, the danger is about like this: Given time and opportunity for her commercial penetration of China, the vision of a ten-million Chinese army officered and supplied by Japs is no dream at all! It's something bound to come, in time, unless we can spread Western influence in the Chinese republic and block her. Under similar conditions, German exploitation of Russia—the ten-million Russian army officered and maintained by Germans—is just as much a certainty. It makes little difference to the world whether one of them eventually gobbles the other or not. Taken separately, the world might cope with either one of those military propositions. Combine them *—and the whole world is licked to a finish, enslaved!* Now, it seems to me that a frame-up of some kind should be possible. And this is where our approaching friend, Itoyori, comes in. Nan, tell us about where you were at with the Viscount, last time you saw him!"

"H-m-m—let me think a bit! There have been so many of these little affairs, tentatively begun and dropped when there was no longer necessity for keeping them going! We were being entertained by some of the Elder Statesmen in Tokyo just before we resigned from the peerage. At the time, we were celebrities—with very wide-spread influence in various parts of the world. On our own account, because of our known social and political influence, they laid themselves out to show us every courtesy. Itoyori hadn't succeeded his brilliant uncle at the time, but he was a baron and a finished diplomat. It seemed well worth my while to go after him—and I did. He was my devoted admirer both in Japan and in London a few months afterward. Nothing scandalous, of course, though I fancy I might easily have pulled him over the line. He was, and is, a man of honor—ethically the superior of most Caucasians. But he is very impressionable.

"After I had joked him out of his growing warmth, we remained most excellent friends—I had a beautiful letter from him three months ago. But he became intrigued with an artist over near the Boul' Miche'—probably this same Hilda Treubel—and was said to have spent a great deal of his time in her studio, night and day. I haven't much doubt that he became infatuated—but knowing the Oriental character as I do, I'll wager a thousand dollars she never got a single Nipponese secret from him and will be far more of a hypnotist than I think, if she ever does!"

"H-m-m-m! I wonder just how influential Itoyori is, today, with the Regent and the men in power behind him?"

"Well, those Germans—who are probably well informed upon that point—seemed to consider the Viscount practically the whole works on this alliance proposition. They're certain that his will be the deciding opinion and vote. Presumably he is the counselor and power behind the Nipponese foreign office—head of what would correspond to the American State Department."

"Hmph! Wonder if we lost caste with him when we retired to private life without the titles? What do you think, Nan?"

"As it happens—I know! When I was last in Yokohama on the *Ranee Sylvia*. I received as much distinguished attention as ever. They were half inclined to consider our retirement from the peerage as an excellent American joke, and with that point of view, even more inclined to think us rather bigger for doing it. They all knew that before floating their new loan in London and New York, their financiers would be referred to us, or a committee appointed by us, from the various financial interests we represent."

"Well—let's see? I think you're right, but it's easy enough to settle it. If we do—we spike Madame Hilda Treubel's guns before they start firing. I'll just send him a radio."

STEPPING over to the transmitting set again, Trevor had no difficulty in getting the Japanese liner with his powerful installation, and sent the following message:

S. S. *Asama Maru*—Mediterranean Sea.
Message to Hon. Viscount Itoyori:
Will the Viscount honor his old friends by making their Paris residence his home while in Europe—using it in every way as his own—bringing his personal suite?

GEORGE LLANGOLEN TREVOR,
MADAME NAN TREMAINE TREVOR,
Avenue de Neuilly, Paris.

In less than fifteen minutes, Trevor heard his own call-letters on the diaphragms at his ears, and received his answer:

> Hon. George Llangolen Trevor and Madame Trevor, Avenue de Neuilly, Paris.
> Gratefully consider myself honored. Arriving your home by "rapide" from Marseilles with secretary, valet and two servants.
> ITOYORI.

NOW, the rest of the story might be narrated at considerable length, with much interesting detail—but skeletonized, it came to this: When there is serious enough object in Nan Trevor's laying herself out to accomplish something, it has always been a sizable job for anyone to defeat her. With a more brilliant mind, powerful hypnotic influence, and a far wider experience with many races of people than Hilda Treubel ever had, it wasn't difficult to regain all of her old ascendancy over her impressionable Oriental friend. Supposing that the Viscount would take a suite at the Elysée Palace Hotel and make the Paris embassy his headquarters, Hilda had sent her perfumed notes to both places. Itoyori got the one at his embassy with a lot of other communications when his mind was full of business and diplomatic affairs—failed to recognize the handwriting, in his single hasty glance, stuffed the note into his pocket with others, and handed the bunch over to his secretary, who discreetly burned it lest it compromise his master by lying about the house of Samurai like the Trevors.

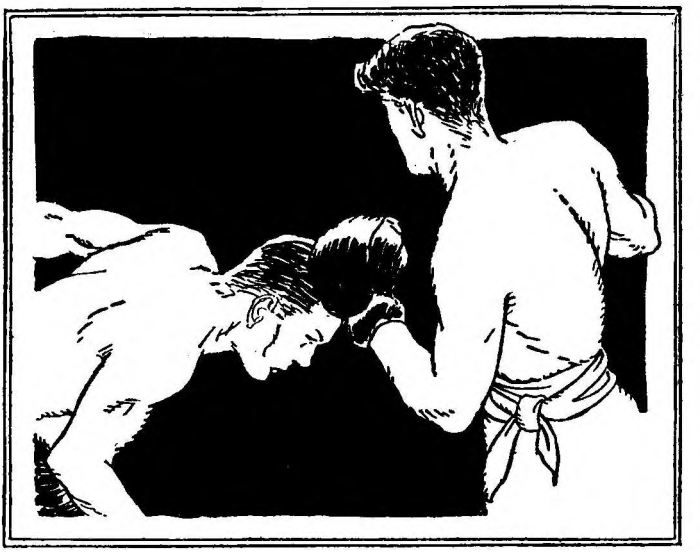
Conferences with the London and Paris ambassadors, also the diplomats from Berlin, were held in a private suite of the Trevor mansion instead of the Paris embassy or a hotel. Then, when Itoyori was almost inclined to consider the proposed alliance favorably, Trevor and Carter handed him a verbatim report of the conference in Tiergartenstrasse, suggested that he go with them to the suburbs of Berlin by airplane, smuggle himself into the house Carter had leased, remain there a week or two if necessary, upon the practical certainty that there would be some conference in the General's house next door—and see if he could not obtain some corroborative evidence as to the ultimate German intentions concerning Japan.

It was difficult for the Viscount to believe Carter's report when he read it—though of course it dealt with a conference among one faction out of many conspiring to set up one or another sort of Government in Germany. The more he thought of it, however, the more it seemed to represent the majority of influence in that country—the majority likely to come out on top. Neither the Trevors nor Carter were connected with any government; there was no official object in their misleading him. They had always proved themselves his courteous and loyal friends. And they appeared to be certain of giving him proof as to the real underlying Pan-German intentions. Being a pretty good sport, and retaining a love of adventure, he took them up on the proposition.

Viscount Itoyori left word at his embassy that he was called out of Paris for a week or so, and then quietly disappeared. Nobody who knew him saw the man go or had any idea how he got out of the city; the newspaper men were furious over what they considered an impossibility. He was seen at the opera and two clubs one evening—and was not seen afterward for over a fortnight; then he reappeared as mysteriously as he left.

Meanwhile he had sat for an hour or two at the open panel back of General von Ludenstein's books upon four different nights, until his limbs were thoroughly cramped, without getting sufficient evidence to satisfy Carter and Trevor, though there was a good deal of the circumstantial sort. Then after nearly two weeks of waiting and watching, Hilda von Treubel was summoned to Berlin to explain why she had failed to get in touch with Itoyori, and there was a stormy session in the General's library, with much recrimination and a complete rehashing of all their plans. The Viscount returned to Paris that night, called a conference of his diplomats next evening and gave them what he had discovered.

Now, there *may* be some sort of a working understanding between Tokyo and Berlin, today. Probably nobody outside of the governments most interested has any knowledge of the fact or how carefully it has been limited if it *is* a fact. But it may be stated with more or less certainty that such an alliance as the one proposed does not and will not exist between the two nations for many years. Nippon—is now suspicious.



A Man His Size

A fight story that is all fight, by a man who has been in the game himself and knows whereof he writes.

By William F. Sturm

A BOXER so fast that he can tell an opponent what is coming and deliver it? They don't come that way, eh? Well, maybe they don't. But they do. I've seen it done. I'm going to tell you the story of one who did it, but it was only incidental to the big idea, you might say. But I'll say it was a fitting wind-up to all that went before, and there was considerable went before. . . . .

You can't pick up a sport-sheet nowadays but that you read something in it about Bob Barstow. Bob has been mowing the good boys down right along, and while he isn't the welterweight champion yet, I'll lay anybody a stack of blues that he will be some day—and his star isn't so far away that you have to use the Lick Observatory telescope to see it in the fight firmament. About all Bob has to do to polish them off is to get a match with them. And when he reaches the top of the heap, it will only go to prove that brains has it over brawn any day in the week.

The peculiar thing about the whole business is that Barstow never intended to make fighting his profession when he started out—all he intended to do was to give Ham Baker the lacing of his ugly life. But as the farmer said, you never can tell in the spring how a measly calf will turn out in the fall. Today Bob is pointing right toward the championship; and take it from me, he'll get there. If I were inclined to flatter myself, I might cite the fact that I am his manager as proof that he has brains. But I wont. All that I'll say is that I know a good thing when I see it. That's why I quit my job as publicity manager of Morse Motors to take him under my managerial wing. While I admit, modestly, that management is at least half of the making of a good fighter, a manager can't get very far with his fifty per cent unless he has the other fifty per cent to exercise his management on. And you tell them, Albert, I have that other fifty. That's why that stack of blues I

was whispering about is pretty safe. But getting down to the story as it unfolded:

IN the first place, Nature started to make a human beanpole out of Barstow, and then, when he reached about five feet nine, changed her mind. A bedslat would have been corpulent alongside him. And this Nature person wasn't satisfied with turning Bob out of the laboratory about half-built—she tacked another accomplishment on to him. He was one of the best stutterers I have ever known. At eighteen, when the story opens, so to speak, he could easily have captured every prize in a ground and lofty stuttering contest. But he doesn't stutter today. Another case of brains!

He came to Morse Motors during his high-school vacation and liked the work so well he never went back to school. He tried to keep his infirmity in the background as much as possible, by keeping to himself.

However, on the bench next to him was Ham Baker. Ham was just what his name indicated. He was built like a gorilla, acted like one, and had as much brains as a gorilla is currently credited with having. Maybe I am slandering the gorilla—I don't know. Ham was like all bullies. He picked on the most inoffensive person he could find—and that person was, of course, Barstow.

When the quitting gong clanged at five o'clock, Ham was always the first man to reach the wash-room. His idea was to wash up and leave the bowl dirty for the next man. If you have been around a factory much, you will know that there are a lot of low-brows who consider this the regular thing to do. After Ham had washed up, he used to go back to the shop and watch Barstow putting his tools away. Ham had a choice line of conversation for a poor boob who waited until the gong rang to begin putting his tools away. But Bob always kept silent. That was his brain working again, you see. If he had tried to talk, all he could have done was to get excited and stutter.

By the time he got to the washroom, Barstow usually found all the bowls dirty. He had to listen to Ham's jeers because he always cleaned a bowl out before washing. All I'm trying to do is just to prove that Ham was a real honest-to-goodness tough guy—establishing my case before the jury, so to speak.

BARSTOW had been at the factory a few months when we decided to equip a gymnasium and get an athletic instructor. When the announcement was made that boxing would be one of the major sports, most of the boys joined the class, Barstow among them. I used to stroll in and watch the men paired off and going slowly through the blows and guards at the command of the instructor. Ham Baker took to the game readily. He had been fighting more or less all his life, and the class idea just suited him, because he could practice on everyone without much danger to himself.

I can remember, now, that Barstow was rather slow in learning. I would never have picked him as being even a *fair* boxer, not alone *good*. And probably he never would have been more than fair if he hadn't gone to the Morse Mutual Relief Association dance. And he wouldn't have made a good scrapper then if Ham Baker hadn't bawled him out the way he did. And he wouldn't have bawled him out, either, if it hadn't been for Nelle Mays, so I guess we've got to give the girl the credit for what happened. She laid the foundation for marrying the coming champion right then, in my opinion. But this isn't a goofy love-story; and with a mention of the beginning of what followed, we'll leave Nelle out of it, because it wasn't until after the fight I am going to tell you about that she enters again, anyhow.

Bob walked over to Nelle for the eighth dance, which his program indicated he had with her. He reached her side about the same time Ham Baker did.

"This aint your dance; and if it was, you couldn't have it!" the bully bellowed.

"I — have — Miss — Mays — on—my—program," Bob spoke up, carefully choosing each word, in order not to stutter.

Ham jerked Nelle's program out of her hand and looked at it. If it was Bob's dance he had overlooked putting his name on Nelle's program. Ham's name wasn't there either. I'm personally inclined to believe the dance belonged to Bob. One word led to another, Bob stuttering worse and worse. Finally the bully gave him a shove that sent him to the floor.

"Y-y-y-you b-b-b-big h-h-ham! Y-y-y-you c-c-can't d-d-do t-t-that t-t-to a m-m-man y-y-your s-s-s-size!" Bob stuttered like a machine-gun going into action.

"Is that so?" barked the bully. "Well, I can do it to you!" And he gave Barstow another shove.

Then Nelle took a hand: "You're nothing but a big brute!" she told Ham. And not satisfied with that, she turned to Barstow: "Don't let any man treat you like that, even if he is bigger than you are!"

She started something. Bob got to his feet slowly. Spurred into action by the girl's championship, he whaled away and hit Baker on the jaw. I think it surprised Baker as much as it did everyone else in the room. Then they tangled. After we separated them, Baker said he would finish it after the boxing-class the next night.

He did.

No use prolonging the telling of what happened. Baker stretched the performance out as long as he could, and when he had finished the job, there wouldn't have been much discussion if the coroner had rendered a verdict of "hit by a locomotive."

I never expected to see Barstow again, but he came back to work the next morning, and you can bet he had to listen to a fine lot of remarks from Baker and the rest of the room.

As the secretary of the athletic committee, I had become fairly well acquainted with most of the boys, and that night Barstow came over to my house. I'll not attempt to stutter as he did, but the gist of the matter was that he was going to trim Baker if he spent the rest of his life trying to. I told him he had better forget Baker and go back to work. But he was not going to do any such thing. He was going to make Ham eat crow, he was going to humiliate him just as he had been humiliated at the dance and in the shop. I thought that was a pretty large order, but I liked Barstow and I told him if I could help him in any way to let me know.

He quit his job the next day without saying a word to anyone.

TIME passed.

Ham Baker, seeking a new outlet for his nasty disposition, began fighting in the preliminaries out at the Fort. You know, at the Fort the State boxing law doesn't touch them; it's a Government reservation. Instead of the fighters being told to go easy and not knock their opponents out, the referee tells them to make it snappy or they wont get any money. Before the winter was over, the sport-writers had changed Ham's name to One-Round Baker. He was knocking them cold as fast as they got in the ring with him. In a year he was fighting semi-wind-ups at the Fort, and in less than eighteen months he was fighting main goes. He might have been a bully at the factory, but you had to hand it to him—he wasn't a staller. He was up and at 'em the minute the bell rang. His principal stock in trade was his ability to put over a sleep-producer with either hand. But he wasn't a boxer—he was a fighting machine, pure and simple. He paid no more attention to the blows of an opponent than if they had been love-taps. He kept wading in until he connected right, and then it was all over.

But if ever a man showed the effects of his manner of fighting, that man was Baker. As I said, his system was to go right after his man, and in doing this he was bound to assimilate everything that came his way. He had a cauliflower ear, a twisted nose and two teeth missing in front. But he was a bear for punishment, and he never broke ground a minute. He had built up quite a following among the boys at the Post, and those real sports who slipped out there from town every Thursday evening to see four or five bouts that reminded them of the good old days before the State boxing law took the punch out of fighting. Baker had never been licked, and the world does love a winner. I've seen thousands of boxing bugs go wild when he stepped into the ring. You would have thought One-Round was the king, the way he barely acknowledged the howls of his admirers.

When the new arena at the Fort was put up and seats provided for ten thousand, the soldier boys wanted to dedicate it right. They were hunting for a suitable boy to fight Baker. He had cleaned up everything in the Middle West, and at that, there are a lot of good boys working out of Chicago, Indianapolis and St. Louis. The local newspapers suggested that the local champ was ripe for a fight with one of the big boys from the East or the West Coast, and in the midst of the discussion there came a challenge from Los Angeles calculated to set the pot boiling in earnest. There was a welter out there that I had heard a great deal about. He called himself Speed Morse. He had been climbing steadily, and the press reports indicated that he was a whirlwind.

With the challenge came a thousand dollars to go as a weight forfeit. Morse guaranteed to do any weight from a hundred and thirty-eight to a hundred and forty-five, either at three o'clock or at ringside. The Fort promoters liked the sound of Morse's record and his wire, and they signed him up.

TWO days before the fight, my telephone bell at the factory rang. "Hello," said a voice which I tried in vain to place, "is this the publicity manager of the Morse Motors?"

I told the voice it was.

"Well, this is Bob Barstow—the fellow who got licked by Ham Baker at the boxing-class about two years ago. I'd like to talk to you a minute this morning."

"I'm pretty busy, Barstow, but I guess I can give you a minute." I figured he wanted me to get him a job at the plant.

When he came into the office an hour later, I wouldn't have known him, unless I had been prepared. He had filled out wonderfully. When he shook my hand, I thought he'd break every bone in it.

"I'm going to fight One-Round Baker at the Fort, Thursday night," he said, in a voice that he might have used in saying he was going to read the morning paper, "and I wonder if it would be putting you out too much if I used the factory gymnasium to limber up a little."

"You're going to what?" I asked, not sure whether he said he was going to fly to the moon.

"I'm fighting Baker at the Fort Thursday night, and I'd like to limber up a little in your gym. I'm in shape, but I want to work the train-soreness out."

I hadn't recovered my speech yet when he shook me loose again. Pulling out a little card, he looked at it and began to recite: "Proantrosubstantiationalist, circumlocution, prestidigitator, Demosthenes."

Anyone that can pronounce words like that couldn't stutter any more, could they? If they did stutter, they couldn't pronounce 'em; that's all.

I hadn't got my breath yet, so I just looked at him as he continued:

"You're going to the bout, I hope. I got a little surprise for Baker. . . . . Ever have a fellow pick on you till you almost went crazy and afraid to say anything back because you'd stutter and give him a chance to kid you worse than ever?"

I was about ready to call the police. I thought he was crazy. But I managed to calm myself and say: "Maybe you'd better start at the beginning, Barstow. Let's have it."

"When Baker licked me after I laid on him at the dance, I made up my mind to pay him back sometime. The first thing I had to do was to quit stuttering. That was easy. I went to a school, and the first thing the professor told me was that all I needed was self-confidence and he would cure me of stuttering in a few months. Easy, wasn't it?"

"Perfectly easy," I acquiesced.

"Spent several months there, walking around in a garden, swingin' my arms and repeating syllables in time to the swings—rhythmic speaking, they called it—like this." And he walked around the room, swinging his arms slowly right and left, repeating a syllable at each swing. "Didn't know it was so easy to quit stuttering. Self-confidence—that's what it takes."

"Yes, but self-confidence wont whip Baker. It'll take something more. This fellow Baker is a bear. I guess your rep' out West entitles you to a bout with him, though how you picked on scrapping for a profession gets me."

"Just to whip Baker. Then I'm going to quit. I spent two years of hard work getting ready for this bout. I didn't expect to have to take so long, but it did. They tell me this boy is good, but that don't worry me none."

"Some more of that self-confidence," I muttered. "But I'm telling you it will take everything you got to get the decision over this man—he's licked them all."

"What it takes I got," he chirped.

AN idea came to me: "Suppose we drop downtown to his training quarters and watch him work out a minute. You can slip in at the back of the crowd, and he wont see you."

"No, I don't need to do that," he told me. "I'm going to trim him and do such a good job that I don't care to spoil it any by knowing what I've got to do."

One thing sure, I couldn't reconcile this cocksure young welter with the beanpole Barstow of two years back.

But he didn't show much in his workouts in our gym. He was fair as a boxer, but not the kind that could make a dent in Baker. Maybe our boys were afraid to mix it with him because of his reputation.

The news soon spread over town that Speed Morse was none other than Bob Barstow, and that he was finishing his training at the Morse factory gym. That brought the crowd to look on. But Ham Baker wasn't in the crowd.

We can pass over the sensational stories in the newspapers. Barstow didn't have anything to say, but Baker made up for the lack. He came out in his regular style and told how he would finish Barstow in a couple of rounds, and how it was a shame to take the money. But the fans had read Barstow's record, and they knew by his list of victims that he had something to back it up. The promoters played the personal grudge stuff up in the publicity to draw a record crowd. I was just one of the interested fans, then. I didn't have any more idea that I was going to be the manager of the coming welterweight champion than I had that I was going to Mars in an airplane.

THE articles called for weighing in at a hundred and forty-five pounds at three o'clock on the day of the fight. The boys always weigh in downtown at Shea's Oasis. I strolled over to Shea's. The scales were in the back room, and One-Round was just going in as I got there. He stepped into one of the booths—a relic of pre-Volsteadian days—to shed his clothes and put on his trunks for the weighing. There was quite a crowd around, when out from another booth comes Barstow, stripped for the scales. He started scaleward just as the curtain was pushed back from One-Round's booth and he came out.

The crowd got the contrast instantly—Barstow, rangy, clean-cut, maybe a little tall, no bulging muscles, reminded me a good deal of Charley Ray in "The Egg-Crate Wallop." One-Round Baker, squat, bull-necked, rough-skinned, his fighting disposition showing in his hard face.

"Well, if it aint little old Stutter-tongue!" Baker greeted his opponent. "You don't stand no more chancet with me than a rabbit. I eat fellers like you 'fore breakfast."

Barstow flushed, then replied evenly: "You can't do it with your tongue." And that was all he said.

The scales were set at a hundred and forty-five, Baker having taken advantage of the top weight-limit Barstow had set in his challenge. The referee motioned Barstow to step on the platform. He did, and the bar didn't move. Then he moved the weight to a hundred and forty-two, and it balanced.

Baker got on the scales without noticing the position of the weight, and the bar hit the top with a jerk. The referee moved the weight to a hundred and forty-five and it balanced. "Both of 'em O. K.," he announced.

When I got out to the Fort that night and found my seat, the building was already crowded. If the arena was built to hold ten thousand, it is my guess that it had eleven thousand in it that night. The preliminaries and the semi-wind-up went off according to schedule amid the hurrahs and the raspberries of the sports from town and the solidly packed soldier section. Then there was the regular wait for the main event. A wind-up scrapper wouldn't be a wind-up scrapper if he didn't delay his appearance.

The sight was one to send a man's blood moving through his veins at a pace above the regular schedule. The eighteen-foot ring in the center of the hall, with its padded canvas floor, the canvas-wrapped ropes, two lonely stools set in cater-corners. . . . . Above, four big electric domes chased every shadow from the ring and made it light as day. The ringside seats were patronized by newspaper men and old, bald-headed men, snappy young men, sports in audible suits—all down where they could touch the platform where the ring was pitched and where, when an occasional glove brought a spattering of claret from an unlucky nose, they might expect to receive the benefit of the sprinkle. Sloping from the level of the ring, the seats went up tier after tier, until the last peanut-eating fan had almost to duck his head to keep the roof from crowding it—seats crowded with all types of humanity, the shaved and the unshaved mixing with equality on such an occasion as this. Four wide aisles ran from the four sides of the ring, dividing the spectators like four great pieces of pie. And over all was the air of expectancy, the missing of heartbeats at every unusual commotion that might presage the coming of the gladiators.

WITHOUT warning there was a burst of handclapping up next the roof at the side farthest away from the fighters' dressing-rooms. Some eagle-eyed kid had seen one of the principals come into the aisle and start toward the ring. The handclap-

ping spread like flame to powder all over the house. As it continued, Barstow came down the aisle, his bathrobe pulled closely about him. I noted the ample hand, swathed in soft white bandages, grasp the lower rope of the ring as he climbed through to his corner. The applause continued, and he smiled at the crowd.

Then from far up toward the roof came another cry: "Good-night, Barstow—where you want your ree-mains sent?" This remark didn't dim the fighter's smile. He had been in enough fights to know the irrepressibility of a fight crowd.

Five minutes passed. The crowd was getting restless. One-Round was exercising the favorite's prerogative to come on the scene last, delaying his appearance as long as possible, on the theory that the delay would make his opponent nervous. When Baker did appear in the aisle and the crowd recognized him, the applause and yells for the favorite became deafening. Baker parted his lips in what he intended as a smile. The uproar continued as he climbed into the ring and crossed to his corner. As he sat down, some goof chortled: "Give you a new hat, One-Round, if you put him away in the first!" If Baker heard this sally, he gave no intimation of it.

The seconds went over and examined the bandages of the opposing boxers to be sure they had not crowded an excess of tape on their knuckles. The four-ounce gloves were drawn on and laced up, and the referee rolled up his sleeves as he stood in the center of the ring with the fighters. "Hit with one hand free, but break when I tell you," was all he said to them. The fighters went back to their corners.

The stools and bottles and buckets had been removed from the ring. Barstow stood in his corner, gloved hands hanging loosely downward. Baker, his gloved hands resting on the ropes in his corner, looked down at the floor.

There was a hush over the chattering throng of spectators.

The gong clanged!

BAKER moved out of his corner like a shot, and it looked as though he would get to Barstow before the latter got out of his corner. The local champ swung a hard right at the challenger's jaw, and followed it with a left meant for the other jaw.

"By-By, Barstow!" screamed a Baker partisan with an ear for alliteration.

But I'm giving you my word that neither of those swings got near Barstow's jaw. He stopped each of them in midflight by the simple expedient of intercepting them with the open side of his glove, which seemed to give not at all under the steam behind the blows. There's an art in timing the blocking that absorbs the shock as easily as a fielder catches the ball, if you know what I mean. Barstow's feet seemed to twinkle, and he was four feet away from Baker before the latter woke up.

Baker began stalking his opponent. Coming in close, he swung a wicked right, but Barstow ducked under it and retaliated with a stiff poke in the attacker's ribs. The first round ended with neither fighter damaged.

"Let's go home early, One-Round!" spoke up the same entertaining goof as the bell rang for the second round. But Baker did little that would bring this consummation about.

AS the fighters went to their corners at the end of the third, Barstow addressed the crowd: "This guy can't fight. They told me he was a bear. If he don't show you something in this round, I'll do it myself." Then he sat down for what remained of the minute intermission. There was a mingling of hisses and cheers at this innovation at a prize-ring; and another bug countered with: "You aint so good yourself."

One-Round Baker had lost very little prestige as yet. The fight was young—it still had twelve rounds to go. He was in shape to go the distance, and you had to hand it to him—he carried the fight to his opponent. He rocked Barstow with a hard left in this round and the crowd yelled its approval.

As the round ended and Barstow walked to his corner, a Baker enthusiast in the front row told him he couldn't hurt the local man with a sledge-hammer. This remark seemed to amuse Barstow, and he answered: "I'm goin' to hit him with right and left hooks to the jaw in the next round—nothin' else. Watch me." The house cheered.

Running true to schedule, Bob laid hook after hook on Baker's jaws. I was beginning to see why they called him Speed out where he came from. But if he thought he was going to hurt Baker, he was mistaken. One-Round still bored in for more.

"Next round the straight left, nothin' else," Bob announced. Anybody who has ever had on the gloves knows how hard it is to get away from a jab, and Baker didn't miss one of them.

"And the straight right and a left hook to the ribs."

The crowd was still loyal to the favorite; the yells for Baker were still strong. He hadn't knocked his man out, it is true, but neither had he been knocked out. But his temper was getting away from him—always a bad sign in a fighter.

In a fierce exchange of blows at the end of the round, Baker half hit, half shoved Barstow into the ropes. It was an encouraging moment for the Baker boosters, and they didn't hesitate to let the world know it. Bolstered up by these cheers, Baker uppercut viciously with his right as he came in. But Barstow wasn't there at all, and the blow which would have torn his head loose if it had landed, went harmlessly up into the air. Before One-Round could get his hand down, Bob stepped in and drove a hard right over his heart. "If you miss with an uppercut again, I'll paste you a lot harder next time," Barstow cautioned as they clinched. "I don't stutter any more, either."

The tide of sentiment for the boy from the West was beginning to set in strongly. The spectators had been in the habit of seeing Baker's opponents dragged out long before this, and yet this kid seemed to be having as good a time as the spectators themselves. You can't fool a fight-crowd. It is inherently fair, especially so when this fairness is brought to the surface by actual merit, where home pride might have directed it otherwise.

"Hit him a one-two-three!" a Barstow supporter suggested. And obedient to the request, Barstow landed a left to the jaw, followed by a right to the other jaw and a left jab on the nose for the third one.

"That's callin' his shots!" came a raucous voice from the other side of the house.

"What else?" Barstow asked the crowd as he hooked his chin over Baker's shoulder as they went into a clinch.

BAKER'S reputation was going fast. He had tried everything he knew, but Barstow was so fast on his feet and so clever with his blocking and dodging that the local champ had not been able to damage him much. Hot rage was burning away any vestige of common sense he may have had at the beginning of the match.

"Your shoe's untied," Bob said to him in a matter-of-fact tone as they came to the center of the ring for the tenth round. Baker looked down. It is one of the most ancient gags in the prize-ring and a man of Ham Baker's ring experience shouldn't have fallen for it. But as I said, he was losing his head. As he looked down Bob tore into him with an uppercut, lifting his chin high by the impact of the blow. "Old stuff, Ham, old stuff," the perpetrator of the joke told his opponent. "That's for bawling me out at the dance that night."

"Knock One-Round out, if you're so damn' good!" the entertainer in the audience yelled.

"Goin' to do that very thing in the first minute of the eleventh round. A left hook, a right hook and a left to the solar plexus. He'll hear the birdies singing." Bob vouchsafed this information as he walked to his corner.

THE gong rang for the eleventh round. Barstow was all over his old enemy. His footwork was dazzling. He stepped in and out, smothering Baker with everything in the fistic catalog. I thought I had seen boys fast on their feet, but I had never seen one as fast as Barstow. I'll bet Baker thought it was raining boxing-gloves. It's a cinch he thought he was being hit with everything but the ring-posts.

"One minute's up!" came the announcement from the vocal entertainer in the audience. "Put him away."

"Here he goes!" Barstow turned to the newspaper men. He swung on Baker's jaw. The impact was terrific. If he had been hitting the local boxer hard before, now he more than doubled the power behind his fist. The victim's head jerked to one side. Instantly the right came in to the other side of the jaw and straightened the hapless boxer's head up again. The One-Round artist stood there helpless for a moment, looking foolishly at the crowd. Then as a left crashed into his solar plexus, he doubled up and sank to the canvas.

"Don't need to count him out, referee," Bob said as he helped pick the fallen fighter up. "He'll have stomachache for two days from that one. You see,"—apologetically—"he knocked me down at a dance once when I couldn't fight, and made fun of me because I stuttered, too."

A picturesque romance of young China in America.

The Sin of San Keu

By MARIAN O'HEARN *and* LEMUEL L. DE BRA

LITTLE San Keu lifted her gaze from the antiques and *objets d'art* that overflowed the window of her father's curio-shop, and for about the time that it takes one to put on a jade bracelet, her velvety black eyes frowned at two young Chinese who had paused to read the crimson paper San Keu's father had pasted on the panel. The Chinese read, smiled broadly, glanced in at San Keu, smiled again, and passed on.

San Keu's little pearl-colored chin lifted, and her eyes clouded with anger. All day, for three times three days, she would have to endure this. Gay and swaggering youths, giggling young girls, chattering old women, dark-faced *tong*-men, bent patriarchs of the old generation—all of that motley yellow throng that forever streamed by her father's window would pause to read those queer characters done in black on that narrow strip of crimson paper—read, smile at San Keu, and pass on.

But even this, thought San Keu, was better than what she must face at the end of the nine days. Yes, anything was better than marrying Yuen How!

She was glad that the white men and white women who passed could not read the announcement of her betrothal to Yuen How. These white women! How little San Keu envied them—their careless but graceful stride, their flimsy, light-hued raiment, their merry smiles! They were always smiling. But then, they did not have to marry just because their parents had ordered it. They married only the one whom they loved.

"And I," breathed San Keu, a catch in her voice, "I want to marry Tom Chan, whom I love; but I am going to marry Yuen How, whom I do not even respect."

It was but last night that Yuen How had paid the marriage price. How San Keu had burned with hate for him when she saw him enter! She could see him now—his narrow yellow face, his slender body clad in sinister black, and that superior smile with which he always looked down at her. . . . .

Suddenly San Keu realized that she was looking straight into the eyes of a young man who had just read the announcement, but who did not smile, one

whose eyes bore a hurt and stormy look. He was turning toward the door.

"San Keu," said Tom Chan, "is it true?"

"Yes," breathed San Keu, with bowed head, "it is true."

"But I too offered the marriage price—even more than did Yuen How."

San Keu glanced toward the rear stairs, then looked up at the man.

"It is not money my father seeks," she said quietly. "It is the friendship of the powerful Yuen family. Besides, you have gone to an American college, you wear American clothes and you have adopted many of the ways of the white people. My father does not like that. He wants his daughter to marry one who has clung to the old customs—one like Yuen How."

"But this is not China! This is San Francisco, in—"

"It is China for us, Tom Chan. Being born here does not change that which is changeless. So I have been betrothed to Yuen How, a man to whom I have never spoken, and never wish to. I shall marry him, bear children, become old and ugly—just as other Chinese women do."

San Keu turned to let her gaze linger on an American woman passing, a woman clad in light, gay-hued material, her head up, a care-free smile on her lips.

"You—you do not seem to care much," the man reproached.

"Tom Chan, I care so much that I pray every hour to the Mother of Heaven to let me die before my marriage. Anything would be better than to be taken as a bride to the house of Yuen. I—I could slay myself first. Yes,"—and the girl bowed her head,—"I could even become—the plaything of a white foreign devil!"

"Haie! You do not know what you are saying! You—"

"Ssh! My father—on the stairs! Go quickly!"

"No! I—"

"But he will punish *me!"*

The man's face darkened with fury. *"Ho hang la,"* he whispered miserably, and went his way.

"Ho hang la!" echoed little San Keu. "I hope you have a safe walk."

THE days passed—and Tom Chan did not return.

San Keu tried not to think of him; indeed, she tried not to think of anything. Since she could do nothing about her future, she tried not to care about it.

It was in this frame of mind that San Keu responded to the merry chatter of a young American who came into the store one day to purchase a cigarette-holder. With him was a girl dressed in some sheer black material that stirred with the slightest movement to whirl against her slender body. After a time the girl threw back her head restlessly and removed her hat, shaking out her short dark hair with a graceful motion of her pretty head.

"It's close in here," she told her companion; "and besides, I'm late. I'll see you at dinner. 'By!"

"My sister," the American told San Keu. "Don't you think she is pretty?"

"Very," replied San Keu truthfully, and then relapsed into silence.

"But no prettier than you, little Water Lily!"

TREMBLING, San Keu lifted her eyes to meet those of the tall American. She had never thought that eyes could be so beautiful, so honest, so friendly. The eyes of her own people were like curtains, concealing every emotion. She wondered if anyone with such eyes as this American could ever be unkind to any one.

The young man picked up an incense-tray and handed it to San Keu. Quickly she bowed her head, and her face grew hot with shame. What if the American could read the wicked thoughts that kept coming to her! Hastily she wrapped the article, handed it to the man, received his bill and turned away.

But the young man followed.

"You aren't a water lily, after all," he said whimsically. "You are more like a fragile Oriental rose—or is there such a thing as an Oriental rose?"

San Keu wanted to respond to his merriment, but her tongue refused to move. All the *fan quai* were like that—merry and laughing. But there was something about this one that was different.

"Tell you what," the young man pursued; "you take tea with us some day, will you? My sister and I would be grateful for your company. Will you?"

"Oh!" protested San Keu. "I couldn't do that. You—you do not understand." Trembling, San Keu shrank back against the rear counter, her eyes wide, her heart pounding. She was suddenly very much afraid—not of this fine, clean-looking man, but of herself. She wanted, oh, so much, to say she would go.

"Please!" she begged. "My father—"

The man doffed his hat and bowed. "I'm sorry, little one," he said gently. "I meant no harm."

FOR a long time San Keu's gaze lingered on the door that had closed behind the American. She was very angry with herself. She knew that to associate in any way with this white man would be considered very improper; and yet—

"It is right that I should marry Yuen How," she told herself over and over, "and it is wrong that I should think of accepting even honorable friendship from anyone else. But why am I so unhappy at the thought of doing what everyone knows is right, and so utterly happy at the thought of doing what everyone knows is wrong? *Aih-yah!* I am a very wicked girl!"

Miserable with shame and contrition, it was not until she lay on her couch that night and looked out at the bright, full moon above the shadows of Chinatown that San Keu began to recount in her mind the punishment that would be inflicted on her should she be seen in the company of the American. Her people considered it a very heinous thing for a Chinese girl to accept the friendship of a foreigner; they could not conceive of such an act being prompted by any but the lowest thoughts.

So the Chinese women would shun her; the Chinese men, as she passed down the street, would spit, and smile evilly. Her father would disown her, drive her away from home, or perhaps sell her into slavery.

And Yuen How! He would lose much face because of the disgraceful actions of his betrothed. He would demand the return of the marriage price. Marry a "plaything of the *fan quai*"? It would be unthinkable!

Suddenly San Keu sat up, her thoughts in a riot. *There* was the way out! It was a very wicked and terrible way; but could anything be worse than to be bound for life to Yuen How?

She would not do anything wrong, San Keu assured herself. She could not bring herself to do that. She would merely act in such a manner as to give all the appearance of evil—enough to convince Yuen How. "Outwardly, one may conform; inwardly, one may keep to one's own standards," wrote the great *Kung-foo-tsze.*

Then suspicion whispered to her:

"It is a trap! His sister will not be there! He wants you—alone!"

Hours afterward, little San Keu flung out her arms, bare and gleaming like old ivory, and a cry from the depths of her girl heart went out to the friendly-looking moon now fast sinking behind the hills: *"Aih-yah!* Oh, how piteous! Chang O, thou goddess of love, what shall I do? What shall I do?" And then, just like any other girl, little San Keu buried her face in her pillow and cried herself to sleep.

WHILE her father was at midday rice next day, the American came again.

San Keu was strangely calm. She responded lightly to his merry bantering. He was certain that San Keu had wrapped the wrong tray. She was sure she hadn't—but she got out another.

The white man talked about many things.

"My sister will be at the Almond Blossom tea-room at three," he said finally. "I want you to be with us. I will call here for you. We will have a very pleasant hour together; then we will bring you back here safely. Wont you come?"

Her head bowed, her pulses leaping, San Keu murmured faintly:

"Yes, thank you; but—but please wait outside for me."

At three o'clock that afternoon the motley throng of yellow men and women that forever streams back and forth through the narrow streets of Chinatown paused to stare open-mouthed at the sight of a young Chinese girl walking down Grant Avenue arm in arm with an American. Little San Keu, conscious of the venomous glances shot at her from all sides, wanted to scream and run back to her father's house; and it was only the thought of Yuen How—his saffron face, his thin body clad in funereal black, his slant, muddy eyes—that enabled her to drag her unwilling feet along at the side of the tall American. "Yuen How would refuse to marry her!" The thought repeated itself over and over in her mind, each time with a little bound of happiness.

As they turned to enter the Almond Blossom tea-room, San Keu stopped suddenly, her slender body trembling. Then quickly she slipped her arm through the American's, leaned on him, looked up into his face, and passed on—passed within a few feet of Yuen How, who stood by the doorway, his slant eyes narrowed evilly, his face black with rage.

Over her shoulder San Keu saw him

move away in that stealthy manner of his. She did not need to be told that Yuen How was on his way to her father's store, an angry denunciation on his lips.

"The plaything of the white foreign devil!" Yuen How would tell her father. Thus he would brand her, placing her far below the slave-girls of the *tongs*.

As they mounted the stairs, San Keu glanced quickly at the American, and drew her arm away. He was fair and laughing, so good just to look at, that she wondered at the aversion she felt to the touch of his hand on her arm. Something about it brought up a mental picture of another face, a young, mild, Oriental face on which there seemed always to hover a kindly, bewildered smile. But Tom Chan seemed to have forgotten her.

"Here we are!" the American cried as he drew back the curtains of a private booth. "Well! Sis hasn't arrived yet! Just sit down, Little One, and I'll phone."

He drew the curtain, and left before San Keu could speak.

TREMBLING, San Keu stood by the table and waited. So it was a trap, after all! Well, the American had served her purpose.

She flung the curtain aside and stepped out.

From a near-by booth arose a woman's guarded laugh. Then a strangely familiar voice:

"Ted! Ted! Did you actually walk down Grant Avenue with that little doll, as specified?"

"I certainly did. You lost your bet, honey. But say, of all the murderous looks those Chinks gave—"

San Keu heard no more. A wave of sickening humiliation swept over her. Blindly she started down the hallway.

A hand clutched her arm. San Keu, with a little cry, swung around.

It was Tom Chan. Gone was the kindly, bewildered smile. "Come!" he said sharply, and led San Keu toward a side exit.

San Keu obeyed. And as she leaned on Tom Chan's arm, she did not think it strange that she felt no aversion such as she had when the white man touched her. It seemed quite right that she should be at Tom Chan's side.

A machine stood by the curb, the motor running. Tom opened the door. "You must face your father's anger sometime," he said. "Better now than after he has had time to plan your punishment."

San Keu said nothing. But she uttered a cry when the car drew up in front of the store and she saw her father. He seemed suddenly to have grown many years older. Bowed and trembling, he was removing the announcement of San Keu's betrothal to Yuen How.

When he became aware of their presence, the girl's father turned and for a long moment looked into San Keu's face just as one might stare at a stranger; then slowly the old man's eyelids drew down like shades over windows. Without a word he entered the store, closed the door—and locked it!

"So," said Tom Chan as he led the weeping girl back to his machine, "you see your punishment. You are an outcast in Chinatown. Now, now, Little One, do not weep! Don't you understand?

"Don't you understand, San Keu, that it was the only way? No one in Chinatown wants you now; so I may have you. What do we care for Old World customs! Why, we are on our way to the Mission to be married!"

San Keu sat up, a stricken cry on her lips.

"Tom, it cannot be! It must not be! Wait! You will not want me when you know! That white man—"

Tom Chan leaned back and laughed.

"Haie-e! You are a very wicked girl, San Keu! I would like to have seen Yuen How when he got that unsigned note warning him of your disgraceful actions! That's why he was at the tea-room when you and the white man entered.

"Kuai! Don't you understand yet? Every word that Ted Brunter said to you was prompted by me. It was my plan that he walk with you to the tea-room so that Yuen How would break the betrothal. Mrs. Brunter made a bet that Ted wouldn't dare to walk down Grant Avenue with you; but he did it. Why, San Keu, that white man and his wife have been close friends of mine since Stanford days!"

SAN KEU bowed her head, but could not speak. When, finally, she looked up, her tear-wet eyes were as bright as jewels. Turning to smile her happiness into the eyes of Tom Chan, she chanced to see, in the automobile mirror, the reflection of her own face. Her smile was the happy, carefree smile of the white women!

A complete novelette that takes you most enjoyably to the North Woods and among the picturesque people of the lumber country.

ON PINE

By CLAY

JED RANEY, timber-king of Velas County, allowed his roan to stop at Long Fork ford for a drink; and while the horse sucked in refreshment, Raney's shrewd gray eyes roved the slopes of old Pine Head. There rose from the crest of the long pine-clad ridge a thin, lazy spiral of smoke like a cue of white hair streaming out of the dark pompadour of pines which gave the ridge its name.

Raney frowned at the sight; then his expression became triumphant. He was on his way home from Eagle, the county seat, after a long session at the Lumberman's Bank, which held mortgages on the thousand acres of timber-land of which Pine Head was the dominating landmark. Raney had offered good money for the tract, many times; but Lem Hudson, the nominal owner, had refused to sell. The advent of Lawrence Lang, civil engineer, attached to the State Forestry Commission, had sent Raney to Eagle, determined to secure an option on the tract.

It was Lang's camp-fire, atop the ridge, that Raney now saw, and his suspicious irritation at the stranger's presence was tempered by the knowledge of what he had just accomplished at Eagle.

Jed Raney reduced the picturesque review of tall pines, marching up to the top of the ridge and over it, to its lowest common denominator, trees to timber, timber to lumber, lumber to money. A thousand acres of pine—potential wealth to make a man a millionaire. And Lem Hudson was at work in Raney's sawmill. At night he hoed potatoes in a desperate effort to raise the money wherewith to meet payments on the mortgages that blanketed Pine Head tract. Lem Hudson was "land-poor" because he was stubborn. Not only had he refused to sell the tract, entire or piecemeal; he refused to sell the timber, cut or standing, to Jed Raney.

"Hullo, Jed! Lookin' things over, be ye? Purty dry!"

"Hello, Sheriff," Raney greeted the little man who drove his lean gray into the shallow waters of the ford. "Dry as tinder in the pine. A man's a fool to let a green camper in his woods, these days."

"Through the Mill," "The Hateful Little Town" and sundry other popular stories have brought Mr. Perry into prominence as a writer of exceptionally attractive fiction. You'll find this novelette interesting indeed.

HEAD

PERRY

SHERIFF HOLMES, Sand River's deputy and sole resident officer of the law, puckered his wizened face still more than usual and nodded sagely at the smoke-plume on Pine Head.

"Yeah! Specially when a camper goes off and leaves his fire, courtin' a girl or somethin', sittin' on a rockin' chair on somebody's front porch, a mile from his camp."

There was no mistaking whose porch the Sheriff meant. Jed Raney's face assumed a grim frown. "If I owned the timber, let me tell you I'd chase *him* off in quick order," he declared. "Can't see why Lem lets him stay. Snoopin' round Sand River with surveyin' instruments, like a timber-spy. He'd keep off *my* land."

"I reckon he would," agreed Sheriff Holmes dryly, "specially if 'twas pine-land."

"If there was a forest fire—" began Raney meaningly.

"It would be a bad time for it," declared Holmes. "That's one reason I'm out this way, keepin' an eye out for smoke. Doggone huckleberry-pickers, ginseng-diggers and hunters starts more fires!"

"Ought to be burnt up themselves—like Blake of Burnt Mountain," Raney said angrily. "I'm not a bloodthirsty man, Sheriff, but I can't help feeling the best thing could happen to a man that starts a fire in the woods is to lose his own life in it. Saves time—and trouble."

"Prob'ly would be best for him—the way people feel, durin' the dry spell, around these diggin's. Mebbe you're right," agreed Holmes. "Say, if ye should happen to run acrost this here Lang, Jed, I wisht ye'd caution him."

"I'll caution him," declared Raney, slapping his roan into a trot. "I'll caution him!" he repeated angrily as he sped on down the winding trail toward Sand River and home.

Raney drew up at the horse gate and dismounted, his eyes seeking the broad piazza at the front of the big frame house. As befitted Jed Raney's status as the industrial captain of Velas County, his residence stood on a high knoll overlooking

the settlement of Sand River. It was the only house in the settlement with any architectural pretensions, including a big piazza, a fence about the yard, awnings overhanging the piazza. Raney had built this house for a wife who had not lived to occupy it.

HE was about to send the roan trotting up the driveway to the stable when his keen gaze caught a movement on the piazza—a rocking-chair swaying to and fro. The dry remark of Sheriff Holmes recurred to him, and he scowled.

A murmur of voices on the porch ceased as Raney's hobnailed boots crunched stone. The hammock was agitated; there came a swift patter of feet. A girl, flushed of face, with troubled brown eyes, came down the steps, disregarding Raney's stern look. She wore a "housewife" apron, but something in the rounded lines of her vigorous young body, the way she carried herself, suggested anything but the housewife. Her lips, the only feature of her oval face in which she resembled her father, were puckered into something of the same troubled grimace Raney wore—only her expression was of rather becoming annoyance. Her eyes were frank, round pools of trouble.

"Father, I'm glad you've got home!" she exclaimed, and put out her hands to grasp his arm. Instead he took her by the wrist and held her, like a child, before him.

"Now, you look here, Beth!" he exclaimed impatiently. "I wont have this spying loafer hanging around this house. I don't care if you did meet him in school. He—*well!*"

He ended with an exclamation of dumfounded surprise as the rocking-chair, with its high back toward him, swayed, and a man rose and faced him.

"Well, if it aint Lem Hudson!"

Raney released his daughter and brushed past her eagerly, to greet the other man. The odd look of repressed triumph returned to his face.

"So it's you, Lem. I thought it was your Pine Head camper, hanging round here. Humph! Glad you got to the rocking-chair instead of him. You don't often take a day off. What brought you? Oh!"

He gave a glance of clumsy teasing at Beth. Her cheeks flamed.

"I wish you wouldn't talk about Mr. Lang at all," she cried, "if you can't talk sensibly. He's neither a loafer nor a spy."

"I got to talk about him," retorted Raney almost fiercely, and then he turned to Hudson: "I'll tell you," he declared emphatically, "if I owned Pine Head, I wouldn't let any man camp up there and build a fire this dry weather."

BETH gave a sigh of hopelessness and went into the house. Hudson regarded Raney with a curious expression on his face. He too had folded his arms across his chest, the typical "at ease" of the heavy-muscled lumberman or farmer. Hudson appeared to be studying Raney's face. His own countenance was impassive, save for an eager gleam in his eyes.

"Oh, I'm sorta easy-goin', Jed," he replied. "And when Beth can vouch for a feller—"

Raney gave an impatient grunt, opened his lips for a sharp retort, then closed them and gave a half-fond, half-sardonic smile toward the door whence Beth had vanished.

Hudson stood stock still, in an attitude of expectancy. He was considerably younger than Raney, but with his heavy beard, his stooped shoulders, he seemed almost as old. Both men were tall and heavily boned, Hudson a trifle lighter, but more closely knit. Otherwise they might have been cast in the same mold—the mold of the men of the trees.

"Well, I'm glad you come," repeated Raney, with a noise in his throat that might have been a chuckle. "What can I do for you, Lem?"

Hudson shifted his feet and swung awkwardly away from his questioner, giving him a fleeting, sidelong look. Raney turned to the rocking-chair, sat down heavily and packed his pipe with tobacco, waiting.

When Hudson spoke, it was in a toneless voice, his face still expressionless and his eyes averted.

"I come to talk about Pine Head," he blurted out. "I didn't know but what we might come to terms after all, Jed."

RANEY packed his pipe carefully, lighted it and puffed out a cloud of smoke.

"Hum, that's funny, Lem," he said after a moment. "Your coming here just today, I mean—because I was just going

to ask you to take a trip with me around the tract. I don't know as I remember how the lines lay. Thought I'd ask you to come and perambulate the bounds with me. They say there's a thousand acres in it. I aint just sure."

"I'll go with you now," suggested Hudson flatly. "I finished up the run of six-inch for the James contract this noon. We can talk while we walk. I didn't want to talk right here—in front of Beth—"

"Beth! Don't mind her. She's just got to the silly age," replied Raney vexedly. "This fellow Lang, for instance. She took some drawing-lessons of him when she was down to the State university. He's got a handsome face and curly black hair—and a cough—and she thinks he's a wonder. And you're fool enough to let him squat down atop of Pine Head! I've got him figured out, Lem. I wont let her have doings with such."

"No, nor I wouldn't, either," agreed Hudson, with such heat that Raney gave him a questioning look. "I mean, I was tellin' her, myself—"

He was cut short by a burst of laughter from Raney, who slapped him on the shoulder. "Have to laugh to think of you preaching against him to Beth—when you let him camp on your land."

"Well, she asked me to let him!" blurted Hudson, turning red and then swiftly white.

Raney's mirth became uproarious. "She did, eh? Well, well, that's a good one!"

Suddenly he sobered. "Beth's a good girl," he asserted sharply. "A mighty good girl, Lem. Only, she's got to be tamed, like a skittish colt. And it's got to be done right in front of folks, so she'll understand. Pshaw! Let's get started. Got your pony?"

"No, I walked."

"You aint sold her?"

"No." Hudson's negative was surly. Raney smiled in his beard. Plainly, he did not believe the denial.

"I'm going to ride, anyhow," he said as they went out the gate. "I aint as young as I used to be, and those sand-hills get my wind."

CHAPTER II

AS the gate slammed, Beth Raney appeared at the screen door. She watched the two men as they went up the road toward Pine Head. There were traces of indignation in her expression. Spots of red in her cheeks flamed against the pallor of the rest of her face; her fingers clenched tightly into fists.

Beth had had a series of disquieting experiences this day. Larry Lang, the young engineer, had come to the house only a few minutes after her father left for Eagle—and he had told her that he loved her and that he had about one chance in a thousand of being able to ask her to marry him for years. He was worse than a pauper, he said—almost bankrupt in health. The doctors had ordered him to the pine woods—and he had come to Sand River because he remembered what Beth had told him when he was her tutor in the engineering class. (The "drawing lessons" Raney spoke of had been something a bit more than just that; Beth was ambitious to fit herself to assist her father in his business.) Lang had taken a roving commission from the State commission of forestry, his reward a mere pittance; his hope, however, was to establish his health, and perhaps to make one of those "big strikes" in discovery of a practicable project of combined water-power and timber-land for State development under the Forestry Conservation Act, a "strike" of the sort for which almost every student-engineer hoped.

Soon after Lang had left, carrying with him a basket of eggs and a bottle of milk which he purchased of Mrs. Eastman, Raney's housekeeper, as if these were what he had come for, Lem Hudson had called.

Hudson had also made a declaration. It was, for Hudson, the equivalent of a proposal of marriage. He had not quite got to the point when Raney arrived. He was close enough to it, however, so that Beth was more than relieved to see her father. She was painfully hurt by her father's rough repulse. She loved him deeply, though she opposed him stubbornly, when he attempted, in his characteristic manner, to ride roughshod over her likes and dislikes.

Lang was to blame, in one way, for the suspicion with which Raney, and all Sand River, for that matter, regarded him. If he had given out the fact that his chief purpose in camping on Pine Head was to conquer that cough, he would not have been distrusted so much. Sand River considered him a "snoopin' spy" and thought Lem Hudson a fool for allowing him to

camp on Pine Head. Sand River was nervous, in constant fear of a forest-fire like the one which only last summer had swept Burnt Mountain and left it, this time, a blasted mound of charred sticks.

Lem admitted his folly, but he had done it with a purpose; he had allowed Beth Raney to plead another man's cause to him because he knew better than to show opposition to Lang: it would only prejudice Beth in Lang's favor. And Hudson wanted Beth for himself. The same cunning that had influenced Hudson to be generous with Lang had suggested to him a way of solving his desire—and his poverty. Hudson knew that Jed Raney wanted Pine Ridge tract more than anything else in the world. He came to Raney's house to pave the way to an offer of Pine Head, at Raney's price, plus a percentage—Raney to take the pine, Hudson the hardwood, which would be handled through Raney's mill. Raney had refused to touch a stick of Hudson's timber unless he could cut it outright, standing (the pine, that is).

And Hudson had another condition to impose—that Jed Raney consent to Beth becoming Mrs. Lemuel Hudson.

HUDSON was cunning—but he was desperate. It was, really, a chance to unload from himself the dead weight of those mortgages. He had been hard put to meet his quarterly interest payments—and now the drouth was cutting down the possible yield of his big plunge in potato acreage. Dry rot had struck in. His harvest promised to be scarce enough to give him back seed for the next year.

Beth was sorry for Lem Hudson. She had known him since childhood—and had seen him turn to an old man before his prime. But—oh, if her father could but get to know Lang, trust him! Lang had described to her his conception of the possibilities of the Sand River valley—properly developed. If Jed Raney would only listen to something besides the whine of his saws!

The thought came to her, as she watched Hudson and her father start away,—that Lang would be driven off Pine Head if her father bought it. Desperately she began trying to think of some way to bring Raney and Lang together on a basis of understanding.

Her father, astride the roan, was still visible, up the road. She saw him raise his hand and point, with a vigorous gesture, up to the pine-clad top of Pine Head. He held the gesture, a long time, as if he were seeking to impress upon Hudson the danger of allowing a camper to pitch his tent up there.

"There isn't any danger!" declared Beth aloud, as if in answer. "It's all bare rock up there, behind the trees."

"Was you speakin' to me, Beth?"

Mrs. Eastman, the housekeeper, stood in the kitchen door. Beth turned to her, with her color heightened.

"No, I was just talking to myself, I guess," she answered—and then she sighed.

"I was jest thinkin' to myself," offered Mrs. Eastman, "that Mr. Lang oughter take somethin' for his cough. Best thing I ever knew was some syrup my mother used to get off'm Blake, o' Burnt Mountain. He made it outer pine-needles and cheery-bark and sugar. It would stop the tightest cough you ever knew, in a day or two."

Beth smiled. "You might offer him some of it," she suggested.

"Jest what I was thinkin' to myself," Mrs. Eastman agreed. "Next time he comes, I will. Doctors told him to breathe in the piney woods. Why shouldn't he take pine syrup internal?"

"Blake of Burnt Mountain!" mused Beth. "Is that the old herb-doctor who was lost in the fire last summer?"

"I aint heard from him for a good long time. Don't know whether he's dead or not. I've heard say he took a vow he wouldn't never visit a city so long as he lived. Well, I'll offer some of this piney syrup to Mr. Lang. I got some on the clock-shelf."

LANG himself was deeply occupied at this very moment in "thinking to himself." He had come to a desperate conclusion. He must get well or quit, one or the other. He was beginning to be very restless, in his rude camp atop Pine Head. His climb, after his visit at Raney's house, had left him breathless and weak. He prepared and ate a generous meal and felt better. It did not occur to him that his shaking fingers and the sinking sensation at the pit of his stomach might have come from simple hunger, rather than an internal ailment, and that his healthy appetite was the beginning of recovery. Feeling sleepy after the meal, he imagined himself

still subject to the lassitude of the invalid, and he stretched out for a nap in a hammock slung between two trees.

To Lang's ears, through the fiddling of the crickets and the soughing of the wind, came two deeper tones, the roar of water in the turbines at Raney's mill, and the whine and shriek of the saws. The whole combination of sounds was a typical symphony of the pine woods—but to Lang's surprise, it did not lull him to sleep. He began to study the sounds, to dissociate the softer notes of nature from those alien tones of man's industry.

"That's it!" he cried aloud, after a moment. "That's what's the matter with me now! I need to work. I've got to drive myself to it; I've got to make believe it's worth while—and maybe it will be."

As he stood, facing a freshening breeze from the east, his thick black hair ruffled, his face bronzed and a bit flushed from excitement, he did not seem an invalid. Only the angularity of his jaw and the deep set of his eyes showed a hint of illness.

He rushed into his tent, which was pitched against the face of a huge limestone slab upended by some convulsion of nature. From the very bottom of his trunk he dug a stub of a pencil, a scale and other drawing instruments, a draughting board.

Beyond Pine Head, to the north, lay a thick swamp of tamarack which bordered the bank of Long Fork, one of the feeders to Sand River. Lang had never been down in the swamp. It was muddy and muggy, and the descent was steep and difficult, slippery with pine needles and moss-grown rock, tangled with dead branches and fallen logs. The timber was small, because close-grown, and it had not even been considered worthy of the woodsman's ax.

The thought had struck Lang that he would explore this swamp and try to picture it as it would look *with all the timber cut off*. Nature sometimes hides her treasures beneath a wilderness. Suppose this deep gully were to be fit for a natural reservoir! Suppose—

HE started recklessly down a sort of path worn perhaps by cattle or forest animals, deeped by rains, overgrown in places by scrub-pine, bushes and wiry grass. The limestone crumbled underfoot at the start, and he clutched at bushes to stay his descent. He slipped again and plunged forward, only avoiding a headlong fall by dropping his board and hanging onto a sapling with both hands. To get a new foothold, he drew himself up out of the path. Facing south, on higher ground, for a moment, he caught a glimpse of something moving, two men coming along the crest of the ridge from the west. One of the two was leading a horse. Lang recognized it as Raney's roan.

He could not see their faces, but he made out that one of them wore a black shirt and a vest, the other a lumberman's flannel shirt, with huge black and gray checks. They were talking, with vigorous gestures. Lang could not hear their voices; the wind blew them away from him. He saw the man in the checked shirt hold out a sheaf of white that looked like folded papers, in front of the other man's face, with a curiously belligerent or triumphant movement.

Lang was unable to hold his position any longer. He was forced to lower himself into the path again and continue his descent. He lost sight of the two men and the horse—but he halted once, puzzled. What did the tableau mean? Were they likely to visit his camp? He drew up again and peered over the rise. He was just in time to see the horse disappearing over the top, to the south. The men evidently had preceded the horse.

Lang drew a breath of relief. He did not wish to meet Jed Raney just now. For that matter, neither did he wish to see Hudson, if the other man were Hudson. He was on the trail of an inspiration.

"Sand Lake," he murmured, "lies somewhere up there—but where, exactly?"

He walked on, making his way with less difficulty than he had expected, for the swamp was surprisingly dry, and he found curious natural openings through the brittle, projecting lower branches. He walked, bent over, to avoid being pricked in the face by the dead limbs, and in a short time he came out in a dry marsh. A sort of trail had led him here. The grass was pushed aside as if by the drag of feet—and his cast-down eyes became focused. suddenly, upon something so strange that he stopped short and examined it.

A footprint was outlined, clearly, in the soft earth. And it was the mark of a bare foot! It was, unmistakably, from a man's foot too, not a boy's. Others were visible, and they led him on through the marsh;

and as he raised his gaze and looked across the shoulder-high marsh growth, he caught the glint of water. He was approaching Long Fork.

Beyond the stream showed a strip of sandy beach. And on the beach there stood, facing him, a ragged, unkempt being, clad in an outlandish arrangement of burlap. It hung from his shoulders as if it were a sack with a hole cut in the bottom, thrust over the head and tied about the waist with a string.

AT the moment Lang glimpsed him, the creature was breaking off a limb of a pine-tree, above his head. He drew the limb through his fingers with a peculiar stripping movement and then seemed to be depositing something in the folds of his garment.

Lang advanced, straining his gaze over the tops of the reeds which grew in a wide strip near the stream. His own footsteps were muffled in the soft soil, but just as he reached the edge of the marsh, at the south bank of Long Fork, the man on the other side started.

He looked up and down the stream, focused his gaze far above where Lang stood, then raised both hands in a gesture of astonishment. At closer range Lang saw that he wore a scraggly beard, gray as dyed wool, unkempt and serving as a complete screen to his features.

He caught sight of Lang at length, and faced him, for a moment, alert, arms akimbo; then with a quick movement his gaze went above Lang's head, toward Pine Head.

Lang raised his hand in a friendly salute. The nondescript looked interesting. He wanted to make friends with him. But the response was startlingly hostile. The old fellow brought his right arm up with one finger pointing toward Pine Head, quickly doubled his fist, shook it menacingly and then beat his breast with it.

The gesture was wonderfully suggestive. To Lang it conveyed the idea that the creature resented his presence here, that he wanted him to go back from whence he came. The gesture was repeated, more violently.

Lang, as he tried to reason out its exact meaning, stepped forward—and at that, the bearded one whirled and ducked beneath the trees and into the woods. His disappearance was as abrupt as if the forest had swallowed him up.

"Well, I'll be doggoned! Jealous of one neighbor in a thousand acres!" exclaimed Lang.

He was inclined to laugh, but was checked by some ominous suggestion which remained with him, from the odd gesture, twice repeated. Then he recalled the fact that today he was not the only other man in these woods. There were Jed Raney and—it must be Lem Hudson with him.

Quite suddenly the interpretation of Raney's gesture, his hand thrust out before Hudson's face with its sheaf of papers clutched in it, came to Lang. Of course! Jed Raney was driving a bargain with Hudson for the timber-land.

"Yes, and Jed Raney would dispossess me, first thing!" he said aloud.

He turned his face to the south, to retrace his way through the swamp back to camp, and as he raised his eyes up to Pine Head, he knew that he had mistaken the meaning of the old graybeard's gesture.

Smoke rose in a long, rolling cloud from the top of Pine Head.

Lang gave a start. His fire? But, he recalled, swiftly, justifying himself, he had covered it with ashes, buried the charred ends of the sticks so no breeze could fan them alive.

But had he? The doubt threw him into instant confusion. He had been so preoccupied. Had he banked the fire after his dinner?

"They'll blame me anyway!" he muttered, paralyzed for a moment by the thought—for he knew what a forest fire would mean in the pine woods, now.

Lang took a few quick steps toward Pine Head. Even in the instant he hesitated, the smoke had crept swiftly farther west. It seemed running like a live thing, incredibly fast. The wind was in the northwest, and it should have driven the smoke before it, but strangely, the smoke seemed to be running into the teeth of the wind.

CHAPTER III

LANG stopped, with the realization that he was walking directly toward the fire which was smoking its way along the ridge, a barrier between him and the settlement. The thing he must do was to get to the settlement and give the alarm. He could not climb back up Pine Head—not

even if he were physically able. The fire would stop him.

He whirled and ran back to the edge of the marsh and plunged into the water of Long Fork without hesitation. It went to his hips and was piercingly cold. He emerged on the north shore, finding firm footway, but hindered by his wet clothing. He started running. Soon he struck marsh-land and tripped and stumbled through tangled grass and bogs.

As he ran, Lang found his only solace in the thought that the fire was running northwest—away from Sand River settlement, away from Raney's house, away from Beth. She was not in danger, at any rate.

He increased his speed, desperately, but soon was forced to slow up, for the exertion quickly began to tell upon him. He cast a glance up to Pine Head. It was like lashing himself with a whip. The whole crest of Pine Head was agleam with flame. The sight spurred him forward desperately.

He came, at length, directly opposite the face of the limestone ledge upon which his camp stood. The sight of the flames was cut off from him, now; he could see only the rolling pall of smoke.

He began to cough. His eardrums beat with the pounding of his pulse. Then he heard a new and terrible note, a rush and crackle, so savage it was like the menace of a horde of wild beasts. The roaring and crackling was punctuated constantly with a rushing hiss and then a louder roar, as if one had cast powder on the flames. This was from the giant pines, being enveloped from top to bottom, making living torches as their resinous needles were swiftly curled to cinders by the tremendous heat.

Soon Lang became aware of a creeping line of flame along the cliff, descending toward Long Fork. He knew, then, that his camp had been enveloped. His fire must have been the starting-point of the holocaust.

The sight sent a new thrill of desperation through him. He tried, again, for speed. He kept closer to the edge of the stream, seeking its layer of cooler air. Embers drifted down upon him; lazy spits of smoke rose from where the embers fell in the grass. His sobbing breath seemed to be tearing out his vitals, burning them up.

It was a nightmare race of half-blind, groping agony. He plunged out of the marsh upon the trail, scarcely conscious where he was and caught sight of a group of men running toward him.

He stumbled and fell flat on his face in the sand. The world went around and around, spinning like a top, a musical top with a strange, angry snarl to it. This was the voice of the sawmill, and he did not recognize it.

"That's him!" some one shouted, angrily. "That's the feller!"

"To hell with him!" came a gruff reply. "Leave him lay. He's got out, all right, without even bein' scorched. Let the women take care of him—if they *want* to. Come on, boys!"

The spinning top wobbled and fell.

Lang did not know it, but the women of Sand River, who had followed their men up the trail toward the fire, did not want to touch him. It was Mrs. Eastman who bullied them into helping her and Beth carry the unconscious man to the house—Raney's house.

The unwritten law of the pine-lands held its stern hand upon the sympathies of these women, the law that he who is guilty of starting a fire in the woods shall be shunned as an Ishmael. The very fact that Lang was soaking wet, not burned and blackened, was against him. To them it meant only that he had been running away, like a coward—they did not know that he had been running like an Olympian hero.

LANG recovered consciousness with the fevered thought racking him, instantly, that he had failed. His desperate effort had been useless. The fire had been its own warning, with its pall of smoke rising over Pine Head. He was filled with agony of body as well as of mind. Although he bore no mark of flame or brand, his lungs had been overtaxed in his race; they felt as if sharp knives were penetrating them.

Beth was beside him, white-faced but calm and reassuring.

"You must not try to talk," she said. "Lie quiet. Don't try to tell me anything. There will be time for that later."

Mrs. Eastman, who had been "thinkin' to herself" efficiently, came in with a bottle of some soothing lotion which she applied to Lang's nostrils. It seemed to ease his cough. But he refused to be quiet. Between spasms of coughing, he cried out:

"Your father, Beth! Your father is in there! And Lem Hudson!"

"Yes. They have stayed to fight the fire," Beth reassured him, but her voice showed her fear. "They know how to take care of themselves," she added.

And as if in reassurance there came to the ears of the three in the bedroom the swift thud of hoof-beats upon the sandy trail. Mrs. Eastman hurried to the front door. The coming of the horseman, riding from the direction of Pine Head, drew an excited murmur from the knot of women that still lingered at the gate of Raney's house, then a shrill cheer as the horseman thudded past.

The rider did not even turn his glance toward them, or wave a greeting. He seemed bent on stern business. His face was blackened, and his bulky shoulders in the black-and-white shirt were bent low as he urged the panting roan at a gallop down the trail toward the settlement.

"It's Jed Raney," said Mrs. Eastman, coming to the door of the bedroom. "Looks like he was goin' after more help. Good thing he had the roan with him. And it's agoin' to rain, too!" she finished.

"You see," Beth said to Lang, "Father is safe, and Lem Hudson will be all right too. They were together."

Lang gasped out, "If it only will rain!" then sank back and fell into a delirious sleep. His incoherent murmurs and restless movements Beth blamed to the shrill, insistent voices of the women outside. She went out to them and warned them to be quiet or to go away.

"Mr. Lang is in a critical condition," she told them. "He ran himself nearly to death, all the way from Pine Head, to give the alarm. Has—has anyone heard from the fire? Are they making headway against it?"

"It seems to be gettin' down a little," volunteered one woman. She had just come down the trail from the vicinity of Pine Head. "Your dad jest rode by after help, I guess. Or else, mebbe they don't need more help. Because he aint comin' back in such a hurry."

"Mebbe he's gone back by the middle road, up the river," suggested another.

"If my man gets hurt up there," cried another woman, harshly, "I'll kill the man that started the fire!"

Beth faced her in silence. Something in her face forced the woman to turn her head away in sullen shame.

"If you keep on disturbing Mr. Lang,—if he's the one you mean,—you *will* kill him," she said. "He needs sleep, and you're making him restless, talking so close to the house."

The women began a retreat, going up the trail, as if irresistibly drawn toward Pine Head, beyond which appeared a dull glow in the gathering dusk.

"Sleep!" came a sharp, angry voice. "I shouldn't think *he* could sleep! He ought to be tarred and feathered."

Beth clapped her hands to her ears to shut out the shrill chorus of excited, half-hysterical chattering applause that greeted this cruel statement. She fled to the house in a panic of fear.

BETH sank into a chair in the parlor, near the chamber door, and a new anxiety came to her as her glance fell upon a neat pile of dry clothing Mrs. Eastman had left on a chair, ready for Lang to put on when he was able—her father's clothing.

When her father returned, there would be trouble. She became tense with the determination that she would brave her father's anger, no matter what the consequences. She well knew what sort of rage Jed Raney would be in, for she had seen him at other times when good timber was destroyed by the red terror. If the women were so quick to brand Lang as an incendiary, wanted to mob him, what might not Jed Raney do?

"And he was going to buy Thousand Acres!" she exclaimed aloud.

Her exclamation seemed to bring an answer. It was Lang, speaking hoarsely. She went in and found him wide awake, his face frightfully haggard with suffering, nostrils pinched, eyes bloodshot.

"They're getting the fire under," she declared, speaking quickly to keep him from talking. "Father went after help, but it seems they didn't need more men. And it feels more and more like rain. Don't try to explain, at all! Oh, I know you overheard the women, blaming you; but—you mustn't think they mean it. They were excited. They didn't realize what they were saying. The men will find out that you didn't—that it wasn't from your camp-fire, and—"

Lang halted her with a gesture. "I'm not sure," he croaked. "I can't remember whether I banked my fire or not. That's the worst of it."

"Of course you did!" cried Beth. "It was a habit; the very fact you can't remember, proves it. You mustn't worry!"

"But the terrible thing about it," he went on, "is the destruction of those pines on the Head. They were an inspiration. Why, I had just begun to realize the possibilities of the big tract—the river, the swamp and—I wonder if the tamarack swamp was burned? By Jove!"

He sat up, a sudden light in his face.

"I had just begun to think how the swamp would look with all the tamarack cut off," he told her. "I was going to sketch the tract. I had started for Long Fork, and then I was going up to Sand Lake. I wonder if the tamarack did burn off?"

He did not seem to note in his own excitement the expression, almost of horror, that had come to Beth's face.

"I'd like to go up there and see," he continued. And then he dropped back with a sigh that sent him coughing. "All my—all my stuff was burned up, of course," he finished with a weary gesture.

Beth seemed to brush away her horror and the terrible suspicion that had caused it, suspicion stirred up by Lang's eagerness to know whether the tamarack had burned.

"Hush, Larry," she said. "You mustn't talk about it at all. You mustn't even think about it."

She put a hand on his forehead and forced him back on the pillow. He obeyed her with a shudder. He slept, and this time without the harrowing, running dreams.

A MOISTURE-LADEN breeze crept up with the falling of darkness. The rain began to drizzle down.

Beth was swallowing a hasty lunch, on Mrs. Eastman's insistence, when the voices of returning fire-fighters came to her ears, mingled with the sharp tones of the women who had gone to wait for them. Beth left her food and went out to the gate. She had a double purpose; she wanted to learn news of the fire, and she wanted to keep anyone from entering the house on any pretext.

From a pair of small boys that preceded the group of adults, Beth learned that the fire had been checked before it leaped Long Fork, but that hundreds of tall, straight pines had been charred and warped, and many of them burned to the ground before the demon had been conquered.

"They's three or four men stayed up there lookin' for your father and Lem Hudson," one of the boys said.

"Oh! Did Father go back?" she asked. "He rode past the house, an hour ago, to get more help from the mill, we thought."

"Hey!" shrilled both boys at once, turning from Beth and dashing back up the trail. "Hey! Jed Raney rode past here an hour ago, to the mill. He aint in Pine Head woods, unless he went back again."

A tall gaunt man, Carlson by name, a sawyer at the mill, detached himself from the weary-footed gang of fire-fighters and hurried up to the gate.

"You sure your dad went to the mill?" he queried anxiously; and when Beth repeated what she had said to the boys, Carlson shook his head.

"They wa'n't anybody left at the mill but Pegleg, the flume-tender. We all started for Pine Head, the first sign of smoke."

"Then he must have stayed at the mill when he saw it was raining." Both deliberated. "But where is Lem Hudson?"

CARLSON considered her query in his characteristically slow manner; then he turned to the others. "Some of us better go back and help look for Lem Hudson," he said.

"We thought he was with your father," he informed Beth.

Beth told him all she knew of her father and Hudson starting off together, evidently to make the rounds of Pine Head tract. She felt safe in confiding in Carlson. He had been a long-time employee of her father's, and there was something about him that steadied her. Perhaps it was his habitual air of judicial hesitation. She was glad he was leader.

"Boys," he said to the others as they came near, "half a dozen of us better keep up the search for Lem. They left here together, and this man Lang seen 'em together on top of the ridge, just before the fire started. They must have got separated."

"Well, why didn't this Lang warn 'em of the fire, if he seen 'em?" sang out an excited lumberjack. "That's what I'd like to know."

The crowd murmured instant approval of his demand.

"Where is he? Let's get hold of him. He oughter help locate Hudson."

There were louder murmurs, excited suggestions. A woman's voice rose high and shrill above them all.

"Get the firebug! Get him out of Raney's house and make him help find Hudson. Ride him on a rail if he wont go no other way."

THE whole group surged forward as if the suggestion were an electric current, galvanizing them. Beth recoiled, and then she became angry. She threw open the gate and stepped out, stood straight and vibrant before them all, her face limned in the glow of light from the door of the house.

"I'm ashamed of any woman who would say that!" she cried. "Mr. Lang is sick, so ill he may—*never get out of bed!*"

The tremor of anger, and of realization that she was jumping at a long conclusion, throbbed in her voice and caused a momentary hush—but its effect was countered by a sharp retort:

"If he's near dead, it aint from fightin' fire. He run from it. If Lem Hudson's lost, it'll be in the fire of his own woods!"

"Jest a minute!" came Carlson's deliberative voice, rising in a booming roar, as he took his stand beside Beth.

"Never mind the in's and out's of this case now," he advised. "We got to find Lem Hudson."

"Sure!" came the response, led by the lumberjack who had started the cry against Lang. "I'm for one of the half-dozen. But the rest of you stick right here and see this man Lang don't run away no further."

In the confusion of the volunteering for the searching-party, Carlson gave Beth a low-toned warning:

"Get hold of your father," he said. "There's been some wild talk against Lang. They've allers been suspicious of him, since he come.

"Come on boys!" he called, and he headed the half-dozen back up the trail toward Pine Head, which glowed a dull, dying gleam against the northern horizon.

Beth got one of the two boys who had brought her first news from the fire and sent him to the mill with a message for her father. Then she turned on the crowd and invited them all onto the piazza, out of the drizzle of rain.

She got sullen refusal, and she did not press the invitation. It was plain they were hostile, a mob ready for desperate action. She went back into the house.

CHAPTER IV

A KNOCK announced the boy Beth had sent to the mill. He brought the puzzling news that Jed Raney was not to be found. The boy had been thorough; he had inquired at Russell's "emporium," as well as searching the mill.

"Mis' Russell, she says she saw him go past, lickety split, and then she heard the roan go poundin' acrost the bridge," the boy volunteered. "Old Pegleg, the flume-tender, he said your dad kept right on upriver, like he was headin' for Eagle by the middle road."

Beth was too dumfounded to speak. Mrs. Eastman saved her from reproach with a plate of cake, which the boy accepted as evidence of material gratitude.

Beth could imagine no reason for her father riding through the settlement and up the middle road—nor for going to Eagle.

"Some of the folks is purty riled up against this Mr. Lang," the boy volunteered, his keen eyes on Beth's face. "Aint much doubt his camp-fire started it. They found firewood lyin' all around, on top of Pine Head. Mebbe—mebbe he tried to stomp it out, and—"

"Lying around?" queried Beth sharply.

"Well, some say it was kicked around," the boy went on, "as if he—er—as if someone did it a-purpose."

Beth was sick at heart, but she kept up a brave show before the sharp-eyed youth who stood just outside the screen and crammed himself with cake.

"Mis' Russell, she says mebbe your dad was goin' after the High Sheriff," he volunteered further.

Beth clenched her fists to steady herself, and managed a smile.

"Why should he want the High Sheriff?" The question was as much for herself as for the boy.

"Well, I heard tell Sheriff Holmes went over to visit relatives on Short Fork crick today and didn't come back, and they might need a sheriff tonight."

"Pshaw! There's no one to be arrested," declared Beth—but inwardly she was not so sure.

"Well, I'm goin' back up Pine Head and

see what I can see," the well-informed youngster decided.

Beth's thoughts flew at once to the picture he had conjured up, the disturbed camp-fire on Pine Head. Who had done that? Did her father know? Was that his reason for rushing off to Eagle? Had Lang done it? Or was it Lem Hudson? And—why?

"I suppose," she remarked bitterly to Mrs. Eastman, "that if Lem Hudson is found to have been harmed in any way, in the fire, they'll blame Mr. Lang for that too."

Mrs. Eastman did not reply directly.

"I been thinkin' to myself," she said, "mebbe Mr. Lang would be just as comfortable up on that old cot in the loft of the barn. If your father comes back and don't like his bein' here—"

The suggestion sent Beth to the chamber where Lang lay. He was very quiet, his breathing regular. The sharp, sunken contour of his cheeks testified to his tremendous fatigue. As she regarded him, wondering whether to rouse him, she was startled again by a knock. It was at the kitchen door.

Mrs. Eastman had admitted her messenger, breathless and excited.

"Carlson—Carlson, he sent me," he panted. "He says—get him out! That Mr. Lang! They—they just found Lem Hudson. Carlson says you better get Lang out of the house, quick! Before they—they bring Hudson."

"Yes, I understand," Beth nodded. She was quite calm. The emergency had come, and she was ready for it. "Is Lem Hudson—badly hurt?"

"I dunno. They wouldn't—Carlson wouldn't let me stay. But I'm a-goin' back." He hesitated and made an awkward gesture. "Say, they don't know anythin' out in front, about Lem—yet," he finished, and then ducked for the door.

Mrs. Eastman detained him and thrust ginger-snaps into his pockets.

"You don't need to tell 'em," she warned.

"Will you tell Carlson you couldn't find Father?" Beth asked.

"I told him," the boy replied. "I guess that's why he sent me to warn you about that Mr. Lang."

"You're a good boy!" Mrs. Eastman praised him. "What's your name?"

"Timothy Strait," he replied sturdily. "Lem Hudson, he licked me onct for swipin' apples off'm his old crab-tree."

"You tell Carlson to bring Lem Hudson right to this house, if he's bad hurt. We'll take care o' him."

Beth began an exclamation of protest, but Mrs. Eastman gave her a look which reassured her. The boy vanished, again circling away from the sullen watchers at the gate.

"Lem Hudson can straighten out this thing if anyone can," Mrs. Eastman declared.

Both women hurried to Lang's room, Mrs. Eastman closing the front door carefully. The shades were already drawn, and the women could not be seen from outside. They found Lang sitting up on the edge of the bed.

"I overheard what Timothy Strait told you," he said. "I think I can manage to walk, all right."

"Walk? To where?" demanded Beth. "Do you think we'd let you go away alone?"

"The evidence is too much for me," he muttered hoarsely. "My presence here is dangerous—for you as well as for myself. When they bring Lem Hudson here—"

"He kin tell 'em, if anybody kin, who started the fire," cut in Mrs. Eastman.

Lang gave Beth a long, meaning look. Her color rose, beneath it.

"But it is doubtful if he would," he said. "And remember, there was no one else on Pine Head today but me—and Hudson and your father, Beth."

He paused and struggled to repress a cough.

"Yes, there was another person in the woods—but he was on the other side of Long Fork. He couldn't have started the fire. It's absurd to think of Jed Raney. It lies between me and Lem Hudson. I don't think he would tell."

He rose and steadied himself, clutching a bed-post. "I can't stay in this house," he declared stubbornly.

"That's what I was thinkin' to myself," came Mrs. Eastman's surprising comment.

CHAPTER V

A CHORUS of excited cries from outside seemed to clinch the suggestion. It took Beth to the front door, in a rush. She opened it a crack and listened.

"Hullo! Hullo! Find Lem Hudson?" came the question.

There was a silence that seemed interminable, and then, from up the trail came the answer in a harsh tone:

"Yes, we found him. We got him—what's left of him. He's dead."

"Burned to death!"

"No! *He's been killed by some one.*"

Beth swayed from the shock and clung to the door, rallying desperately to listen to what followed.

"Somebody did for him before the fire got to him," was the bitter-toned statement. She recognized the voice of the lumberjack who had first shown hostility toward Lang. "Somebody shoved Lem off the cliff and then rolled a big rock over onto him. Mashed his head!"

" 'Twas done before the fire even started, it looks like," broke in another. "The fire burned everythin' on top o' Pine Head, at the cliff. Even the feller's hammock and tent."

"Wouldn't 'a' knowed this was Lem except for his clothes and that horseshoe-nail ring he allers wore," the lumberjack rasped out. "He was lyin' half in the water, foot of the cliff. Big rock beside his head, all bloody. The fire only scorched him around the head and shoulders where it crept along in some dry reeds. His feet and legs and one arm was under water."

"They's been murder done; that's what!"

This was the shrill voice of the woman who seemed to be doing most of the talking for the members of her sex who had joined the group of men.

Beth heard a movement, in the kitchen, the sound of feet, but she did not turn her head; she was frozen to the spot, straining her eyes into the darkness outside.

"We couldn't see very well," came Carlson's booming, deliberative voice, "but it looked like they had been a scuffle up there at the camp. Firewood all scattered round. Only thing we found was some torn papers in Lem's hand, under water. Fire didn't get to 'em. Look like they might be legal papers of some sort."

"Where'll we take Lem?" demanded the lumberjack.

"Better carry him down to the mill," Carlson suggested. "Too far to go out to his place tonight. Anyhow, the coroner'll have to see him."

A growing mumble of voices drowned out individual comment; the mumble began to swell into sullen muttering, and then into a roar. The crowd surged against the fence.

At the sound of the creaking fence Beth turned, swiftly, and darted to her chamber. It was dimly lighted from the parlor lamp but a glance told her it was empty. Lang had gone—and Mrs. Eastman also had vanished. Instantly Beth guessed the answer. The stable loft!

THE sound of feet on the gravel walk drew her swiftly back to the door. She flung it open and stepped out onto the piazza. She had but one thought in mind, to delay the mob that was advancing upon the house.

"What is it boys?" she called out, addressing them as her father might have done. "Rain drive you in at last? Come right up out of the wet."

The harsh-voiced young lumberjack was in the lead. He put one calked boot on the bottom step and peered up from narrowed eyes at Beth.

"We're comin' in to get Lang," he declared flatly. "Lem Hudson's been murdered. He was throwed off the cliff right where this Lang had his camp. We want him."

"Don't argue with her. Get the firebug!"

Again the woman's sharp voice, rising in cruel hysteria. It cut through Beth like a knife, but somehow the shock of it steadied her.

"So you think he killed Lem Hudson—too!" she demanded scornfully.

"We don't think nothin'," came the swift and all too-truthful response from the leader. "We jest want him; that's all. We're going' to take him. Come on, boys!"

The crunch of his calks on the step came simultaneously with a familiar click from the kitchen—the back door closing. Deliberately, as if leading them in, Beth turned her back on the mob. Through the kitchen door, directly opposite, she caught a flutter of Mrs. Eastman's gingham apron. Beth flung open the screen and held it wide.

"Come right in, boys," she invited ironically. "Help yourselves to anything or anybody you happen to want."

She led on, again, caught up the lamp from the table and went into the bedroom. The lumberjack and two other men followed her.

"You see—he isn't here," she announced, and with quick perception: "And the window's open."

The lumberjack whirled back into the parlor. "The firebug's beat it!" he announced with an oath. "Jumped out the winder. The damn' sneak! Come on! We'll get him, yet, before he gets outa Sand River. How long's he been gone?" he demanded angrily of Beth.

"Ten minutes, or so, I believe," she responded. "He was asleep in there not any longer ago than that."

"Well, you're well rid of him, Miss Raney," snapped the lumberjack a bit more civilly. "Come on, boys! Get after him. And when you get him—get him good!"

The self-appointed committee crowded through the front door. Outside, the leader made his announcement to the others. There rose a confusion of angry cries. Beth closed the door, and as she did so, her knees gave way beneath her.

"I GOT him in the loft, on a cot, over behind the hay. Your father himself wouldn't think of lookin' there."

Mrs. Eastman was speaking in a whisper. She had picked Beth up from the floor and got her on a couch, where she lay shivering with the reaction from the ordeal. Mrs. Eastman appeared undisturbed except that her motherly face was a bit more grim and her eyes red-rimmed.

'What time is it?" queried Beth dully.

"Just comin' onto midnight, dear," Mrs. Eastman replied.

"I wish father were here. I can't understand why he rushed off as he did."

Her collapse was but momentary; her mind recovered quickly and went racing on. She began to puzzle over her father's flight, to try to reason out the circumstances that had led to the fire, to the death of Lem Hudson; and finally she came to one conviction.

Larry Lang had not been guilty of murder. This conviction came from her heart. Now she reasoned it out. Lang was no match for the hulking Hudson. It would have been a physical impossibility for Lang to send Hudson smashing down over the cliff—and then roll a huge stone atop him.

But there must be an alternative. There was no motive for Lang to kill Hudson. And Hudson had gone into the woods with Jed Raney. They were talking business over the long-sought Pine Head tract. One of them had come out, riding swiftly through Sand River, and had vanished. The other had been carried out dead—his head smashed, clutching in one hand a sheaf of "legal papers."

If Jed Raney did want to get to Eagle to see the High Sheriff, why had he not taken the direct route by way of Long Fork ford? It was inexplicable, terrifying, to Beth. And yet she could not condemn her father, even in thought. . . . .

BETH had no idea she could sleep—but she was roused from deep slumber, where she had lain, fully clad, on the couch, by the sound of steps grinding up the walk, a familiar rasp of steel calks such as nearly every man in Sand River wore. She was up and at the door before the footsteps reached the piazza.

"Father?" she queried eagerly.

"It's me, Carlson," came the reply in a cautious tone. "I jest come by to let you know they didn't ketch Lang. They've give up for tonight. I reckon they wont be so savage after they've slept on it."

"Thank you, Carlson!" she breathed. And then she spoke what was uppermost in her mind—two things. "He couldn't have done it," she said; and then: "Is Father back?"

"Well, I shouldn't think he could," came Carlson's deliberative drawl, comfortingly. "But it looks bad for him to skip out the winder, that way."

"What else could he do? They were bloodthirsty! They would have lynched him."

"Prob'ly," he agreed, "unless I could 'a' stopped 'em."

He turned to go, then hesitated. "No, I aint seen your dad. But when he gets back, you better tell him where Lang is."

"Oh! How did you know that I knew where Lang is?"

" 'Twas reasonable to suppose so," Carlson responded almost apologetically. "But I'd ruther not know, myself. But you tell your dad—and tell him everythin'—the truth."

Beth stood staring out into the gloom long after the gate had clicked shut behind Carlson.

"The truth!" she murmured. "Yes, but what is the truth?"

Before dawn Beth had concluded there was but one person from whom she might learn the truth. That was Larry Lang.

CHAPTER VI

BETH was surprised and alarmed, when she awoke, to hear Lang's voice, from the kitchen. Mrs. Eastman had brought him in, under cover of a fog which followed the rain, and was giving him a hearty breakfast.

Lang's cheerful smile, his carefully groomed appearance, his absence of pallor, gave her quite a shock. After she had dramatically faced a mob clamoring for his life and had pictured him huddled on a canvas cot in the hayloft, holding his breath for fear of betraying his hiding-place with a cough, his nonchalance let her down suddenly.

"A civilized breakfast for once this summer," he mumbled apologetically through a mouthful of batter-cake and honey. "I always thought flapjacks were just flapjacks until now."

Beth managed a wan smile, then went to the window and gazed out in silence.

"Sorry I'm such a cheerful idiot, this morning," he apologized. "But I've never felt better, physically, in my life. I believe I needed some such violent exercises as I got—and such medicine and food. Mrs. Eastman tells me you haven't heard from your father."

"No," Beth responded. "He has probably gone to Eagle. And as I think of it, I don't believe he knew about—Lem Hudson."

"Neither do I," declared Lang, so swiftly that Beth regarded him with a puzzled frown. Then she began to recollect Lang's position.

"You can—and must prove to them that you were nowhere near Lem Hudson," she said, seating herself opposite him at the table and speaking judicially.

"But I was," he cried. "I was near him and your father just as I started down to the swamp. By the way, I'm planning to get up to Pine Head, right away, and see what happened to the swamp in the fire."

"They did not see you?" she persisted.

"No. And it is a small matter, my having seen them. Your father can tell where Hudson went. I want to trace the trail of the queer creature— Beth! What is it? Are you ill?"

She had turned pale and swayed in her chair.

'They were together all the time!" she muttered desperately. "Father and Lem Hudson! And Father rode away from Pine Head before they found Lem Hudson! He has not come back! Can't you see that if you—that if there was no one else in the woods but you three?"

"But there was some one else—as I was going to say. A ragged old fellow who seemed bent on destroying the pines by tearing branches from them."

SWIFTLY and eagerly he described the appearance of the man he had seen at Long Fork, the curious gestures he made. His description had a curiously dissimilar effect upon the two women. Mrs. Eastman listened with such intense curiosity that she allowed flapjacks to burn on the griddle. But Beth regarded him with a gaze which changed from curiosity to uneasiness, and she seemed to penetrate what lay back of his words.

"Why, that's the spittin' image of old Blake o' Burnt Mountain!" exclaimed Mrs. Eastman.

"And Blake is dead," remarked Beth in a toneless voice.

"Yes! He burnt hisself up in the big fire that licked Burnt Mountain clean, last fall. And they say he started the fire."

"Must have been his smoky ghost, haunting this fire then," suggested Lang with faint facetiousness.

"I want the truth!"

Beth Raney burst out with the sharp demand, rising from her chair, leaning toward Lang, her hands gripping the table, her face aquiver and her eyes burning.

"The truth!" she repeated, half-commanding, half-imploring. "I don't want you to invent another person to try to save —anyone. The truth!"

"Beth! That is the truth." Lang half rose from his chair, but he sat down again at Beth's imperious gesture. "Don't you believe me?"

"It is impossible!" she declared. "Impossible! Blake's dead as everyone knows."

"Why, I can show you his footprints in the marsh beyond the swamp!" Lang explained. "That's one reason I'm going up there. I want to find them and try and trace his trail."

"The trail of a ghost!" cried Beth, with a laugh that was almost hysterical.

'Well—if you must have it so," he replied, flushing a bit. "Wont you come with me, and see?"

"No!"

Her refusal was passionate. Lang flushed deeper.

"I shall have to go alone, then," he remarked as pleasantly as he could, and rose from the table. He was about to pass out the door when he was halted by the sound of footsteps on the piazza.

"DON'T go—now!" gasped Beth in alarm.

It was Carlson who stood at the screen when Beth opened the inside door, fairly pushing Lang aside and behind it as she did so, for he had preceded her into the room. Another man, who had come with Carlson, apparently, was sitting grimly on the steps, waiting, his back to Beth.

"We telephoned from the mill to Eagle," Carlson said in a troubled tone. "Can't locate your father. This is Sheriff Holmes with me. We've got some papers the boys turned over to him, the papers that was in Lem's hand. They're badly soaked. They seem to belong to Jed Raney."

"Mortgage papers," snapped Sheriff Holmes, whirling toward them and back again like a spring door. "Evidence!"

"We telephoned the Lumberman's Bank," Carlson went on. "They said your father hadn't been there. Said he was there yesterday and had fixed it to take up the mortgages on Pine Head tract."

Beth started. "To take them up? Then he—"

"I reckon your dad was aimin' to buy 'em over Lem Hudson's head," Carlson explained. "That is, he arranged to take 'em over the first of next month if Hudson couldn't meet the int'rest payments. Course, he might have been intendin' to extend 'em—"

Even Carlson's kindly heart could not lead him to consider this very probable. And Beth shook her head.

"I reckon Lem Hudson would 'a' failed on the int'rest, from what they said at the bank," Carlson finished.

"Hum!" grunted Holmes, jerking his head around. "Jed Raney didn't hev to buy, I guess. He was in a position to take."

"The Sheriff wanted me to speak to you about 'em," Carlson explained to Beth.

"Am I to take the papers?" Beth inquired. "I know so little of Father's business deals."

"No sir! I keep them papers. Evidence!" declared Holmes, rising and coming to the door. "And afore ye say anythin' further, Miss Raney, it's my duty to warn ye that whatever ye say, now and hereafter, may be used ag'in' ye. I'll be obliged to consider that evidence."

Beth cast an appealing look at Carlson.

"You don't need to talk at all, Beth," he said kindly.

Lang could not remain any longer a concealed listener. He stepped out and faced the Sheriff, through the screen.

"Perhaps you'd better hear my story, Sheriff" he suggested calmly.

SHERIFF HOLMES' watery eyes bulged at Lang's sudden appearance but he recovered quickly.

"Time enough for that," he responded briskly. "I'm goin' to get all the evidence. Been instructed to do so, by the High Sheriff. All accordin' to law. Well, I'm glad to see ye had sense enough not to try to escape from the law, young feller. I'd a got ye, sooner or later, anyhow!"

"No reason why I should seek to escape —from the law," replied Lang meaningly. "In fact, I want to try to aid you in locating the man who—"

"That'll be enough from you, young man!" warned Sheriff Holmes testily. "They wont be no undue influence brought to bear by anyone, in this case, whilst I'm handlin' it. Now, Miss Raney."

The self-confident little backwoods sheriff was irresistible with his brisk assertion of authority. The end of it was that Beth was put through a sharp examination. He wormed from Beth all she knew of her father's intentions in regard to Pine Head, her understanding of his motive in going with Hudson into the woods—and more than that.

He baited her until she flared up at him —and unwittingly, in her indignation, gave him just what he wanted. Lang stood by and fumed. Occasionally he interrupted, and was promptly squelched by the Sheriff —and by Beth also.

"Humph! Then Lem Hudson, he wanted to marry ye?" queried Holmes suddenly, at the end of an involved question concerning Hudson's call at the house, and at Beth's indignant reply, "I gave him no encouragement," the Sheriff inquired, "Air ye engaged to somebody else?"

Beth hesitated, but it was not from confusion. It was in deliberation. Her reply was firm and unequivocal.

"Yes, I am. To Mr. Lang," she said.

"No!" cried Lang, stung to the denial. "That's not true! Beth—"

"Young man," cut in Holmes sternly, "another interruption of this examination, and I'll arrest ye for tamperin' with due process of law and evidence, resistin' an officer in the performance of his sworn duty. I asked the lady, not you."

LANG appealed to Beth with a look, but her gaze was coldly direct and her face calm.

"I can explain Mr. Lang's objection to the statement," she volunteered.

"Ye don't hev to explain," declared Sheriff Holmes tersely. "Now, young feller, if ye want to talk!"

"This is an outrage!" broke out Lang heatedly. "This examination of Miss Raney! She has no knowledge of the affair. I can swear to that."

"Ye'll have a chancet," remarked Holmes dryly. "I'll advise ye to make a clean breast of it all."

"I shall tell the truth," raged Lang. "I offered to—"

"All in good time, accordin' to law and evidence. I'll ask ye to step out here on the piazza with me—alone."

Lang turned to Beth, with a wondering look. "Beth, you must not do this—for me!" he protested. "It puts you in a false light. Your linking yourself with me—for I think the Sheriff believes that I have guilty knowledge of the affair—is unnecessary."

"Tell him the truth," she flashed at him.

Lang flushed and then went white, biting his lips. He thought he understood what she meant; he thought that she had deliberately linked herself with him to induce him to abandon his story of the ragged unknown at Long Fork. And when he considered this evidence of her disbelief in his veracity it sent him cold.

"Harve, I'll ask you to go inside with Miss Raney, and close the door," said Holmes to Carlson.

CARLSON obeyed, the apologetic droop of his shoulders eloquent of his reluctance to act as an aid to this autocratic minion of the law.

"There was another man in Pine Head tract, Sheriff—" Lang began, plunging stubbornly into the story as soon as he was outside, and before Beth was out of hearing. "I saw him, just before I noticed the first sign of the fire. Curiously, my description of him seems to fit that of a character known as Blake of Burnt Mountain. A sort of hermit."

"Yeah! Well, what seems so, aint evidence," commented Holmes. "And I'll ask ye to leave that story, now, and start in at the beginnin'."

Lang did—and at the end of it Sheriff Holmes, who had helped himself to the rocking-chair and was fanning himself languidly, rose and placed a hand on Lang's shoulder.

"Young man, I'm obliged, on the evidence, to place ye under arrest in connection with the incendeeary fire on Pine Head—and the murder of Lem Hudson."

"I'm charged with murder—and arson?" Lang's inquiry was ironically biting.

"Neither one—yet. For the present, the ghost of Blake of Burnt Mountain is the only one we suspect."

The irony of this *Sherlock* of the woods more than matched Lang's. To make matters more ironic, he snapped a pair of handcuffs on Lang's wrists.

"Anything ye want to take with ye?" he inquired sharply. "Want to say anythin' more to your—*fiancy?*"

Lang gave Holmes a savage look and preceded him down the steps without a word.

CHAPTER VII

LANG regretted, before he had reached the gate, that he had allowed his emotion rather than his judgment to govern him, in that opportunity to see Beth again.

Lang blamed Beth less for her disbelief, after his examination at the hands of the Sheriff. His anger was principally from wounded pride in having his word questioned by the girl he loved—and then being *lied* into the position of her *fiancé* for a reason he could not understand—unless she had an idea it would help him! That hurt his pride; regret helped to hurt it more.

Carlson caught up with Lang and the Sheriff where the trail divided on the crest of a little bush-grown knoll, a short-cut path leading to the right and down to the mill, directly below.

"Did ye tell her what the boys found this mornin'?" Holmes inquired of Carlson.

Carlson shook his head, avoiding Lang's expectant gaze. "No," he drawled. "Somehow, I don't put much significance onto

that. It might have floated down from Pine Head, you know."

"Harve, ye'll never make a detective! That hat of Jed Raney's couldn't go through the flume."

Carlson looked embarrassed. "Don't know as I want to be a detective" he mumbled dryly.

"It's evidence," commented Holmes. "And besides that, it'll keep the boys busy, right now. Mr. Lang, I'm takin' ye down to the inquest at the mill. After that, straight to Eagle. 'Twont hurt ye none to testify at the inquest and tell what ye know," he suggested. "The boys feel none too kindly toward ye."

Lang regarded Holmes with a long, steady look.

"I infer that the boys have found Jed Raney's hat in the river—below the dam," he said. "Am I to infer that you wish me to turn state's evidence because you're afraid you can't protect your prisoner?"

"You're purty good at inference," snapped Sheriff Holmes. "But ye needn't infer I'll let anybody take ye away from me, so long as I kin pull a trigger or swing a peavey round my head."

"I'll testify," offered Lang, "because I want to help clear up this matter. I don't like to think that you believe in ghosts—and I hope the coroner doesn't believe in them."

The Sheriff did not reply, but his action was significant: he unlocked the handcuffs from Lang's wrists and led the way down the path to the saw-shed door of the mill.

THE inquest, conducted by Coroner Smalley, from Eagle, who was also an undertaker, comprehended only the outstanding and apparently obvious facts. One of the most obvious was the body lying on a plank supported by two sawbucks in the planing-room of the mill. Identification appeared superfluous, but it was given by several witnesses who well knew Lem Hudson, his clothing, his boots, his shiny sateen shirt, and the horseshoe-nail ring he habitually wore on the middle finger of his left hand. These details were significant, however, since the head was crushed and seared by fire beyond all human semblance. The left hand, too, had been burned and was much swollen.

The body, papers in a worn wallet taken from the hip pocket of Hudson's trousers, and a black slouch hat were the only articles of evidence introduced. No weapon had been found, save the huge boulder, and this was too huge to be moved readily. The black slouch hat was Jed Raney's. It had been found in a quiet cove in the river, some distance below the mill, by the men who had threshed the brush all night in search of Lang. Their pursuit had been distracted by this find. They began a desultory search for the body of Jed Raney, on the theory he might have drowned himself—a theory which they scouted as soon as it occurred to them. The inquest developed the fact that the shutting off of the penstock to the turbines during the night had raised the water above the dam so that it trickled over the spillway. The hat might have floated over.

Lang emphasized the appearance of the nondescript—and was neither encouraged nor discouraged except by silence. He got the feeling that the burden of proof was thrown upon him, with a burden of doubt atop of it. His admission that the man he had seen was a full mile from the scene of the crime before the fire started appeared to be accepted as sufficient alibi for this "mysterious stranger." At any rate, the coroner's verdict was that: "Lemuel Hudson came to his death by an act of violence at hands unknown."

Yet everyone eyed Lang with curious cold stares and spoke in whispers, as the inquest broke up.

ONE odd bit that was developed, unofficially, by the coroner-undertaker, was the mention of Jim Hudson, an elder brother of Lemuel's. Jim had left home as a youth twenty years ago, it appeared, and was last heard from when his name appeared on the casualty lists of the Canadian expeditionary forces. Once "missing in action" and once "severely wounded," they had it. The coroner-undertaker appeared to doubt that anything would ever be heard from Jim, the only surviving—if he were surviving —relative of Lemuel.

Lang spent the night in a cell in the county jail at Eagle. In the morning an attorney visited him, Caspar Sweet, a gray-haired, rather benevolent-appearing man, with a trick of looking over his spectacles in a fatherly manner. He was the leading lawyer in the county seat. Lang was surprised and grateful at his offer to defend him. He did not question

Lawyer Sweet's motives, but set himself to sending messages asking for financial aid from those whom he counted as friends, messages going mostly to members of the faculty at the State university.

Lang was formally arraigned in court and charged with the murder of Lemuel Hudson.

"A mere matter of form," Lawyer Sweet declared. "Not so bad as it sounds. Technical charge. I wanted it to be manslaughter so you could get bail, but Sheriff Holmes wouldn't agree, though the County Attorney was half inclined to recommend it."

On Lawyer Sweet's advice Lang merely pleaded "not guilty" and waived preliminary examination in court to allow his case to go direct to the Grand Jury, which would meet in October.

Lang would have liked to fight it out in the lower court—but he had no funds; his faculty friends were scattered far and wide during the vacation period; his own relatives, a widowed mother and a sister, were in Scotland. Moreover Lawyer Sweet's argument seemed sound.

"It's always best to take time, when you're innocent," he advised. "It sometimes takes a long time for the real truth to develop. A lot can happen in two months—and a lot will be forgotten. Velas County citizens are in a savage mood about forest fires just now. And then—there is Jed Raney—missing."

As the iron door of his cell closed upon him again, following the arraignment in court, Lang had the depressing conviction that the truth was a very strangely difficult thing to grasp. Who had killed Lem Hudson? Who had set the fire? Where was Jed Raney? Who was the ragged graybeard?

CHAPTER VIII

FOR a fortnight the only news Lang had was no news—then it was both good news and bad. Lawyer Sweet listened to Lang's story of the mysterious man on the river-bank with a fatherly, patient credulity that was perfectly sympathetic but seemed to lack the comfort of conviction. He inaugurated a search of the woods about Pine Head—with the report that there were no footprints in the marsh or anywhere else.

It had rained enough to obliterate them, of course, and the hobnailed boots of fire-fighters would have done so if rain had not. The fire had crept through the marsh to Long Fork.

Jed Raney had disappeared entirely. His roan horse limped back to Sand River the evening of the day Lang was arraigned, riderless. His trail was traced up the middle road to where it joined the main trail to Eagle, and there was lost—and the finding of the hat below the dam became of even less significance. Dragging of the river discovered nothing but the usual logs and stumps and snags.

It became increasing apparent that Jed Raney's were the "hands unknown," and this was good news—and bad news—for Lang.

It was particularly bad news when Beth came to Eagle and called on him at the jail.

He read the story of her apprehension and suffering in her face, despite her brave smile as she was admitted to the gloomy guard-room and allowed to sit on a bench beside him, under the eyes of a bailiff.

"I've just come from Lawyer Sweet's office," she began. "He is Father's lawyer, you know."

"No! I didn't know it!" Lang exclaimed. "He didn't tell me."

He began to get a glimmer of light that was unwelcome. What more natural than for Lawyer Sweet to strive to protect Jed Raney? His sympathy without confidence, his acquiescence without belief, they were explained now. But he lied, manfully, to Beth—for Jed Raney's interests were hers too.

"I'm glad of that," he said. "What did he say?"

"He is confident you will be acquitted," she replied, but her gaze dropped to her rigidly clasped hands in her lap. "And of course *you* will," she added.

"Beth, why did you tell Sheriff Holmes we were engaged?"

"Because I thought I could help you—that way," she replied without a trace of emotion.

"And there is another way I can help," she went on. "You know, now that your case is going to the Grand Jury, they might summon me to testify. And it is the law that a woman cannot be forced to give evidence against her husband."

Lang was stricken dumb at the quiet suggestion. It should have been—it *was*—magnificent of her; but—

"It will be a very little thing," she added, with an absent sort of smile, as her eyes lifted to his for an instant.

The magnificence of it crumbled. Indeed, it would be "a little thing" if this was the way it was offered.

"That is unnecessary, and no doubt impossible, anyway," he managed to reply thickly. "But it is not a little thing, to me. I could not seek immunity that way. Beth—"

"It has been done before," she argued matter-of-factly. "I can get the license quite easily. I have not been summoned, as yet, and Lawyer Sweet thinks it—"

"You have actually consulted him about it? Oh! Your *father's lawyer!*"

He shrank inwardly from her, even as the idea struck him:

If she married him, she would not, could not, be forced to give testimony. If she did not marry him, she could be forced to testify against Lang—and indirectly against her father.

He recovered his poise quickly.

"Yes, I am willing to do that," he began evenly, but his voice shook before he finished, "if you think it would help *anyone.*"

She did not appear to comprehend, at once, the irony of his last remark, but after a moment her hands came unclasped and she rose, confronting him, as he got to his feet, and looked him full in the eyes with an expression that haunted him for days.

"You have no truth in you!" she declared in a strained half-whisper. "And you cannot understand the truth!"

Then she left him.

THERE were two things that kept Lang from morbid despair during his confinement in jail. One of them was his work on a sketch of Pine Head timber-tract, a painstakingly reconstructed replica of the one he had half finished and lost in the fire. The other thing was his acquaintance with a prisoner whose curiosity was roused by the "pencil pitcher" Lang was drawing. The man was doing time for violating the game-laws. He was a shiftless and shifty sort of poacher, but he knew the pine woods for miles about.

This man helped Lang, immeasurably, with his sketch, and Lang kept grimly at it until he had finished it. He sent it, with a detailed report, to the Forestry Commission, just a few days before the Grand Jury met.

The Grand Jury, with a negative nonchalance which left Lang numb, returned "no bill' in his case, which absolved him of the charge of murder and corroborated Lawyer Sweet's declaration that the charge was more a technicality than anything else. But Lang was not free. He was immediately rearrested by the High Sheriff as a "material witness" in connection with a secret indictment returned by the Grand Jury—officially secret but through the underground channels of the court and law offices, quite well known to be an indictment charging Jed Raney with the murder of Lem Hudson.

"The County Attorney asked for an indictment for 'accessory after the fact' against you," Sweet informed Lang in a whisper, as he sat in the dock in the courtroom, awaiting action on the charge. "On account of the fire, you see, and your story of another man in the woods."

"I don't understand."

"Pretty far-fetched," Lawyer Sweet explained, with a puzzling air of apology. "Based on some talk from Sand River about how your camp-fire was found disturbed, kicked around. And because of your engagement to Miss Raney, you know. It seemed natural you should try to cover up Jed Raney—"

Lang laughed in his lawyer's face.

"Isn't there anyone connected with Velas County judiciary who can think in a straight line?" he demanded. "Isn't there anyone can see the plain truth yet? Isn't the fact I was a mile from my camp when the fire started a good enough alibi for that? Oh, I suppose not. You lawyers and court officers have got so you believe only the improbable. Why, I haven't even suggested that I thought my graybeard ghost committed murder, or arson either!"

Lawyer Sweet nodded, still apologetic.

"If you want it straight," burst out Lang, speaking aloud under cover of a murmur of voices about the judge's bench, "I don't believe that Raney did kill Hudson. And that, I suppose, is absurdly improbable, according to the 'laws of evidence.' I haven't been able to believe it, from the first. But why should I try to shield him when I did not even know that Hudson had been killed until long after the fire started—not until it had been extinguished? Why, everyone thought, then, that Jed Raney had ridden off, posthaste, to Eagle, for the High Sheriff!"

"Um, hum! I can see that but—Mr.

Lang, will you pardon me if I appear skeptical, still? Why do you insist upon that graybeard?"

"Why? Because he was there, man! He was there!"

"A mile from the scene of—"

"Yes. *When I saw him!* You forget that I had previously discovered the prints of a man's bare feet on the south side of Long Fork. And this man was barefooted. Isn't it possible he may have been up to Pine Head while I was in the swamp? Not that I accuse him of murder. I don't. But he might be a valuable witness."

"Yes," nodded Sweet, with a curious glint in his shrewd little eyes. "A valuable witness—for the State."

Further conference between them was cut short by the clerk of the court calling Sweet up to a conference concerning bail for his client. It was fixed, at first, at five thousand dollars, but Sweet appealed to the judge, promised, on his word as an officer of the court, he would produce the witness when wanted, and secured a reduction to two thousand dollars. Lang was grateful, but impotent to help himself. He had been able to secure a small loan, but only enough to pay Sweet a retainer. He could not win his own freedom, now.

HE spent another night in his cell—and then his release came, unexpectedly. Two thousand dollars in cash was placed in the hands of Lawyer Sweet—by Mrs. Maria Eastman of Sand River.

Mrs. Eastman was waiting at the gate of the jail, with a buckboard and team, when Lang emerged.

"You're lookin' peaked again," she accused him. "Been coughin' much?"

He gripped her gnarled, work-cramped fingers hard and swallowed a lump in his throat. He could not speak.

"You need to get right out in the open again, in the pine woods," she declared. "Jump in."

"But I can't. I—Mrs. Eastman, I'd do almost anything you wanted me to do but accept—"

"Almost anythin', eh? Well, then jump in and I'll do the rest. Beth Raney furnished half of that bail money."

Lang climbed into the seat. He asked her to stop at a store for him to make some purchases. She glanced at him, curiously, as he emerged with an armful of parcels, including a canvas knapsack.

"I'm going on a long hike in the pine woods," he explained. "There is only one thing for me to do—find the graybeard of Long Fork."

CHAPTER IX

"JIM HUDSON has come back from the dead."

Mrs. Eastman spoke but little, an average of about once a mile, but when she spoke, she said something. They were at Long Fork ford when she gave this interesting information.

"He wa'n't killed, of course," she added, "but everyone in Sand River took it for granted he was—same as they do about Blake. Jim Hudson was reported missing—and he was missing, in the head, I reckon, the way he acts now."

"It makes it doubly awkward for Beth," commented Lang thoughtfully.

"Well, it does, but not just the way you mean, I guess. Jim Hudson don't act—right. I want you to see him. I want you to drive down to the post office with Beth, when we get home. I want him and the rest of Sand River to see you too."

She drew up at the gate of the house, and hurried in. A few moments later, Beth came out. Her face was pale, but lighted with a tiny flush as she extended her hand to Lang.

"I would not have come," he said slowly, "if it had not been that you have put me so much in your debt that—"

"I think I understand why you came," she replied in a low tone. "You mustn't consider that I have done anything wonderful. I'd despise myself if I were to let you remain in jail when a little money, loaned to the county, would get you out."

There was constraint in her manner, as in her speech. She took up the reins and drove rapidly down to the post office.

Sand River was patently abuzz with the new excitement of Jim Hudson's return. There was a group of men and boys seated on the steps of the general store, clustered about a man in dingy khaki with a cane in his hand. Carlson came across from the mill, which was again snoring out its vibrant tune of activity. The sawyer greeted Lang warmly and asked, eagerly, about the proceedings of the court. Lang told him, briefly.

"Is that Jim Hudson?" he inquired, indicating the man in khaki.

"Yes. Jest outa the hospital, he tells us. Was all busted to pieces and gassed and come near losin' his mind. Been under Gov'ment care for two years, bein' patched up, he says. He wa'n't plannin' to come back to the States at all, but some one showed him a paper about Lem. Bein' the only kin, he come home."

LANG'S appearance had drawn the attention of everyone in sight; the man in khaki looked up, removed a battered cap, wiped his forehead and cast a swift glance upon Lang and Beth, his gaze lingering momentarily upon Beth. The man's face bore the marks of great suffering, not only in the long, livid scar which ran from his right temple down to the corner of his mouth, but in the sunken cheeks and furrowed brow. The scar gave him a perpetual, twisted grimace only partly concealed by a drooping, sandy mustache.

Beth went in for the mail, and Lang continued his study of this returned wanderer. His interest was oddly piqued.

"I used to know Jim when he was a lad," Carlson remarked, "but he's strange, now. He don't seem to know anybody round here, very well. And he wont talk much about what he's been through. Suppose it's painful to him."

Beth Raney came out the door, and the soldier, with a hasty, awkward scramble, got to his feet and limped toward her, his cap off. His eyes were downcast as he spoke. His voice was harsh and broken.

"Miss Raney?" he queried respectfully. "I—I wanted to speak to you. I'm Jim Hudson, you know, Lem's brother. I want to tell you that I don't hold anythin' against you for what's happened. Let bygones be bygones, I say! Live and let live. There's a lot of things I want to forget. I come back to Sand River to try to forget 'em. And now, I'm here—there's a lot of other things I'm goin' to forget, too."

Beth appeared to shrink from him, but she listened patiently, as he went on:

"I been through plain hell," he rasped, "and I want to spend the rest of my life in peace and friendliness. I suppose you and I will have to be doin' business between us, on account of Pine Hill tract."

"Pine Head, you mean!" exclaimed Beth. "I—I don't know anything about that. You see, Father's business affairs are—in the hands of the law, just now. What will happen, I can't tell. But I will say this, that so far as I am concerned, you are welcome to anything that belonged to Lem Hudson. I'm sure I couldn't—touch it—now."

She turned swiftly, with almost a sob, and fairly ran to the buckboard.

"Carlson, will you please come up to the house?" she implored. "I want you."

Carlson clambered into the back of the rig.

Lang caught a last glimpse of Jim Hudson as the buckboard topped the knoll. The man stood with his hands on his cane, leaning forward, in a tense, strained attitude, looking after them.

"I don't like the way he acts!" Beth burst out. "His brother killed! And he begins to talk business with me as soon as he gets home! Why did he call it Pine Hill? Oh, I suppose it is because of his memory being at fault but—I feel queer about him, the look in his eyes."

CARLSON struck in with his soothing drawl: "Wall, I suppose so," he commented. "O' course, he had shell-shock, he says, and sorta lost his balance for a while. Jim Hudson sure knowed it as Pine Head, when he was a boy."

"I am as sorry for him as I can be!" Beth exclaimed earnestly. "He seems to have suffered terribly—not only physically, but—there is a sort of horror in his eyes. I ought to feel grateful to him, I suppose, but—"

She broke off abruptly, and there was no more mention of Jim Hudson until after dinner.

Lang had no opportunity for a talk with Beth at the meal. She had asked Carlson to stay and devoted most of her conversation to him. Lang gathered that Carlson had been placed in full charge of operations at the mill and up Long Fork, where lumberjacks were at work rafting down timber—and Lang learned that a crew of river-drivers had been busy since July, salvaging every bit of water-logged timber from the Fork. Under Carlson's direction the stream had been cleared of every deadhead, stump, snag and bit of driftwood. Lang could guess the reason for this—the principal reason, beyond salvage. They were still searching for the body of Jed Raney.

The home-coming of the prodigal Hudson, however, was a matter that could not be ignored, for it involved the whole

question of future logging operations in Sand River. The man had taken pains to exhibit documents proving his identity, including discharge papers from the army, had secured from Sheriff Holmes the keys to the Hudson house down-river and had taken up his residence there. He loomed as a potential litigant in the already tangled affairs of the Raney estate, for the default of both Lem Hudson and Jed Raney in the matter of the mortgages on Pine Head tract threw this into the courts and tied up the future of timber-cutting operations of Sand River in a maze of doubt. Lang was interested, deeply, in this tangle, since it involved his recommendations to the Forestry Commission.

"If it wa'n't for the documentary evidence," Carlson commented, as he told them of Jim Hudson's proofs of identity, "the things he knows about Sand River, past and present, would be almost enough."

"Oh, I don't doubt he is Jim Hudson," said Beth. "My feeling is one of those attacks of intuition to which women are subject, I'm afraid. In this case it amounts to—a sort of fear of the man."

CHAPTER X

IT was not until evening that Lang found himself alone with Beth. He had gone out on the piazza, after supper, to smoke—and to wait for her to join him, if she would. She came out at length and stood at the top of the steps, a slim figure bathed in the October moonlight.

"Tomorrow," he spoke up, trying to be cheerful, "I shall go into the woods. Tonight—I want to tell you how sorry I am for the things that have come between us, Beth."

She whirled toward him abruptly. "Into the woods!" she cried. "Why do you want to find that creature? Why do you insist?"

Her voice was sharp with terror.

"To end this suspense," replied Lang, rising and coming near her. "It is that which is harassing you and me and everyone. Beth—I don't ask you to believe—except that I want you to try to believe in me, to believe I am sincere, even if you think I am mistaken, to believe that I really want to get at the truth."

"Don't!" she cried. "It is possible that suspense is even better than—what you call the truth."

He tried to take her hand, but she shrank from him with a painful contraction of her brow.

"I'm sorry," he murmured in a shaking voice. "But I must do it. I can't agree that suspense is better than the truth."

Without another word she turned from him and went into the house.

Lang did not sleep that night. He spent hours constructing a message to Beth, releasing her from the formal engagement she had assumed and telling her that he would never come back to her until he could convince her of the truth—and until she wanted to learn the truth.

"I do not believe your father is guilty," he wrote, "any more than you do yourself. I cannot blame you for doubting my innocence. I can only praise you for your kindness. That is all—except that I love you too much to stay any longer in your sight, to see you again until I can prove—the truth."

At daylight Lang was on Pine Head.

As he surveyed the blackened waste the fire had left, his physical weariness and spiritual depression deepened. It was no land of promise, now, there was no inspiration in it. He smiled, bitterly, at himself as he thought of his inadequate sketch. He scarce expected even comment on it from the Forestry Commission, now that he could see how inaccurate it was, for the swamp was burned to the ground, and he saw that its topography was quite different from what he had imagined.

Grimly he set about inspecting his old camp-site, a heartbreaking task, for the fire had destroyed all his belongings, including his surveying instruments, which were his only capital. Bits of burned wood, ashes, stone chipped by heat, were scattered about the barren table of rock at the top of the cliff. He went to the edge and peered down to where Long Fork flowed past the foot. Here, on this ledge, was where the struggle had occurred, sending a man to death forty feet below.

Along the bottom, between stream and stone, wound a narrow path, a fisherman's trail. At one point it was hidden by the jut of a limestone shelf which bulged out at about the height of a man's head. Lang had never noticed this before. His curiosity was roused.

"It's a trail, and trails are what I'm looking for," he told himself; and he shouldered the knapsack he had bought and provisioned in Eagle.

He found a shortcut to the base of the cliff and followed the fisherman's trail to the south. Scarcely had he turned the jutting corner when he stopped short and dropped to his knees with a cry of astonishment.

The clear imprint of a bare foot was preserved in the caked mud beneath the shelf, close to the limestone wall! And it pointed south! The trail ended abruptly, just ahead, where the cliff bulged out and crowded the path out of existence.

"Blake of Burnt Mountain was here!" he muttered with conviction. That footprint abolished the last vestige of his doubt.

Swiftly he back-tracked and followed the trail along the creek's edge, skirting the burned-over swamp, passing an old wooden bridge over which crossed a log-haul from Raney's Triangle to the ford, on the main trail to the settlement. He arrived at the other path, through the marsh, where he had first seen footprints the day of the fire.

He reconstructed, in mind, the situation that day, and it became obvious to him that Blake might easily have passed by this creek-trail to Pine Head while Lang himself was in the swamp, sketching. Two hours he had spent there, and in two hours a man had been killed, a fire set, one man had fled—*two* men had fled, a man on horseback, and a bearded wanderer of the woods.

Lang waded the creek and stood beneath the very tree where the graybeard had faced him. As he glanced up and saw the stripped lower branches of the pine, he no longer had a shadow of doubt that it was Blake he had seen, Blake the "yarb-doctor," whose simple remedies Mrs. Eastman had doctored him with so effectively—Blake, who was reputed to have perished in a forest fire.

Somehow, Lang did not feel that he was hunting a murderer, or even a criminal. There had been something almost patriarchal in the appearance of the old fellow. But he did feel that Blake knew the truth of what had happened at Pine Head.

His first job, now, was to find another trail. His plan of action was simple; if he chased his first trail to its end and found nothing, he would seek another—and another. He circled back into the thick growth once, twice, thrice—and found nothing; but the fourth time, cutting a wider arc, he came upon a narrow, grass-grown lane, an abandoned log-haul. It led northwest. Unhesitatingly Lang followed it.

BETH RANEY had just finished reading Lang's farewell note. She looked up with a shuddering intake of breath, a cry of anguish on her lips—and saw, through the screen door, a man in the dingy brown of a Canadian army uniform limping up the path.

Wondering what he could want at this early hour, she waited, dazedly rereading the message Lang had left, only half seeing, scarce understanding what it meant.

The man came to the steps. She opened the screen and went out to meet him. She could not bear to think of his entering the house.

"I come up to tell you somethin' that's been botherin' me ever since I got home," he began in his hoarse voice, as soon as he saw her. "I might as well speak out and have done with it."

His gaze shifted restlessly, strained and searching, as if he expected to recognize some familiar landmark—or was afraid he would.

"Come up and sit down," Beth invited him faintly.

He mounted the steps stiffly, leaning on his cane. She turned the old wicker rocking-chair toward him—then hesitated, turning pale as she recalled that this was the very chair in which Lem Hudson had been seated when she last saw him. But she held steady, reflecting that Jim could not know that.

He took the chair, his crooked smile coming and going, turning the livid scar alternately white and red as the blood throbbed in it and out again.

"It's a bit of a climb through the sand," he sighed, wiping his face with a khaki kerchief. "Never seemed—never used to seem so hard when I was a kid."

He made this reference to his boyhood awkwardly, almost timidly.

"I come to tell you I can't figure it out no other way but what Jed Raney must be—dead," he blurted out.

Beth started and echoed his word: "Dead? What makes you say that? Why do you think so?"

"It's a feelin' I've got," replied Hudson, his eyes downcast and roving from side to side. "It's come over me, and I can't get away from it, and I wanted to tell

you. I reason it this way, Miss Raney: he would come back, your father would, if he was alive. And because you're his daughter, I want you to know—I don't believe he killed Lem!"

"Then—who do you think—" she began, then checked herself.

"I don't know!" he cried. "I don't know—but I'm a-goin' to find out! I don't believe it was your dad!"

"Oh! That—that is very generous of you," she stammered.

SHE was seized by a tremendous emotion—but it was not gratitude. It was something like cold fear combined with horror of this man who seemed so generous. His generosity appeared almost ghoulish, as if he were picking over the bones of the dead for a grisly reason he did not explain.

" 'Course I haven't nothin' to base my feelin' on," went on Hudson argumentatively. "Nat'chally, I couldn't have no proof. Since I wasn't up there myself, and I aint had a chancet to make a first-hand investigation. But I intend to know. And I thought the first thing, Miss Raney, was for us two to come to an understandin'."

He paused as if waiting for her to make some comment, but she held silence, breathless.

"I used to know Jed Raney when I was a youngster," he went on broodingly. "I always thought he was a fair and square, generous-hearted man. I know he was ambitious. He wanted to get hold of all the pine-lands he could lay his hands onto."

The last was an accusation, but he softened it. "Lem was jest unlucky by nature, I guess," he said. "He worked hard, but he couldn't manage to hold onto what come to him. He had a quick temper—and a soft heart, too. Them two things are like flint and steel, sometimes."

"Why are you telling me this?" broke in Beth, breathing fast as if from an unconquerable emotion.

"Because—Lem thought an awful lot of you," was the reply, and it seemed to come with the force of an explosion. He glanced up suddenly, looking squarely into her eyes.

It seemed to her that the very soul of Lem Hudson looked at her, out of this man's eyes—and that the soul of Lem Hudson was writhing in torment. The spasm of hysteria passed as he lowered his gaze, and she became ashamed of her horror.

"I—I was quite fond of him," she managed to say, trying to match his apparent kindly intent. "He was always good to me. But—I couldn't care for him the way he—he said he did for me."

"But he couldn't help lovin' you!"

The exclamation, intense and hoarsely voiced, startled her again.

"I know that. From things I found around the house—memories," he went on. "But that's past and gone, as Lem is gone. I've come into his inheritance now—and I've come to inherit somethin' besides the property he left—whatever it may amount to."

"I am sure it belongs to you—I want you to have it," Beth hastened to interpolate. But he would not be stopped.

"I've inherited the same sort of regard for you that Lem had, and I'm hopin', sometime—"

"No, no!"

Beth cried out in a very agony of repulsion. It seemed a ghastly thing to her, to hint at his "inheritance of regard" for her. His generosity was swallowed up in the unmistakable meaning of his look as he raised his eyes to hers and gazed into them, for an awful moment.

"I intend to clear up all this that lies between us," he said, "if there *is* anything—or anyone between us. I learned one thing, in the hell I been through," he broke off suddenly, his voice becoming even more harsh and guttural than usual, "and that is, if there's anything a man wants, he's got to go after it, and get it—even if he has to take it away from somebody else. So—I'm goin' up to Pine Head now—"

He paused deliberately, rose stiffly from his seat.

"You—you are going up *there?*" she half whispered.

"And get *that* over with," he announced. "It'll be hard, at first—because of—memories," he added.

He stumped down the steps without another word, and she watched him, as curiously fascinated as she had been when she first saw him coming to the house.

"YE had a caller?"

Mrs. Eastman asked the question cheerily, as Beth stumbled blindly into

the house, unconsciously clutching Lang's message to her breast as she put her hands toward her throat. She felt half choked; her heart was beating in a flutter of apprehension.

"Yes—Jim Hudson—and I believe he is insane. He talked—he said he did not believe Father—did it. He—I can't tell you. But look at this! It's from Larry. He has gone! Up to Pine Head! And Jim Hudson is going there too! I'm afraid—"

Mrs. Eastman took the crumpled note, smoothed it out and read it—and then she almost smiled.

"He'll come back—in good time," she declared confidently.

"But Jim Hudson! He has gone up there too."

"You think he means harm?"

Mrs. Eastman's question was interrupted by a sharp knock at the front door. They both went to answer it.

Sheriff Holmes faced them. Again he had come with Carlson.

"I got word that Mr. Lang left here at daylight," Holmes said sharply. "Where's he gone? I got orders to keep watch o' him."

"Well, of all things!" exclaimed Mrs. Eastman. "Aint he free on bail?"

"They is such things as bail-jumpers," snapped Holmes in an ugly tone. "I got info'mation he's packin' a turkey and headin' for the State line. And unless you two women want to lose your bail-bond, forfeit it to the county, he's got to be stopped before he crosses."

Beth started to speak, but Mrs. Eastman hushed her with a gesture.

She stepped out and confronted the officer fiercely.

"Henry Holmes!" she exclaimed. "You're tryin' to scare us into surrenderin' him so's you can arrest him, ag'in; that's all. Well, we aint goin' to do it. And that's that. But if you're so set on showin' your authority, you'd better take that lunatic into custody that calls hisself Jim Hudson. He's gone into the woods too, headin' toward the State line. Now you git outa here!"

Retreating like a stubborn setting-hen before Mrs. Eastman's "shooing" motions, Holmes backed down the steps. At the bottom he spat on the grass with an air of bravado, and then calling to Carlson, said:

"Carlson, come with me. I swear ye in as special depitty. Raise your right hand and take the oath."

"I wont do it," declared the sawyer. "I'll go along with you after this crazy Jim Hudson—but I wont be a depitty to you or no other man."

"I'll see about Jim Hudson," declared Holmes with a swagger, "but I'm after Lang, first of all. —Well, come on if you're comin', Harve."

CARLSON hesitated as Holmes turned toward the gate—but he caught a nod from Mrs. Eastman, and followed Holmes.

"He's jealous because he couldn't pin it all onto Mr. Lang, in the first place," Mrs. Eastman declared as the two men went up the trail. "He wants to show his authority and justify hisself for bringin' the charge by rearrestin' him again—on suspicion. That's what! But we wont surrender him."

"But—suppose he does cross the line," suggested Beth, mindful of Lang's note and its declaration that he was going away, not to return until he had cleared up the mystery—and knowing that he need only journey a few miles northwest to reach the State boundary.

"Well, here we stand!" ejaculated Mrs. Eastman. "And there goes Henry Holmes, and we're Lang's bail-bondsmen, or bondswomen, and we got as much responsibility as the Sheriff has. That's what the Clerk of Courts said when he took the money."

"Do you mean—"

"I mean we'll jest up and head him off, before Henry Holmes gets to him. *I'm* goin'."

"Yes. That is the only way," Beth agreed. "Take the shortcut through the Triangle to Sand Lake, and make him come back."

They cut through a cornfield north of the house, the route that the boy Timothy Strait had taken to get to and from Pine Head, unobserved from the trail.

"We'd better make Pine Head, first off," Mrs. Eastman advised. "Mr. Lang might o' stopped there for a time—and Jim Hudson is goin' there."

She led the way with long, steady strides.

"Looks suspicious to me, Jim Hudson goin' up, and then Sheriff Holmes follerin' so soon after," she observed.

"It is more than suspicious—to me," Beth commented. "The more I think of it, the more I am convinced that Jim

Hudson is the one who gave information to Holmes. I'm glad Carlson is with him. Jim Hudson, being lame, can't travel very fast in the woods, anyway."

"Mebbe not," was Mrs. Eastman's cryptic comment.

CHAPTER XI

THE old log-haul that Lang followed led him, with many windings and twistings, to the southeastern end of Sand Lake. As soon as Lang set eyes upon the body of water, set like a crude letter "S" amid the pines and tamaracks, he was seized with the conviction that here was indeed a great natural reservoir. He had traveled swiftly, and it was only midmorning when he reached a point upon the shore from which he caught his first glimpse of the curiously colored slope of a hill which he knew to be Burnt Mountain.

He noted, automatically, the character of the forest as he plunged toward the hill, leaving the trail and abandoning his first plan of seeking another. He passed a tree with a surveyor's blaze upon it, but did not stop to ponder its significance. He crashed through small tamarack swamps, alder thickets and finally came to the rise of grade which began to carry him up the southwestern slope of Burnt Mountain.

Breathless, he slowed up, and as he relaxed his taut muscles and collected himself, he realized that his whole effort had been concentrated upon the unsupported but dogged "hunch" that over the top of the hill he would find Blake.

"Undoubtedly he wont be there at all," he reflected now. "I might as well make up my mind to be disappointed."

But scarcely had he left the denser woods and come out onto a clear space near the top of the hill, when his eye was caught by a thin plume of bluish-white smoke that appeared to come out of the crest ahead.

His heart thumping wildly, he abandoned all hesitation and ran stumblingly up the remaining distance to the top, plunged down the slope recklessly, perspiring, dry-throated and choking in the tremendous urge of the promise that he got from that smoke-plume.

Suddenly he lost sight of the smoke—and halted. Below him, to the west, lay a dispiriting wilderness of tamarack, miles of it stretching far to the horizon, close-grown, impenetrable to the view.

The hill overtopped the swamp, so that the tips of the trees nearest him just showed above it. A gully had been gashed from the summit of the hill and showed gravel, with here and there an outcropping of limestone. It pitched downward at a steep angle like a funnel leading directly into the heart of the swamp.

Lang slid and scrambled on, down into a sort of gulch between two shoulders of limestone sticking out to the weather, blackened by rains and winds and fire. The gulch widened; the washout swerved to the right and rounded beneath one of the shoulders of limestone—came to an abrupt end.

But at the end there again rose the column of smoke.

Lang flung himself on his stomach and peered over the edge of a cliff not unlike that of Pine Head. Below him, halfway to the swamp-bottom, was a tiny shelf or plateau clinging to the cliff, its edges grown with bushes—and all about its surface were scattered sticks and loosened gravel. There was no fire visible, but smoke rose from beneath.

LANG hesitated. His sureness faded. This might be the lair of a moonshiner; it was surely calculated for concealment and naturally defended from approach. He unbuckled his knapsack. There was but one way to approach the shelf—let himself down backwards, digging his toes and fingers in the crevices of the limestone.

In his knapsack Lang had an automatic, and he fished it out, thrust its muzzle over the edge, peered through a fringe of fox-grass and called out: "Hello!"

There was an immediate and startling answer—the frantic, savage baying of a hound. In an instant a lean, black and white animal rushed out from under the bulging face of the ledge and in deep-throated, quavering voice vented his alarm and defiance.

At first the hound did not appear to have located the source of alarm; he gave challenge to the world in general. Lang shouted again, and the hound caught his direction and lifting his muzzle bayed loudly, but to Lang's surprise, the savage note disappeared. The dog was making a mournful appeal, with a whine at the end of each longdrawn howl.

"Nice old fellow!" ventured Lang ingratiatingly.

The dog howled—and wagged its tail. The emaciated condition of the beast struck Lang as strange. He hesitated only a moment, then thrust his automatic into his belt and started climbing down the face of the ledge. The dog fawned and whined appealingly as Lang came near, and as Lang dropped to the ground, rushed upon him, slavering and whining in an extravagant display of welcome.

"What's the trouble, old fellow?" Lang inquired. "Left you here to starve?"

The dog bayed again and then turned and dived out of sight around a corner of the ledge. Lang followed, gun in hand. The dog had disappeared in a hole in the rock, apparently a cave of some sort. Lang could not see inside, it was so dark, but he heard the hound whining within.

"Who's there?" he challenged.

There came a feeble groan; the dog rushed out, licking at Lang's hands and whining, begging him to enter. Lang knelt and peered into the low-vaulted opening and gradually he made out the flicker of a tiny fire, and beside it, a makeshift cot that seemed formed of saplings covered with evergreen boughs.

Upon it lay a huddled figure clothed in rags—in tattered burlap!

"Blake!" cried Lang almost in exultation. Then, swiftly apprehensive, he crept in and peered into the gaunt, gray face of the being on the cot.

"Sick?" he queried. "What's the matter?"

"Sick! I'm starvin', man," came the reply in a rattling voice accompanied by a groan. "I'm almost done for. Got any grub? For God's sake, give me some!"

"Sure I've got grub!" Lang assured him cheerfully. "Plenty of it—but I left my bag up top. What happened, Blake?"

"How—how d'ye know I'm Blake?" came the counter-question, faintly challenging.

"Blake of Burnt Mountain," declared Lang confidently. "Herb-doctor, maker of pine syrup and pine balm. Isn't that right?"

"Right, Mister—whoever you be. Never mind, now. Get the grub!"

THE dog's shivering whine added its appeal to the old man's pitiful plaint. Lang put back his automatic and scrambled up the ledge after his knapsack. He refrained from further questions until he had prepared a generous supply of bacon, toasted at the tiny fire in a corner of the entrance, dog and man watching him hungrily, the one whining, the other gasping and groaning.

"Give Nero some too," croaked the old fellow. "He's got almost too weak to hunt. He aint been bringin' home anythin' since last week. If it hadn't been fer Nero, I'd 'a' starved long ago. Haven't been off this cot sence I fell and broke my leg. Nero hunted rabbits and birds—and got 'em, too, and brought 'em to me. Good old dog!"

His voice quavered—and the hound, recognizing praise, whined and crawled to his master's side. Lang was thrilled at the picture that came to him from Blake's brief sketch of what had happened, and at the thing Blake did, when he was handed a generous bacon sandwich.

HE broke it in two and threw half to the hound before he ate a crumb of it—and when he ate, it was with wolfish hunger. Three times this performance was repeated as Lang patiently roasted bacon and cut bread until his stock was almost gone. The old fellow lurched to a sitting posture, grunting with pain.

"Hunger!" he croaked. "May ye never know what it means, young man! And pore Nero—he did his best. Like to broke his neck tryin' for a grouse I shot over there at the edge. I only winged it, and it fluttered over, and down into the swamp, and Nero went after it. But he didn't get it—after all," Blake finished, with a sigh.

"How did you break your leg?" queried Lang. "And what have you done for it?"

The old fellow's left leg was wrapped in a grotesque bundle of crude splints, fashioned from twigs and bound with strips of burlap and bark.

"I fell from up top," responded Blake. "Too much of a hurry tryin' to get down out o' sight. I knowed *you'd* be comin' after me, sooner or later, if they didn't lock you up."

"Why did you think they'd lock me up?" demanded Lang, in surprise.

Blake ignored the question.

"I expected you," he went on, "because you're the only one seen me the day of the fire in the pines. And I ran and got acrost the State line because I didn't want

you to find me—and now I'm glad you did. They didn't lock you up, after all?"

"They did!" exploded Lang almost angrily; but he could not feel any real anger against the helpless old fellow. "I'm held on bail as a material witness against—against an unknown man who committed murder—that day."

"Hah! Murder!"

"Yes—and I was accused of it, the murder of Lem Hudson. I've sought you out to learn the truth about it. Do you know who killed Lem Hudson?"

The old man looked at Lang, a dull curiosity in his dim eyes.

He shook his head, hopelessly, "I dunno," he said. "I didn't know he was killed."

CHAPTER XII

THE shock of Blake's denial roused Lang's indignation—but it quieted to a feeling of determined ruthlessness. He did not believe Blake was telling the truth, but he was resolved to make him.

"Why did you disappear, so quickly, after you saw me, across Long Fork?" he inquired.

"Account of the fire," replied Blake quickly, but he evaded Lang's eyes. "I was afeard they'd accuse me of settin' it, or have me up for tellin' what I knowed about it."

"Or about the murder?" persisted Lang. "Blake—you were up at the foot of Pine Head that day! What did you see?"

"Young man," retorted Blake sullenly, "you aint told me who you be, yet. How do I know you aint a detective, tryin' to pin somethin' onto me?"

"A detective!" laughed Lang. "Some detective, to be on the job before the crime was committed!"

"Well—then you know what I saw," declared Blake cunningly: "Two men—and a horse. That's all."

"You saw them!" exulted Lang. "But up at the foot of Pine Head, what—?"

His quizzing was cut short by the sound of a growl from the dog. The hound rose and stalked stiff-legged to the mouth of the cave, his hair bristling along his spine.

"Nero hears somethin'," observed Blake; and Lang incautiously started toward the exit.

"Look here!" came Blake's voice from behind him.

Lang turned and looked into the muzzle of a double-barreled shotgun.

The haggard face, deep-sunken eyes and trembling arms of the old man were ominous of danger—a danger that seemed to Lang to be more likely accidental than premeditated; and to take the lesser of two chances, Lang walked straight up to the cot, and without a word grasped the gun by the barrel and thrust it aside. Blake relaxed his grip and sank back with a groan.

"I give up," he said pitifully. "The gun aint loaded, anyhow. No shells left."

TO make sure, Lang broke the weapon. He found its rusty barrels empty. He stood it up near the mouth of the cavern. Outside, the dog was growling ominously.

"Lift my leg over, will ye?" implored Blake excitedly. "There's somebody else comin'. Do you know who?" he demanded suspiciously.

Lang shook his head as he assisted Blake to a sitting position with both feet on the ground.

"Ah, that hurts—but it feels good, jest the same," grunted Blake as he massaged the upper portion of his bundled leg. "Rheumatiz kept me back. The bones are set, I reckon. Nero, what's the matter?"

The dog broke into a salvo of defiance. A tiny trickle of sand appeared, dribbling down over the entrance, plainly visible in the sunlight.

"Quiet the dog, if you can," Lang whispered, and reached for the shot-gun. "We'll see who—"

He darted out swiftly, faced about and with the gun at his shoulder, called up sharply: "Show yourself, or I'll shoot!"

"All right, partner; I've got the password," a husky voice from above responded instantly; and a uniformed figure rose on hands and knees at the brink of the ledge.

Lang did not allow his astonishment to confuse his action.

"Come down here!" he commanded. "Right over the edge. I mean what I say about shooting."

"I figgered it that way," was the dry reply; and Jim Hudson eased himself over the edge and down the steep face of the ledge with surprising ease.

"Why did you come here? Why did you follow me, Hudson?" Lang demanded sharply.

"Man's got a right to walk through the woods, if he wants," came the laconic reply, "I been lookin' over the pine lands, and I just noticed a trail leadin' this way and followed. Habit, mebbe. In the army you learn to watch everything that looks suspicious."

"Then you look upon me as a suspicious character?" Lang queried.

"Not exactly. Hullo! What you got here? A summer cottage in the hills! Dog and everythin'!"

"I've found a friend of mine, in trouble," replied Lang dryly. "That is his dog."

"Come here, hound," invited Hudson gruffly, snapping his fingers. Nero shrank back, growling, his lips curling up over his teeth.

"Don't like me—don't like the uniform. I've met lots like you, hound. Well, I don't like you, either." Hudson gave vent to a hoarse laugh.

"I don't like the way you trailed me and spied on me, from up above," said Lang. "What does it mean, Hudson?"

Hudson made a frightful grimace with his scarred face.

" 'Twas my brother was killed!" he cried fiercely. "And the man who did it aint been found, yet. How'd I know but what you was hiding him out?"

Lang was taken aback, for an instant, by the reply. "I'm not hiding anyone," he retorted. "I set out to find a man who, I think, knows more about the affair than either of us does. I've just found him—crippled from a fall. He's been in that hole for two months, he says, and I believe it. He's half starved. It's Blake of Burnt Mountain!"

HUDSON blinked—then shook his head stupidly. "Some friend you made in jail?" he queried.

"No!" retorted Lang curtly. "I said he had been here for two months—and that was the length of time I was in jail."

" 'Scuse me," muttered Hudson, glancing about him with a roving regard. Nero had retired to the cave. Lang stepped to the opening, motioning Hudson to come with him.

"There's some one out here who will help me get you away from here," Lang said to Blake.

Hudson did not appear, at once; and Lang, thinking he was afraid of the dog, suggested to Blake that he send the animal back into the cavern.

"It's Jim Hudson, brother of Lem Hudson," he told Blake. "Jest back from a war-hospital."

Lang had set down the useless shotgun again, near the entrance, and he began collecting the scattered paraphernalia he had dug from his knapsack.

"Jim Hudson, eh? What's he doin' here?" Blake's tone was tinged with faint apprehension. "Well, 'taint for me to ask questions," he sighed, "I want to get outa here. Before you pack up, might I—have some more to eat?"

Lang handed the old man the heel of a loaf.

"No need to save it now, I guess," he said. "The two of us can haul you up to the top and get you to Sand River somehow."

His talk was constantly interrupted by the growling protest of Nero, from the deep recesses of the cavern. Blake flung him half of the bread, and the dog mouthed it, still growling.

"Nero don't trust him," observed Blake. "I don't like that. Why don't he come in?"

LANG turned to summon Hudson again —and his glance was caught by the slowly moving butt of the shotgun being dragged along in the sand.

Slowly Lang stepped out, his automatic in his hand. Hudson leveled the shotgun, finger crooked upon the trigger. Lang faced him coolly.

The distorted face leaned against the stock of the shotgun quivered in a paroxysm of rage. He cocked one trigger; then his eye was caught by the slow upward movement of Lang's hand with the automatic. Slowly, as Lang faced him, silent and unflinching, Hudson's expression changed; his lips trembled; his teeth showed in what was intended for a smile.

"All right," he croaked. "You've got the nerve. I wondered if you had."

"Put the gun down!" Lang commanded.

Hudson obeyed, to the extent of lowering the weapon, still cocked, and in his grasp.

Nero leaped forth from behind Lang, snarling, but Lang caught him and flung him back. The dog was but a bundle of bones.

"Put the gun where it was!" Lang ordered; and Hudson, wild-eyed, apparently angry with himself that he had not pulled the trigger, obeyed.

"You are only confirming my belief you followed me for an underhanded purpose," Lang declared. "Keep your hands off that gun, now! Your welcome, here, isn't any too cordial, from man or beast."

"Can't help a damn' dog's feelin's," rasped Hudson. "Can't help it if you're suspicious of me. As Lem Hudson's brother I've got a right to be suspicious of you, I reckon. If it hadn't been for you, Lem might have been happy—with Beth Raney—"

"That's enough!" snapped Lang angrily. "You're taking the worst possible attitude—if you really want to find the man who killed your brother. Come inside, now, and remember that your suspicions give you no right to take the law into your own hands. Blake is as helpless as a child—and as innocent, I believe. I think he knows something—"

"Reckon he does know something," muttered Hudson sullenly, but he obeyed Lang's summons and preceded him inside.

"Blake, this is Jim Hudson." Lang presented the two without formality. "He's going to help get you out of here. Have you such a thing as a rope?"

"Nary a string. But I've got a hand-ax, and there's acres of tamarack for makin' bark-rope. I'll show you how. I know a lot about things a man can do in the woods. But the wilderness aint kind to a crippled man. I used to think nothin' could ever drag me out of the woods—but I'd ruther rot in jail, now, than rot in here."

"Ready to go to jail, eh?" came Hudson's voice in sharp triumph. "That's the way to look at it. Better be ready for what's comin'."

"So, you're Lem Hudson's brother Jim?" Blake queried without resentment. "Yes—ye look like him."

THERE was a blank silence. Hudson seemed strangely affected by the remark. Lang was surprised into the exclamation:

"I thought you didn't know Lem Hudson, Blake!"

"Not well enough to say so—no more'n I know you, by sight. A man who's trained his eyes to see don't have to light 'em on a body more'n once to know him—ef he sees him ag'in."

Hudson gave a sneering laugh and continued to glare at Blake, as he had done since he entered.

"Come, we'll have to hurry if we expect to make Sand River before dark," urged Lang, and he seized the ax and led the way outside. The shotgun he left in Blake's hands. The old fellow blinked up at him with an apologetic, understanding grin.

It took only a few minutes for the two men to secure enough strips of the tough, fibrous bark to make a long rope; and returning to the cave, they worked under Blake's directions, weaving a bulky three-strand cable of bark which, tested, promised to hold more than one man's weight, if necessary. As they worked, Blake grew garrulous. He described, in a wandering fashion, his experiences, terrible enough, but to him ordinary except for the threat of starvation.

He had cached a food-supply in this cave, he said, every winter, and used it as a winter retreat. No one knew of it, and he took pains that no one should.

"The game wardens bothered me, in Velas County," he explained. "They thought Nero ran deer—but he didn't."

"Everyone thought you were dead," Lang told him, "—burned in the fire that swept Burnt Mountain last fall."

A canny smile flitted over Blake's haggard face. "I was burned out—not up," he said. "Lost my old shack over the other end of the mountain, in the fire, and had to move anyhow. So I stayed over this side of the State line. Wardens don't bother, here. Anyway, they don't dig into the tamarack swamps. Nothin' but small game in 'em. First time I was back in Velas County was the day of the fire at Pine Head—the day you seen me. You was the first one has seen me since the Burnt Mountain fire, too. I knowed it—and I was in such a hurry to get back into my hole, I fell—and that's how this happened."

HUDSON did not join in the conversation. He worked away, steadily enough, but clumsily, and several times Blake cautioned him to draw the strands of bark tighter. Lang was puzzled at Hudson's surly manner, but he reflected that the man was undoubtedly poisoned with suspicion of both him and Blake. He could not be blamed for that, Lang was forced to admit—but his murderous effort with the shotgun, abandoned, apparently, because he feared that Lang would get in a shot with the automatic before he could

pull the trigger of the shotgun, was sufficient to cause Lang to keep sharp watch of him.

They fashioned a rude sling to fit about Blake's body, and adjusted it to him.

"Now for the hoist," cried Lang cheerfully. "I'll take the rope's end up top and leave it to you, Hudson, to see that all's secure down here."

Lang took the shotgun from Blake, leaned it aside, and was bending over, adjusting the rope sling under Blake's arms, when the hound rushed from the back of the cave with a savage snarl and flung himself toward Hudson.

LANG whirled and groped for the gun, automatically, found it missing, and saw Hudson pulling the trigger as the dog charged him.

Hudson's cry of rage blended into fear as the hammer clicked harmlessly and Nero launched himself in air, snapping at Hudson's throat. He staggered back against the side of the cave, cursing and crying out. Lang leaped forward, thrust the dog back, wrested the shotgun from Hudson's hands and flung Hudson to the ground. The dog snapped at the prostrate man's feet, but withheld attack at Lang's command.

"What's the meaning of this?" he demanded, standing over the cowering man, who had curled his arms about his face and was fairly whimpering in terror.

"Call off that damn' dog!" he demanded hoarsely. "He started for me, and I went to put him out. He'd better be dead, anyhow."

Blake raised his quavering voice angrily. "You'd better be dead than to shoot him!" he cried. "He's worth two of you, Hudson!"

Hudson remained prostrate; and Lang, thinking he had been bitten, stooped over him and pulled his arms away from his face. There was no mark save the old scar—but the look Hudson gave him was of stark terror. The man looked as if he had gone insane. His eyes were wild and his face convulsed into a mask of fear.

"Come on! Get up and get out of here!" he commanded. "This hole has got on your nerves, Hudson—and the dog's, too. He don't like you but we'll have to make the best of that."

Hudson rose, cringing away from the dog and slunk out the cave.

"You will be the one to carry the rope's end up" said Lang, grimly. "I think it will be better for Nero—and for you."

CHAPTER XIII

HUDSON'S ugly attitude warned Lang to take no further chances with him. He went to the far side of the little plateau as Hudson began the scramble up the ledge and covered him with the automatic as he directed Hudson to make the rope fast to a tree. While Hudson was busied at this task, Lang made a final inspection of the knots in the crude sling, instructed Blake to hold fast above his head to the thick cable, and then climbed up the ledge.

He had taken the hand-ax, gathered a few of Blake's ragged bed-blankets in a bundle which he tied to the sling, and noting, with satisfaction that Blake appeared to have gathered every ounce of reserve energy he possessed, to brace himself for the ordeal of being dragged up the face of the ledge, he was free to turn his attention to the primitive problem in engineering—and the other problem of the surly man whom he was forced to rely on for help.

Hudson rose from hands and knees as Lang reached the top. Apparently he had been adjusting the rope from the sapling to which he had made it fast to the edge of the ledge; he had even taken the pains to find a smooth place on the brink of the limestone for the rope to run.

"All right?" Lang inquired.

"Right as can be," replied Hudson gruffly.

"Very well, then. To make sure there is no slip, I'll snub the slack about the tree and take in. You haul up, a bit at a time. When you're tired, we'll change places."

Hudson stooped for the lift. Below, the hound raised his voice in harsh protest, and Lang could hear Blake trying to quiet him. It was odd, how Nero hated Hudson, how he had seemed to distrust him from the very first—very odd, in view of his friendly welcome to Lang. Not all of the surliness and vicious intentions of the man could be laid to his desire for vengeance for Lem Hudson's death, it seemed. There was something queer about him.

Come to think of it, Lang reflected, the man did not have his cane! And he had forgotten his limp!

Lang was so startled at the discovery he almost lost his hold on the rope as Hudson heaved upon it, displaying remarkable strength of arms and back by raising Blake clear of the ground with the first heave.

The hound broke into a veritable rage. Hudson cursed the dog and heaved again. Lang drew in the slack, braced his foot against a jutting rock and wound the rope's end about the smooth bole of the sapling, a poplar.

Again Hudson lifted. Two yards of rope had passed through his hands and been drawn taut. He took a fresh grip and lifted, vigorously, seeming to be spurred to angry effort by the dog's hostility.

Lang, reeving in behind Hudson, felt a sudden giving of strands. The rope writhed in his hands. He shouted out: "Hold hard."

Then he caught sight of a slowly raveling strand between his hands and the tree. With a desperate effort he managed to twist the rope about his foot and get a fresh hold with one hand, forward of the broken strand.

BLAKE'S weight jolted down an inch, two inches—then stopped. Hudson released his grip and turned to Lang, his eyes staring, the scar beneath his right eye whitened like a flake of bloodless flesh slapped across the crimson of his face. His whole expression was hideous.

"I'm pretty well done!" he cried, and started back from the edge, as if to take Lang's place.

"Stay where you are!" gritted Lang. "The rope—was parting. You've got to give me more slack. Quickly!"

Hudson, with a grunt, stood stock still, leaning toward Lang, until Lang, wrapping about his left wrist the scanty length between the broken strand and his foot, reached in his belt and got his right hand on his automatic.

Hudson turned, then, and lifted, once, twice, thrice, without stop. Lang was hurried to take in the slack and keep all clear.

"Now you can rest," he called. "Take your time. We wont change places at all."

He had got a close look at the frayed section of the bark rope—and he knew that the strand which had parted had been neatly severed halfway through with some sharp-edged instrument. There was no doubt about it.

First the shotgun, then the severed strand!

THINKING swiftly, Lang decided to keep silence, to let no murmur escape him that he had detected the sliced bark.

"All ready again!" he sang out. "This time we bring him all the way."

Hudson brought him up, hand over hand and over the edge, while Nero voiced his alarm and ferocious anger at seeing his master hauled out of sight by the man he hated and feared.

Blake called to the hound: "Nero, come on! Up, come up, old fellow!"

The hound made a flying leap into the bushes which clung to the less perpendicular side of the ledge at the west end, and with a thrashing scramble got to the top, ran to his master and fawned upon him.

The afternoon was waning, but the bald top of Burnt Mountain was still bathed in sunlight, and there was left four good hours of daylight. They all took a breathing-spell, and then Lang unrolled the blankets and set about to fashion a litter. Blake roused and instructed them in a clever manner, how to stretch a blanket on two poles, held apart by short poplar limbs, cleft at one end, forked at the other and lashed with bark rope.

They took up the litter, with Blake lying on it, complaining weakly, of stomach pains, no doubt from overindulgence in food after so long without it, and rubbing his injured leg in agony. The long journey to Pine Head lay before them, and Blake was a burden despite his emaciated condition.

"We'll make for the log-haul at Sand Lake," Lang decided, "and rest there for a time. If necessary, we can go for help."

"That's a good idee," seconded Hudson, to Lang's surprise. It was the first time he had spoken in many minutes. He took up his end of the litter and started off at a sturdy pace, apparently eager, now, to get Blake safely to their destination. Lang had watched Hudson, as they used the bark rope to bind the litter joints, and had seen him handle the severed section without a tremor or flicker of eyelash. Lang was glad he had not mentioned his suspicion. It gave him just so much more advantage if Hudson had further cards to play in the game he was putting up—a desperate game, indeed, and mystifying.

His attitude toward Blake was subtly, that of an accuser, as if he had decided

that Blake were a criminal and he was anxious to help place him in the hands of the law. Indeed, Hudson took pains to whisper to Lang as they paused for a rest halfway down the hill and Lang went ahead to find the easiest route through an alder thicket, beckoning Hudson along with him, for Blake's safety:

"I knew, all the time, that shotgun wasn't loaded."

"Yes?" smiled Lang. "I suppose you were only trying to bluff the dog—as well as me!"

"Well, the dog knew what a gun *might* do!" retorted Hudson.

Lang made no comment, and Hudson did not speak again.

THEY got through the alders by fighting their way. At times Lang used the hatchet to hew a path. They were resting, at the end of the hard go, when Blake raised one bony hand and pointed at a dead tree, bare of bark and with the mark of an ax shoulder-high, upon it.

"State line," he said. "Step acrost, and we're in Velas County."

Lang nodded. He recognized, now, the fact he had ignored on the way out, that he had crossed the boundary between States—and he noted, with a momentary thrill, that the northwestern limit of his sketched layout which included Sand Lake and the lower abutments of Burnt Mountain, came just within the confines of Velas County. It meant that if anything did come of his recommendations, there would be no inter-State complications to block him. Then he regarded Jim Hudson—and the thrill passed.

Here was the heir to Pine Head. Inter-State complications could scarcely be worse than the legal snarl which must develop as a result of Jim Hudson's return. He knew little of what had actually happened in respect to the tract, only that Jed Raney had taken steps to assume the mortgages—and then had disappeared. It was foolish, he decided, to allow himself to dream of the big possibility, as long as it was blocked by the human enigma with heavy, hunched shoulders, plodding on ahead of him. In common law, the rights of the heir would be respected, mortgages to the contrary notwithstanding. He knew that.

There was only one hope now—eminent domain proceedings, and that was a faint hope indeed, as he knew from experience with the cumbersome process employed in the legislature for acquiring parks and reservations.

He was considering these gloomy points as they staggered down the last bit of Burnt Mountain foothill and into the logging-road which skirted Sand Lake. He was startled out of his meditations when Hudson grunted, turned half around and lowered his end of the litter.

The dog set up a howl, and Lang looked ahead and saw the welcome gauntness of Carlson coming up the trail. Yes, he even welcomed the wizened face of Sheriff Holmes, behind the sawyer.

CHAPTER XIV

"WELL, how d'ye do!" came the Sheriff's dry salutation as he glimpsed Blake's form on the stretcher. "Who's this you got here?"

"Blake of Burnt Mountain," replied Lang quietly, "the man you said was dead."

The Sheriff stepped close to the litter and peered into Blake's sunken features. He looked up, first at Lang, then at Hudson—and with an unexpected smile, thrust out his hand to Lang.

"It's him," he said. And then his expression became doubtful again, and he let his hand fall to his side. "But he looks as if he was dead, to me."

Lang gave a startled glance at Blake's face. The old man's eyes opened, and he looked up into their faces.

"Not yet," he said in a weak voice. "I aint goin' to die, either, until I tell you somethin'. Take me up top of Pine Head."

Hudson demurred, with a snarl. "Take him to the lockup," he suggested meaningly. "That's the place for him."

Holmes deliberated, studied Hudson's face, then Lang's.

"What's your reason for wantin' to be lugged up the hill?" he inquired of Blake.

The old man beckoned the Sheriff nearer, and as Holmes bent over him, he whispered something that sent the officer's head up with a jerk.

"Tote him up there!" he commanded. "It's a whim of his'n—and we might as well humor him."

"All foolishness," Hudson protested angrily. "I've told you, Sheriff, what *my* suspicions are," he added meaningly.

"Yeah! You can prove 'em, better, up on Pine Head, can't ye?"

Hudson stooped to pick up his end of the litter, grumbling incoherently. Carlson replaced Lang in the rear until they had emerged from the narrow log-haul which ended at the wooden bridge, a little way downstream from where Lang had forded the Fork. Then the four men divided the burden, one at each corner of the rude stretcher.

"Up there," said Blake, pointing northwestward, "up there was where I saw this young feller—and he saw me, acrost the creek. I p'inted out the fire to him and run for cover."

Holmes gave Lang a look of mingled apology and interrogation. Lang smiled and nodded. The Sheriff shook his head in a gesture that signified he was beaten.

"Where'd ye find him?" he inquired.

Lang described the cave and his search for Blake, and gave Hudson credit for his assistance—leaving out the unpleasant incidents.

"You'd make a good detective," was Holmes' comment, as Lang finished. "Ye missed your calling, young man."

"It's a fine thing for a man to know when he has chosen the right profession," remarked Lang dryly.

Carlson broke into a chuckle and Holmes turned beet-red.

THERE was no more talk possible, for they had reached the beginning of the steep ascent to Pine Head, and a hard scramble it was, even with four men at the litter. Blake was jolted considerably, despite their careful efforts to carry him gently, and he showed evidences of pain and great fatigue when the top was reached. He asked for water, and Carlson hurried down to the foot of the cliff to fill his hat from the stream.

The others, waiting above, heard him shout:

"The women are comin' down the Fork," he called.

Holmes and Lang rushed to the edge of the cliff but could see nothing for several moments, save Carlson, striding upstream toward a point in the path where it curved about the edge of the blackened swamp. In a little time he returned, and with him were Beth and Mrs. Eastman. Beth was clinging to his arm and appeared exhausted.

"Humph!" snorted Holmes suspiciously. "What are the women doin' out here, stickin' their noses in?"

"Perhaps they wish to learn to be detectives," suggested Lang.

"What you goin' to do?" demanded Hudson sharply. "Let the women in on this? There's no use in it!"

"Who are they?" came Blake's voice in an eager tone.

"Jed Raney's darter and housekeeper," Holmes informed him.

"I'd like to see Jed Raney's darter," Blake declared, struggling vainly to sit up. "There's suthin' I want to tell her —afore I—suthin' about her—dad—"

His voice trailed off into incoherence. Lang, alarmed by the old man's ashen appearance, raised his head and eased his position.

"Tell Carlson to hurry up, at once, with water," he called to Holmes. "The old fellow hasn't much strength left. We've got to know what it is he's got to say. And I want Beth Raney to hear it, too," he finished, with a look at Holmes that sent the Sheriff hurrying down the steep path to stimulate Carlson to greater speed.

"I've got something to say," Hudson began gruffly. "It wont wait, either. I've got a charge against—"

"Not now!" Lang cut him off with an angry movement. "Whatever you, or Blake or anyone, has got to say will be told before as many witnesses as we can get together."

Hudson subsided with a malevolent expression on his face.

A drink and a kerchief dipped in cold water on his forehead, and Blake revived wonderfully.

"Got any more grub?" he implored apologetically. "I could eat some more—now."

Lang found a cake of chocolate in his knapsack, and Blake, with an apology to Nero, consumed it hungrily. The dog lay at his master's feet, anxious-eyed but quiet. He did not stir, save when Hudson moved, and then with twitching lips and bristling hair he gave vent to low growls that testified to his continued hatred for the man.

HOLMES assisted Beth up the path. Beth was visibly exhausted, her clothing mud-stained, torn and bedraggled. Mrs. Eastman's clothing, too, showed signs of a long tramp in the woods and through marshes and swamps.

"We've been all over Pine Head tract," Mrs. Eastman informed them. "This is

the third time we've been up on Pine Head."

Blake raised himself on one elbow and gave Beth a searching glance.

"Be you Jed Raney's darter?" he inquired.

Beth nodded, affected by his emaciated condition, his pitifully tattered clothing.

"So you found Blake!" broke out Mrs. Eastman triumphantly, giving Lang a nervous grip of the hand. "I knew you would! I knew it. And Sheriff Holmes, he tried to make us believe you was goin' to jump bail! The insect!"

Lang gave "the insect" a grim look. "Why should you think that?" he demanded.

"Because I had info'mation that caused me to believe Jed Raney was innocent of this crime," responded Holmes, resuming something of his old cocksure sternness.

"Information?" queried Lang.

"Well, 'twa'n't evidence, exactly," Holmes qualified, "I'll have to let Jim Hudson explain it to you."

"Oh! It was Jim Hudson!"

THE exclamation came from Beth.

"Why didn't you tell us, when you came to the house?" she demanded. "What right did you have to hound Mr. Lang when he is in our custody, on bail?"

"And we, a-traipsin' through the swamps to warn him not to cross the State line because a—a insect was on his trail wantin' to trip him up?" Mrs. Eastman broke in. "What right—?"

"A *John Doe* warrant for the arrest of the murderer of Lem Hudson!" blared Sheriff Holmes, thrusting his hand in his coat pocket impressively. "The Grand Jury returned a secret indictment—"

"Against Jed Raney," Lang cried—and then was sorry for it, as he saw Beth shrink and bow her head on Mrs. Eastman's shoulder.

"And against *John Doe* too," persisted Holmes. "And I got a right to serve it —on *you.*"

"But you wont!"

Lang's defiance seemed to paralyze the Sheriff in his tracks. His gaze wandered to the automatic which Lang had disclosed by brushing back his coat. Lang did not touch the gun—but the Sheriff did not step an inch toward him.

"I got the right—" began Holmes, in a high-pitched tone.

"Only in the event that you are satisfied of the innocence of the person accused specifically in the first indictment," declared Lang.

"Jed Raney is innocent!"

CHAPTER XV

THE hoarse declaration came from Hudson.

"He's innocent, and you know it, Lang!"

Hudson stood a little apart from the others, who were clustered near Blake's litter. He had his back against a charred tree near the brink of the ledge, his arms folded and his cap drawn down low as if to shield his face from the rays of the westering sun.

There was something sinister in his sureness, his defiance. His voice had become a rasping half-whisper. Instinctively all turned toward him. Blake raised up and fastened his deep-sunk eyes upon the man. Beth regarded him, white-faced and tense.

"Jed Raney didn't kill Lem Hudson," he repeated. "I've been doing some investigating of my own. That's why I came out in the woods today. I had a suspicion something would develop. It has. Lang, you know it, well as I do—that the man who killed Lem went barefoot. Like Blake!"

Lang, with the others, gave an involuntary glance at Blake's feet—still bare, as they had been on the day he appeared in Pine Head tract—as they must have been when he crept to the base of the ledge, below them.

"You found tracks down to the foot of the ledge, here," Hudson went on, shooting out an arm and pointing at Lang. "I saw you when you found 'em!"

Lang was conscious of a thrill of combined alarm and anger.

"You are going to charge—"

"Wait!" cried Hudson fiercely. "I'm going to tell you what happened. I've been studying it out."

He paused for a moment, folding his arms across his chest—his eyes roving about the group, resting for a moment on the hound, who had flattened his body at Blake's feet and was quivering and rumbling dislike at Hudson's gestures. Hudson's gaze fixed on Blake, at length, and held there.

"Jed Raney and Lem got into a quarrel, up here on Pine Head," he declared, with curious conviction in his tone. "They

got to fighting, finally. It was over the mortgage papers. Jed Raney had 'em with him."

Hudson shot a swift glance at Holmes, and the Sheriff nodded.

"Lem was jealous of Pine Head," Hudson continued. "All of you know that. It was all he owned. He was having hard work to keep it. He might have sold it long ago, but the mortgages was so heavy he wanted to get a bigger price than he could find. Lem had to have a good reason for offerin' to sell to Jed Raney—and he had a good reason."

Hudson lowered his tone, and his glance roved the ground restlessly.

"I wont mention it, just now," he said in a lower tone. "I found out the reason —in things he left at home. I know the reason."

HUDSON paused again, his voice sinking to a husky whisper with a quiver in it that might have been from pity. Lang was strangely moved, despite the uneasy distaste he felt for the man's display of emotion.

"They got into a fight over the papers," Hudson went on, more rapidly. "And Lem Hudson stumbled over a rock—and fell backwards—over the ledge. *But he wasn't killed, then!*"

The final declaration was given in a belligerent, challenging tone, as if he dared contradiction.

Blake had raised himself to a sitting posture now, and was leaning forward, watching Hudson closely. Lang caught a gleam of intense interest in the old man's eyes—but not the slightest hint of fear or guilt. It was more as if Blake were comparing notes on what he knew and on what Hudson said.

"The fall didn't kill him," Hudson repeated deliberately. "But he was stunned. Jed Raney thought he was dead—and he got scared and skipped out. Left him there—for dead. But Lem was alive. And Jed Raney was afraid to come back."

"How do you know this?" Lang asked the question bluntly.

"Wait till I finish," retorted Hudson. "I know—and you know too."

Blake moved his head and glanced up at Lang curiously, then bent his keen old eyes upon Hudson. Holmes seemed to be making an impartial study of Blake and Lang.

"There was another man here," Hudson went on, "a barefoot man. And he hated Lem Hudson because Lem once drove him off his land with a gun and told him never to come back again. But he come back, barefoot, down the path, down Long Fork, right down below here, to where the path ends."

Blake looked up at Lang with a movement that drew Lang's attention. The old man moved his lips, nodding, as if to confirm Hudson's statement and call Lang's attention to it as a fact he knew also.

Hudson shifted his position. His folded arms hunched his shoulders as he gripped his deep chest tightly. It was as if he were striving to hold back his anger, to control himself. He glared at Blake.

"This barefoot man saw Lem lying there as if dead, at the foot of the ledge. He saw the other man come down and try to take some papers out of Lem's hand—and Lem stirred and come back to life.

"He was hanging onto them papers because they was the mortgages he had took away from Jed Raney. And Jed Raney got scared and run away; and this man—the barefooted man—he took a rock and killed Lem! Smashed his head with it. He hated him. He killed him and then run back down the path.

"He left his footprints in the path—and Lang, you found one of 'em this morning. That's how Lem Hudson was killed. That's how I figured it out. *And there's the man that did it!*"

He thrust out an accusing hand and pointed at Blake.

THE only sound was a gasp from Beth and a sort of grunt from Holmes. Blake regarded Hudson, open-mouthed, and then he crinkled his face into a smile. It was a grimace of derision.

"Ye lie!" he cried. "Ye lie; and ye know it—and I'll prove it, Hudson!"

The violence of his speech seemed to take Blake's breath, and he was seized with a coughing-fit that racked him terribly. No one spoke for a long moment. Hudson did not reply to the accusation except to sneer, and Lang was conscious of a feeling of astonishment at Hudson's quiet acceptance of the challenge. The man should have been in a high pitch of righteous indignation, a brother accusing the killer of his kin. Instead he held himself steady, braced against the tree, his fingers digging into his arms, his face shadowed by his cap, emotionless, so far as one could tell.

Holmes broke out as the silence persisted. "Well, Blake, what have ye got to say?"

Blake seemed to summon new vigor; he straightened, braced himself with his hands on the ground behind him.

"Don't make no difference if this is his dying statement," broke in Hudson sharply. "I know what happened."

"Ye lie, if ye say it's the way you tell it!" Blake declared. "And this aint goin' to be my dyin' statement. I'll tell ye what I *saw*—not what I figgered out."

HE spoke directly to Hudson, as if the others were merely spectators to a combat of wills. Hudson shifted uneasily, before Blake's intense gaze.

"I saw two men come into the woods on the day the fire burned this side of Pine Head," said Blake. "One of 'em had a roan horse, ridin' it. After a while he got off and led it along the top of the ridge, from west to east.

"I was halfway up this side,"—indicating the northern slope,—"gathering yarbs and pine-needles to make medicine. Ye're right, Hudson, about me bein' chased off this land. I was—and this was the fust time I ever came onto it again. Oh, I been chased off'm land afore! But this time, the time he druv me off, I made up my mind never to come back into Velas County again. I was goin' to move out when the fire swept Burnt Mountain—and it give me a good chancet to disappear and let people think I was dead. I wanted to be let alone.

"Well, I was let alone—all winter, sick part of the time, and sick of bein' alone. I came back into Velas County because I wanted to see some people I used to know around Sand River. They was a Mrs. Gurley—"

"My mother, that was!" cut in Mrs. Eastman.

Blake regarded her thoughtfully. "Ye don't say?" he queried. "She used to buy pine syrup off'm me. Well—I didn't get to see no one I knew, because I run acrost these two men in the woods. One of 'em with a roan horse—and wearin' a checked shirt like a timberjack's. The other, he wore a black shirt, all shiny-lookin'. Humph! Been a long time sence I wore an outside shirt myself, and I noticed them things, somehow.

"They was big men, powerful built, about your size, Hudson."

"Well—Lem, he was about my size," exclaimed Hudson impatiently.

"Thet was Lem Hudson, mebbe, in the black shirt?"

CARLSON, whose silence had been profound, up to now, broke in eagerly:

"Yeah, he had a black sateen shirt on when we found him," Carlson said.

"When you found him, dead?" queried Blake.

Carlson nodded.

"Umhum!" mused Blake. "No doubt it was Lem Hudson, then?"

"Of course not!" cried Hudson harshly. "Lem was killed!"

Blake gave Hudson a long, deliberate look which seemed to drive the man half frantic with rage. His fingers worked upon his bulging muscles, and he breathed hard. He had pulled his cap still lower over his eyes, though the sun did not touch him now; it had sunk behind Burnt Mountain.

"I ducked down to the Fork, thinkin' to dodge them two and get to the settlement," Blake went on. "But when I got to the foot of the ledge, here, I heard them talkin' up above. They begun to talk loud and sounded mad. I stopped and turned back, and purty soon I got uneasy and looked up here—and I saw they was fightin' together. The man in the checked shirt, I didn't know him. The other one, I'd seen before. It was Lem Hudson!"

"Ye knew him, then?" broke out Holmes excitedly.

Hudson made a curious, barking sound, meant to be a derisive laugh, it seemed, but it was more like a half-sob.

"They fought and wrestled round on top of here," Blake continued, deliberatively, "ontil I got skeered they'd fall over the edge. I knew I ought to git away from there, but I couldn't stir. And purty soon I seen one of 'em stumble backwards. The man in the checked shirt! And he fell over the edge."

"That's a damn lie!"

Hudson broke into speech angrily, desperately. He moved, as if he would hurl himself upon the old man, but the hound got to his feet and snarled at him, baring his teeth and threatening to charge. Hudson remained rigid; then he appeared to regain control of himself.

"Well, go on with your story," he derided.

Beth Raney's face had undergone a change from its sharp, agonized attentiveness, at Blake's final statement. Incredulity came to her, then a wild sort of hopefulness. She clasped her hands tightly and kept her gaze on Hudson, as if fascinated by his attitude.

"Yeah, it was him that fell over, the man in the checked shirt," Blake declared in a mildly querulous tone, as if it puzzled him, "I seen it, plain as day. I was goin' to come back to the foot of the ledge when I heard some one come crashin' down this side toward me. I just had time to hide in the swamp when he come past—the man in the black shirt. He rushed down to the path and round the edge of the ledge, and I started to foller him.

"But I didn't." Blake uttered this apologetically. "I didn't dare to mix in, folks—because—*I killed a man once.*"

CHAPTER XVI

HUDSON would have been flung backward over the ledge, when the hound leaped at him but for Lang's quick action. Hudson, at Blake's quavering confession of his reason for not interfering in the combat he had witnessed, took a step toward the old man, giving vent to a long, guttural cry of triumph.

His move brought instant results. The hound, unnoticed by the others, had crept closer to Hudson as his master talked, and in one ferocious leap covered the remaining distance between them, venting a deep, long-drawn howl as he snapped at Hudson's throat.

Hudson staggered back, fighting the dog off, slipped on a smooth bit of rock and went to his knees—rose and with hoarse cries of terror, continued his retreat. The dog gathered himself for another leap when Lang came to the rescue. He grasped the hound about the neck, put his whole weight upon his body and held him, snapping, snarling, slavering at the mouth and venting blood-curdling growls at Hudson.

Carlson and Holmes rushed to Lang's assistance, and the three men managed to restrain the dog. Carlson slipped off his leather belt and got it about Nero's neck at danger to his own arms, for the dog was snapping viciously and squirming for freedom. Hudson, livid with fear and anger, sought his place, with the tree-trunk at his back, leaning against it and breathing heavily. Carlson dragged the dog away, and Lang got a bit of the bark rope twisted about Nero's muzzle. They tied him to a tree.

"Shoot the beast!" panted Hudson. "That's what he needs!"

They paid no heed to him. Blake watched the whole struggle in grim silence, almost with satisfaction, it appeared, from his expression.

"Nero's a good dog," he remarked mildly. "He never goes to touch nobody but his enemies. He remembers—things. Once a man points a gun at him, or me, and he never forgets it."

"I wish I'd 'a' shot him, back there in your hiding-hole," raged Hudson.

"Yes, an' ye would—if the gun had been loaded," Blake reminded him, " 'Twa'n't your fault. Jest the opposite of what happened to me—the time I fooled with a gun. It *was* loaded—but I didn't know that. Oh, I served my time for it, a year in prison for manslaughter—and near thirty years in the wilderness alone. Ye see what I had on my mind, when I cleared out of Velas County last fall—and when I didn't mix into this fight?"

"Yes, I see what you had on your mind, all right," growled Hudson. "You had in mind that that was a good time to lay low until the other man run away—and then you had Lem Hudson where you wanted him."

"Let him finish, let him finish!" bristled Holmes. "Go on, Blake, and tell what ye saw, next."

BLAKE considered, giving a swift glance at Beth, who was still regarding Hudson with a look of mingled incredulity and quivering hope, tinged with an expression of dawning distrust.

"I didn't see everything that happened," Blake said. "I was afraid to stay. I started to get away from there, and I went mebbe a hundred rods, as fast as I could—and then I recollected somethin'. I recollected that the path was soft and muddy—and that I was leavin' footprints in it. So I stopped and hid myself again, in the swamp. After a time I come back this way. I wanted to cover up them foot-marks of mine. Because I remembered what circumstantial evidence could do—to a man."

He drew a shuddering sigh and bowed his head for a moment.

"Well, I was creepin' up the path on

hands and knees," he went on, "when I seen a man sneakin' down toward me. I didn't have time to get into the swamp—but he didn't see me. He was lookin'—back. He seemed as if he was afraid of somethin'—back there, where he come from. He didn't look at me, at all. And he climbed up on Pine Head again, without seein' me—and I didn't dare go any farther along that path—because I was afeard of what I'd see—at the end of it."

"You saw this man—how close?" broke in Beth in a sharp tone, going over close to Blake and half kneeling beside him.

He looked up into her face for a moment, and then put one bony hand on her arm.

"It wa'n't your father," he said slowly. "The man I saw wore a checked shirt—but it wa'n't your father, gal."

Beth gave a swift, bewildered glance about, at the faces of the others, finally resting her gaze upon Hudson.

He had resumed his old defiant attitude, but there was beginning to be in it something of desperation. Crouched against the blackened tree-trunk, his face so well hidden by his cap-visor that only his lower jaw was visible, he had crossed his arms upon his breast again—but this time with a difference.

His fingers had crawled beneath his armpits, and he was drawing the thin, worn khaki of his military jacket tightly about his shoulders. He swallowed, and the ripple of his throat showed how painful an effort it was. Beth started up, took a step toward him—then she flung out her hands in a gesture of horror.

"It was you!" she cried. "I know you, now! *Lem Hudson!* It was you! You killed my father! You are not Jim Hudson. You are—"

Her voice failed her, died in her throat with a moan, and she pitched forward. Lang reached her side in time to prevent her from falling prostrate on the gritty surface of the rock.

BETH'S collapse was but momentary. The shock of discovery and conviction was, really, a shock of tremendous, overpowering relief. When she revived, supported by Lang and Mrs. Eastman, Holmes and Carlson had manacled Hudson, and Carlson's help had been needful, for the man fought like a tiger, trying to fling himself upon the helpless Blake, cursing him with oaths that seemed to have been raked from the bottom of a madman's soul. In the struggle his cap had fallen off and his scarred face was revealed, convulsed in a frightful mask of desperation. Scar and mustache, several days' growth of beard, cropped hair and uniform still served to make it doubtful whether the resemblance he bore to Lem Hudson were real or only fancied. But Beth immediately reiterated her accusation.

"That is *Lem* Hudson!" she declared. "I have felt—I can't describe it—it was so strange, so terrible—but now I know!"

Back of them the dog Nero was venting muffled, whining rage. Blake, ashen-faced, his head trembling as if from palsy, voiced a final conviction before he toppled over on his litter, limp and senseless.

"The dog knowed ye!" he cried. "Nero knowed—because he was with me when ye chased me off'm Pine Head—with a gun."

Even after Blake's pitiful collapse Hudson continued his frantic efforts to get at him, and it was only when Carlson used his powerful strength in a neck-and-knee grip, half paralyzing the man's muscles, that he yielded and became more quiet.

Beth rose and faced him, with a gaze that he could not meet. He turned his head aside.

"Why did you do it?" she cried. "Why did you kill him?"

"Because I wanted you!" he answered hoarsely, and so fiercely that she recoiled from him. "Because I wanted you, and was goin' to offer Pine Head for you—and he had the mortgages. Jed Raney bought me out!

"I didn't go to kill him," he added, almost whimpering. "I wanted to get the mortgage papers away from him and tear 'em up. He had no right to buy me up! I fought with him, and he tumbled over."

Not even Holmes had the cruelty—or courage—to ask the question that loomed in all minds, for they knew, out of Hudson's own garbled tale, out of Blake's description of what he had seen—and from the story spoken by the very stones themselves, what Lem Hudson had done, in his desperation, after he had found Raney's body lying at the foot of the ledge. The silent stones knew, also, that Lem Hudson had regained, somehow, the cold-blooded nerve to change clothes with Jed Raney, to take his horse and flee, stopping only long enough to kick Lang's smoldering fire into flame, in further effort to cover up his crime.

CHAPTER XVII

LEM HUDSON, alias Jim Hudson, made a full confession later. He told his story boldly, proudly—how he had gone to Canada, made inquiry at the War Office, obtained his dead brother's effects, even to his discharge papers, and disguised by the scar—from burns he suffered in his desperate, incendiary scramble about the top of Pine Head—he returned to Sand River.

When he went to trial, after a long period of "observation as to sanity," alienists testified that, in their belief, the man was insane.

The question of his guilt on the charge of murder—the moral certainty being offset by the insanity element so far as the law was concerned—led the county attorney to move for his commitment to a State institution for the criminally insane—which meant, practically, confinement for life.

The legal question was whether Lemuel Hudson had been insane when he found Jed Raney, apparently lifeless, at the foot of Pine Head, after the fall, or whether Hudson had gone insane afterward. Certainly only a lunatic could have committed the horrible act of disfiguring his victim's face as Jed Raney's had been disfigured. And only a madman would have returned as Lem Hudson had, disguised as his own brother, with the insanely clever purpose of profiting by his crime.

His attempt to kill Lang at Blake's cave, his bold charge against Blake in the face of Blake's knowledge of what had actually occurred, were further suggestive of mental derangement.

There loomed another legal question. It looked as if the possession and ultimate disposition of Pine Head tract would be delayed by a hopeless tangle. Lang wrote and wired to the Forestry Commission, and waited uneasily for an answer which failed to come. But in the meantime another tangle was unsnarled. He and Beth arrived at a complete understanding, and they were as happy as two persons could be with the background of tragedy still shadowing them.

And then came the letter—it's delay explained by the forwarding mark—from the county jail, at Eagle, where it had lain for days.

Lang read it, sitting beside the bed where old Blake was convalescing, in the very room Lang had occupied after his race. Then he took it out on the piazza where Beth lay in the hammock, sunning herself, blanket-wrapped by Mrs. Eastman's capable hands.

"I think you should be able to receive some good news," Lang suggested as he exhibited the official frank of the Forestry Commission on the envelope—but she looked, instead, into his face.

"They have accepted your recommendations!" she cried.

"Yes. But it was *your* sketch that did the trick!" he exclaimed. "Why didn't you tell me you had sent them one, drawn on the spot? What a mess my own must have seemed to them!"

"It was pride that kept me from telling you" she confessed, with a droop of her eyes, touching his hand, "and, now, I suppose your pride is hurt!"

"Not a bit of it! I'm proud of you—my pupil and my—"

LIE was gently interrupted. Somehow mere words are often very unsatisfactory.

"What a terrible thing pride of opinion is!" murmured Beth, after a time. "I think, now, that I have gotten over that sort of thing. After you have shown me—the truth," she finished very soberly.

He detailed the good news to her.

"The Commission is going to take over Pine Head tract, including Sand Lake, to develop it as a State preserve, build a dam, conserve those wonderful pines, the water-power and—and who do you think is appointed resident engineer?"

"I know who ought to be!" she flashed jealously. "And if they have dared to appoint someone else!"

"Pride of opinion!" he grinned—and handed her, his commission.

"Good judgment confirmed by authority" she retorted. "Oh, I am so proud—of you!"

"Then I guess I'll accept the appointment."

THE END

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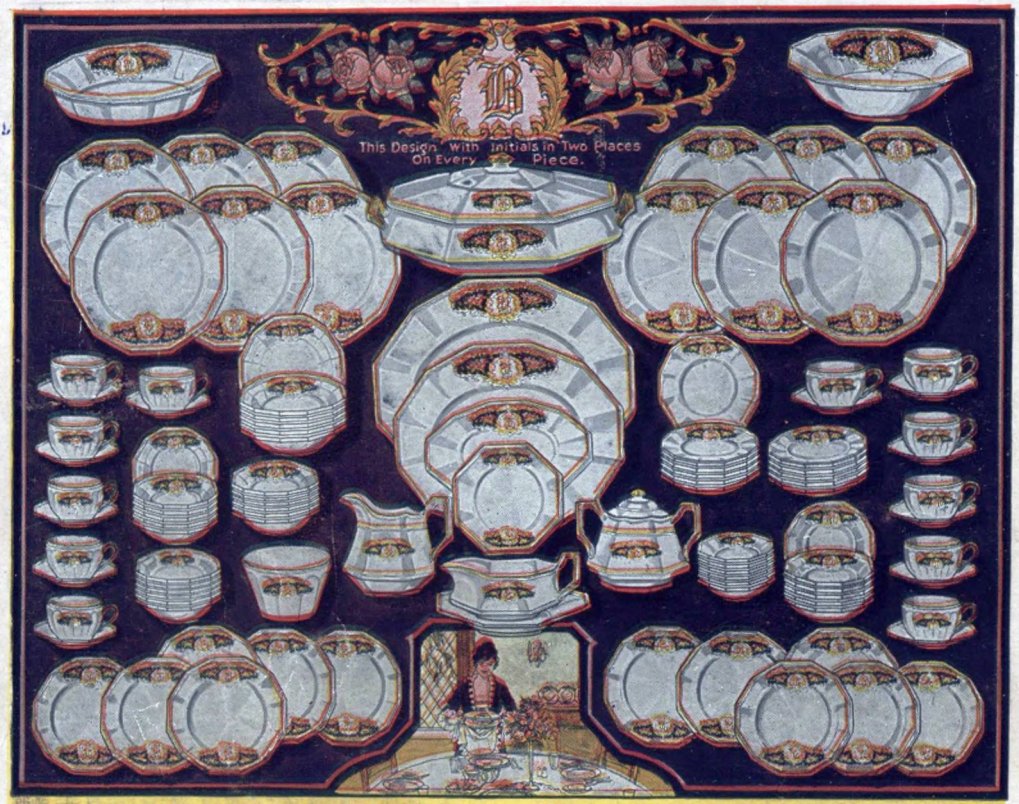

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