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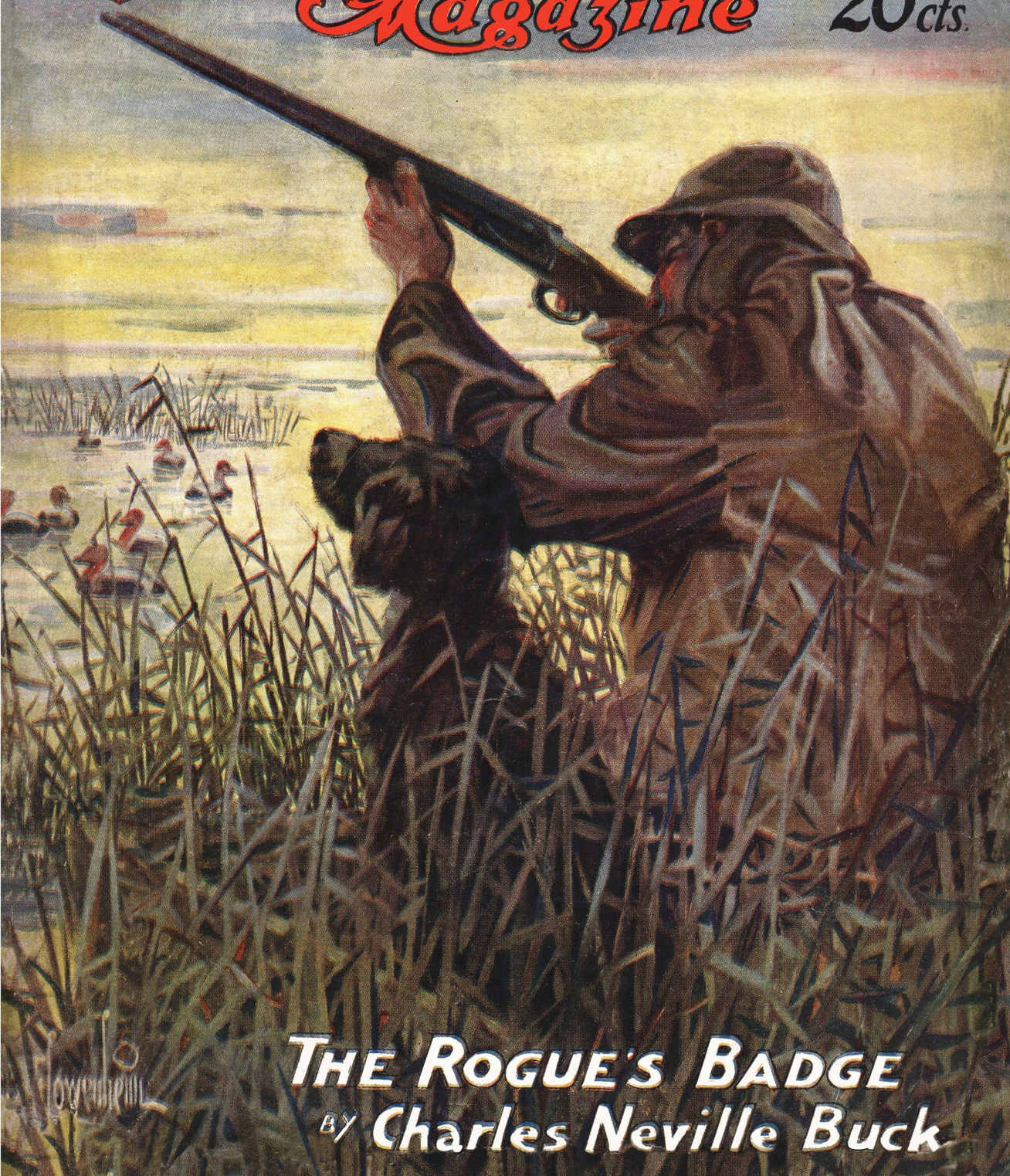
TWICE-A-MONTH

OCT. 20, 1923

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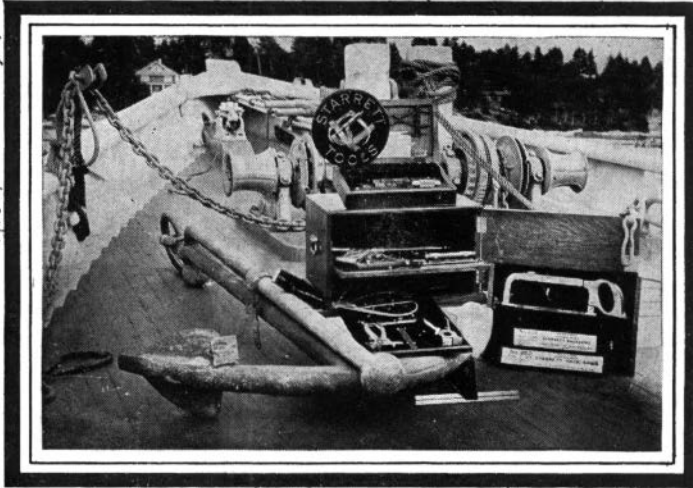
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**THE ROGUE'S BADGE**  
BY Charles Neville Buck

OCTOBER 20, 1923  
VOL. LXX  
No. 1

**THE POPULAR MAGAZINE** 20 Cents



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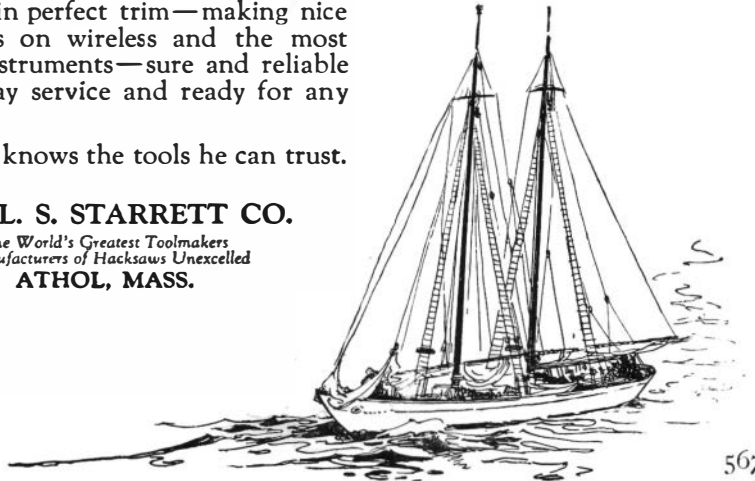
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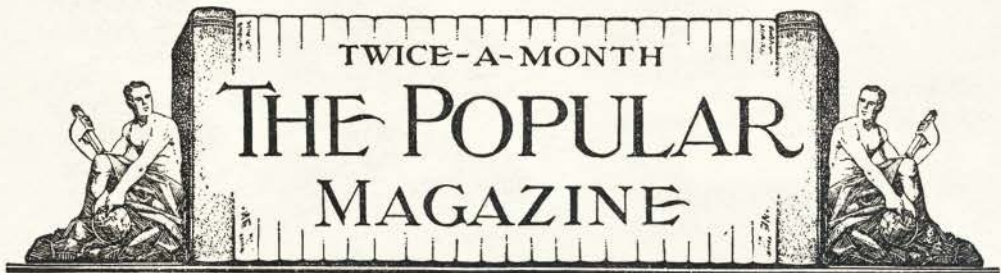
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# THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LXX.

OCTOBER 20, 1923.

No. 1



## The Rogue's Badge

By Charles Neville Buck

*Author of "Offside in Scrimmage," "The Dark Corners," Etc.*

In racing parlance, blinkers on a horse are called "the rogue's badge." They are the sign of a vicious temper that is likely to flare up at the sight of anything unfamiliar. Up above the blue-grass fields of Kentucky in the mountains of the Cumberland there dwells a race of men and women who also wear the rogue's badge. Their eyes are covered not by leather flaps but by ignorance. And to them the unfamiliar is as the red rag to the bull. Their tempers are as high as their courage. And they do not seek the law when they have a wrong to be righted. This is the story of a horse and a man, both born to the rogue's badge, each of whom lived down his sinister birthright and became great in his own field. It is the story, too, of that stern race of mountaineers that peoples the Kentucky highlands where romance, as Mr. Buck here proves, still dwells.

—THE EDITOR.

(A Complete Novel)

### CHAPTER I.

AS the light-colored and elderly negro who had been standing near the palings of the back stretch slipped his stop watch into his pocket and turned away, he was hardly conscious himself that he sighed or what submerged echo of melancholy made him sigh.

It was an April morning with an early

yet confident declaration of spring in the air which found voice in the palpitant full-throatedness of yellow-breasted larks and more practical confirmation in the tightening up of preliminary gallops to the earnestness of work-outs.

But the full-bodied negro whose hair was graying, sighed, and he did so because he was half conscious of Time's contrasts. He

was now a trainer on the down slope of his years and he could not entirely forget that when he too had been in his spring he had dominated moments which white men, and rich men, had coveted.

He had been a wisp of a black boy then with a gift of magic in his hands and head. Instead of standing on the ground and "clocking" preparatory gallops between sunrise and mid-morning he had worn silks in those times and had felt his heart leap with the quick excitement of back stretch and finish.

In a fashion he had also made history in those days, for though he had been born just at the end of slavery he had ridden the incomparable Ten Broeck in all his races against time. He had brought him romping victoriously home in that struggle which will remain unforgettable while blood horses are bred and raced—the four-mile heat in which the Harper stallion distanced Molly McCarthy backed by the strong pride of the West. Then not to have known the name of Billy Moseby would have been not to know the American turf, and the colored boy had tasted the savor of heady triumphs. Then—and it had been here on this same track at Churchill Downs—old Frank Harper had run about in a daze of exultation crying out in a piping shrillness: "Gentlemen, I run my horse from end to end! Yes, sirs, I run him from end to end and that boy's the best in the country!"

This morning, with the Derby still six weeks distant, a hundred or more railbirds had gathered in the early chill of morning to watch the work-outs of possible contenders, and to many of them the man who in other years had piloted the mighty son of Phaëthon was a figure of forgotten importance. In this place just now two purposes were being served: the effort to keep training secrets and the counter-effort to penetrate them.

Despite their laconic and almost stolid seeming these onlookers were touched with passion—the passion to garner advance information what would profit them hereafter. They sought to build against the day, a few weeks hence, when the "iron men," as they called the pari mutuels in the betting inclosure, should pay dividends on sound racing judgment.

And contrariwise the trainers who came from the stables in the wake of gingerly dancing colts and fillies sought to keep

"bottled up" what answers their charges might give to questions of speed and stamina, put to them in categorical terms of test. In consequence they made large and casual pretense that this morning nothing was to be expected except joint limberings and pipe openers. That same pretense characterized every other morning and deceived no one.

"I guess that about concludes the performance, eh, Billy?" inquired a slender young man whose wad of copy paper proclaimed him a sporting reporter. "I'm not taking back much news to town but I see you're parking the clock—and when you do that I can usually go home feeling that there's nothing more to wait for."

The colored man nodded. "There ain't been much worth gettin' up early to watch this mornin'," he acceded, "and now it's gettin' on to be late. I reckon they're callin' it a day."

They turned together toward the gate, then the colored man halted as suddenly as though he had encountered a rattlesnake in his path and his eyes kindled into such expectant interest that the sporting writer followed their gaze. He saw two horses coming, freshly saddled, onto the track with boys crouching over their withers, and something in the negro's absorption carried a sense of significance for their appearance.

The crowd had dwindled now from several scores to a corporal's guard of track regulars. The sun was high and the morning's work presumably over, but the old-time jockey's hand felt again for his stop watch.

"Not quite done yet, after all, Billy," murmured the newspaper man. "Colonel Parrish is slipping his Derby starter out on the track after most of the railbirds have flown home. Now he's going to set him down for a stiff breezing or I miss my guess."

But the colored man said nothing. He was not looking at Chimney Swift, the handsome blood bay which was nominated to carry the Parrish colors in the mightily coveted Kentucky Derby. His eyes instead dwelt fixedly on the brown young stallion that danced delicately along at his side. After a moment he prompted in a low voice: "Come along, sir. Let's you an' me sa'nter off by ourselves. I've got a hunch that this ain't goin' to be no Derby work-out after all."

The reporter lifted his brows in surprise but put no question until they had passed beyond earshot of the little group that still lingered about the back stretch. Then he turned inquiringly: "What do you mean—not Derby work?" he demanded. "That's the Parrish starter and that's 'Snip' Button, the Parrish jockey, with a leg-up, isn't it?"

The colored man nodded but offered no reply, while his eyes dwelt with the shrewd light of interest on the brown horse.

"What's the brown?" demanded the writer. "Some old sprinter they're sending along as pacemaker, I suppose, but I don't recognize him."

"No, sir, neither do I. That's what's set me to studyin'."

"Studying? I don't get you, yet."

The colored man's voice took on a vibrance of enthusiasm.

"Listen to me, Mr. Burtley," he said speaking rapidly. "I ain't never seen that brown stud hoss before—but I'm a right old hand at this game. There's some sires that just naturally print their names an' trade-marks on their get. Sometimes it's the way a colt carries his ears—sometimes it's the fashion he handles hisself. But that colt comes straight down the line from old Phaëthon hisself or I'm badly fooled. Just cast your eye over him, sir. You're lookin' at a hoss!"

The two colts were standing side by side now and their boys were leaning forward as Parrish instructed them in a low voice.

"The Derby starter's what everybody's watchin'," went on Billy Moseby sagely. "That's the only way Colonel Parrish would ever have any chance at all to slip the other fellow out onto the track without every clock snappin' on him—an' like as not this is his first work-out off the farm. Did you ever see a purtier thing than that brown baby? Of course he ain't no old sprinter with a fast quarter left in him. He's a two year old."

Burtley laughed his skepticism.

"I usually trail along with you, Billy, when you lead the way," he observed. "But look at that growth: look at the bone development: look at the height of the horse, man! Why, he stands sixteen hands if he's an inch. That's no baby. He's mature—three years at least!"

The colored man shook his head stubbornly and his words were more convincing than his gesture.

"I just told you I never saw that colt before," he said shortly. "An' there ain't no three year olds racin' that I ain't seen."

The blood bay and the brown turned and walked away, soon to break into a slow jog; then into an easy canter, but only two pairs of eyes dwelt with the brown, ridden by an unknown stableboy. Those were the eyes of the white reporter and the negro trainer. The rest followed Chimney Swift and the well-known jockey who rode him.

"See that!" ejaculated Moseby excitedly, when, across the track, they turned into the stretch. "That boy on the brown pulled back an' took the rail. They don't take a pacemaker to the rail and give the speed merchant outside, do they? Now they'll break in front of the stand."

As he spoke the bay colt, entered for the Kentucky and Latonia Derbies and for other rich stakes, plunged from his canter into the catapulting fury of his racing stride, and stop watches clicked in ragged unevenness.

The timers were caught napping since the two colts had already passed the pole from which a Derby worker might have been expected to start his run.

One watch had not yet clicked and that was Billy Moseby's, but two fifths of a second later it started, too, for the brown, left far behind by the bay's explosive get-away, had burst from his sedate gallop into an eruptive swirl of speed and had set sail for the leader.

"They don't usually break with a pace-maker layin' behind the hoss he's workin' with," observed the colored man dryly. "An' I'll make you another bet. I'm the only man here excusin' Colonel Parrish hisself that caught the time on the brown when he got away. That boy broke slow with him a' purpose to fool the clocks!"

Tom Burtley was bending forward. Toward the first turn came the fleetly flying pair, the bay and the brown, and over their shoulders crouched the boys, hand riding, giving both mounts every ounce of support that lay in their educated powers.

"The Derby colt ain't bein' held under wraps," almost whispered Moseby. "He's doin' the best he knows how—an'—white man, look a' thar! He's goin' back to the brown a'ready!"

"They're stepping along right briskly," breathed the reporter.

"They're steppin' like a house afire!" the colored man snorted. "My watch says the

brown baby did that eighth under twelve flat, an' he's just a-breezin' along with his head in the boy's lap."

Around the turn into the back stretch came the pair racing now like a yoked team, shoulder to shoulder, neck to neck and muzzle to muzzle. The brown two year old, for all his youth and coltish greenness was the bigger horse and his great stride ate distance in easy but mighty bites, while the handicap horse that sought to make the pace gave of his best and found himself needing it all.

As they came thundering down the straightaway the stable jockey whirled up his bat—let it fall sharply once, twice, on the flanks of the Derby candidate, until he drew the bay head its own length to the front, but in a few strides a bronze muzzle emerged from that eclipse, then a brown throat, a brown neck and a half length of brown barrel. It was a hammer-and-tongs try-out of speed and as they swept along the brown crept decisively out from behind his straining screen of blood bay until open daylight showed between the two and the unknown youngster flashed by, with his head pulled sidewise, still fighting for more run.

"They went three furlongs," announced Moseby crisply, "and the clockers had their watches sprung on the wrong hoss."

"What was the time?" demanded Burtley. "I didn't have my watch out. I relied on you."

The colored trainer met the inquiring eyes politely but he shook his head.

"I'm mighty sorry, sir," he said apologetically. "But I ain't a-goin' to tell you the time."

"Not going to tell me? Why?"

Billy Moseby was gazing with something like adoration at the steaming, sweating bodies of the two colts as they came daintily back after being pulled down and turned. It was the tribute of a judgment seasoned and ripened by many years, but while he looked at both animals he thought of only one.

"I ain't goin' to tell you the time them three eighths was working in," he answered steadily, "because if you print it every taut in town'll know as much about that colt as what his own barn knows—an' his barn slipped him out here on the quiet a-purpose to keep its secret. Let 'em do it, white man, let 'em do it."

"But——" began the news hunter indignantly, and the negro raised a protesting hand.

"Wait just a minute before you get mad," he urged. "I know it's your business to get news, an' gen'rally I'm glad to help you, but we've seed a thing this mornin' that a man don't see often in a lifetime. We've seed a world beater come out on a race track for the first time in his life. I've watched Sysonby run an' Colin an' all the rest, an' I rode old Ten Broeck, myself—but right there stands a hoss that don't need to take the mud from nairy one of 'em, or my name ain't Billy Moseby. Thar stands as good a colt as ever looked through a bridle. His first time out, unless he goes wrong, he'll spread-eagle any two-year-old field he meets—an' his first time out, every hoss has the right to speak for hisself."

"You mean that if we tip the talent they'll go plunging on him—and make a short price with the iron men?"

The negro nodded. "Thar won't be but just one time that that colt can face the flag from under cover—with a surprise to spring. Let him spring it. Let everybody's eyes pop outen their heads, just once. Let his own home folks keep their secret. You've done seed a hoss make time look foolish—an' you forgot to clock him!"

Tommy Burtley laughed at the heat of the other's ardor.

"All right, old-timer," he agreed. "That's a sporting view to take and I won't print anything. Let Colonel Parrish keep his horse dark—but for my own private information——"

"Just for yourself," assented Moseby, readily enough, "he stepped them three furlongs in thirty-five flat on a dull track—but he didn't never have to extend hisself an' he mighty nigh pulled the boy's arms out when he tried to ease him up. Moreover I reckon maybe you didn't notice when they came out that he's still shod with heavy irons—not racin' plates." After a moment the older man added musingly. "I wonder now who that stableboy is? Of course they didn't want to put the jock up because that would have been a give-away right off—an' yet that boy that breezed him will bear watchin'."

"Maybe," smiled Burtley. "We've made a double-barreled discovery: a new Sysonby and a new Tod Sloan—or Billy Moseby."

They turned and no word was said as



to their destination, because no word was needful. Away from the track and through the whitewashed village of stables their steps carried them both to the barn where Parrish stood on the tanbark walkway contemplatively watching the rubbing down of his two steaming charges.

The long low barns that housed these satin-coated aristocrats of horsedom lay under the spring sun, teeming with the activities of the track's forenoon. Uproarious laughter and bantering shouts of negro stable hands sounded loose and rich along the soft roads that ran between them.

Around and around the buildings themselves and in the hoof-trodden spaces beyond walked black and white boys leading blanketed charges and along the rails hung exercise saddles and gear freshly soaped and polished. Everywhere were stable mascots; goats, cats and even Shetland ponies, indispensable to those temperamental creatures that become restless "stall walkers" unless they be so quaintly companioned.

Here, hovered over by the fickleness of chance, were colts whose names would adorn the stud book of the future and blood brothers who would prove themselves as paltry of value as the bridles they looked through or the saddles they wore.

At Colonel Parrish's barn stood the bay colt and the brown with rubbers kneading and massaging their great sinews and burnishing their coats. They submitted to these attentions with nervous and seemingly conscious pride, and Parrish, who chewed on an unlighted cigar, eyed them with contentment.

The lad who had been in the saddle on the brown colt stood now at his head holding the bit rings and quieting his nervous excitement with low, incoherent words as a negro sponged the steaming coat and scraped him down from forelock to fetlock. Snip Button, the stable jockey, stood a bit apart as though bored by observing tasks so savoring of the menial. His legs, in their puttees, were match thin and his body wisplike with its fight against the encroachments of weight. He looked, as he lounged languidly in the offing, like a miniature of an old man, with sharp, peaked features, sophisticated out of keeping with his youth and with an unprepossessing cunning in his eyes.

But the other boy who held the brown muzzle and whispered low words to the for-

ward-tilted brown ears was not yet spoiled by a public life. He, too, was short and slim; not only because he was not yet fully grown but also because he carried with him the shame of being a runt, and his eyes were deep with a somberness which seemed to brood over his meagerness of stature.

As two shadows fell across the sunlit walkway Colonel Parrish turned slowly and when his eyes encountered Burtley and Billy Moseby they did not light to welcome.

"What's the colt, colonel?" inquired the newspaper man affably and the reply came courteously but without enthusiasm.

"Fleetwing, by Electron out of Blue Gown—a youngster."

"We saw him work—and we timed him," observed Burtley.

Parrish shifted his unlighted cigar from one side of his mouth to the other. His brows furrowed into a frown and his steady gray eyes engaged those of the reporter.

"I'm sorry to hear it, sir," was his brief comment. "I was trying to keep him under cover."

"I'm not going to include that work-out in any report at present, colonel," reassured the writer. "You've got a speed prodigy there, from the looks of things, and until the form sheet publishes the official dope on him it's your own affair. The kid there handled him nicely, too."

The frown cleared on the owner's face and he nodded, while the boy at the brown colt's head flushed brick red at the compliment, though he only stared harder at the velvet nose.

"Ye-es," drawled Parrish slowly, "I told him so. That's Tolliver Cornett. Tolliver, this is Mr. Burtley of the *Tribune*—and Billy Moseby. Billy was a premier jockey in his day."

The turfman laughed and looked at his cigar. "Billy," he added reminiscently to the negro, "these kids don't know anything about turf history. I doubt if they ever heard of how we bred 'em and raced 'em in those days when we asked 'em to go a route; when we called on a horse to pick up his freight and carry it the best two out of three heats—at three and four miles a heat!"

The white jockey spat through his teeth and shrugged.

"They runs them six-day races on bikes now," he volunteered. "I ain't much on ancient history myself. I likes speed."

But the boy holding the brown colt turned his head with a birdlike quickness. His dark face lighted and his flush grew deeper.

"Billy Moseby, did ye say?" he demanded, and in his excitement he spoke with the unmistakable dialect of the Cumberland hills, where thoroughbred horses are as unknown as zebras. "Ye don't mean the same Billy Moseby that rode Ten Broeck back yonder in 1878 when he beat Molly McCarthy?"

"One of them does know something after all," laughed Parrish with vast amusement. "Here's an exercise boy that goes in for the traditions of the turf. Maybe he won't always be an exercise boy."

The jockey wheeled with an air of insupportable boredom and went away with the jaunty impudence of a cock sparrow.

## CHAPTER II.

The sun had gone down clear and the moon was throwing blue shadow masses about acres of low barns that stood out bone white in their new paint. It was a city of horses and the servants of horses, for long ago the masters and Brahmans of the sport had gone back from the race track to town. It was not entirely a sleeping city, for here and there showed the yellow spot of a lighted window, and from here and there came the twang of a banjo and the muffled shouts of black boys exhorting strange deities over the ritual of the "galloping dominoes."

Here and there too was the resounding thud of hoof plates lashed irritably out against the boarded walls of box stalls or the more restful sound of munching over feed boxes, yet above these casual sounds brooded a larger silence in the picket-fenced inclosure of the horses' town.

In front of the stall where Fleetwing, by Electron out of Blue Gown, stood on his carpeting of fresh straw, Tolliver Cornett sat on a bale of feed with his feet hanging and his eyes staring ahead of him. In that spectral light and shadow he made a small and a somewhat wistful figure, with a lawless lock falling dark over his thin face in which the eyes seemed inordinately large and owlish. He was gazing toward the city whose electric ghost of glare hung in the sky to the north—but he was as much alone as if he had been sitting on a mountaintop. With the other exercise boys, white and

black, who were finding varied companionships here and there he had established no commerce and no fellowship.

Tolliver was immersed deep in reflection and in wonder. This was the first real race track he had ever seen and never yet had he seen it when crowds jostled in its stands and the judges stood in the kiosk by the finish line. Never, indeed, until a little while ago, had he seen this flat world of "down below" whose inhabitants his own people of the illiterate mountains called "furriners."

A bewildering new life was unrolling before the gaze of Tolliver Cornett, and yet his bewilderment never admitted itself to any inquiring eye, except in that taciturnity which sometimes seemed to wrap him in sullenness.

The months there on a Bluegrass farm where he had accidentally revealed a gift for gentling fractious colts had seemed unreal enough and they had led on to this which seemed so much stranger.

Now Tolliver sat alone seeking to digest the wonderment which had come too fast for assimilation in its due course.

Back there on the stock farm near Lexington he had been an interested waif standing around the busy exercise track, the paddocks with their whitewashed fences and the ample barns. There he had first seen this two-year-old colt and, by a miracle which he could not quite explain, he had found himself annexed to the stable force.

"I just drapped there," he mused, "and straightway took root there."

It was this brown colt, magnificently bred and looked to with high expectancy from his foaling that had brought it all about, for the youngster had at first demonstrated a temper which had been construed into ruinous viciousness. His fine ears had lain menacingly back at human approach and his hoofs had whipped out disconcertingly. His strong young teeth had been bared—and he stood haltered between double reins in his stall into which feeders and rubbers ventured timidly. Sometimes, when unwatched, stable hands sought to mask that timidity with raucous shouts and deprecations which might have impressed a mule but which only enraged the high-strung descendant of Phaëthon.

Tolliver, who had no fear of horses, had slipped one day without permission into the stall when the colt was unhaltered, and

shouts of warning had followed him. It had been expected that he would be reduced, under the thrusting forefeet of the young stallion, into a disorder of broken bones before rescue could reach him and for a moment of tenseness the outcry fell to breathless silence. But the boy had gone in talking in a low voice and the brown colt with its back-laid ears, distended nostrils and blazing eyes had hesitated, regarding him dubiously as if in amazement for his audacity.

Five minutes later Tolliver had bridled the animal and led him out converted to an incredible docility. How he had done it no one quite knew but neither did any one quite care. A colt whose bright destiny had been threatened by the curse of the outlaw's temper had made a friend and become momentarily at least amenable. Perhaps he was redeemed. That was what counted and much as other oversensitized horses carried in their retinue such mascots as goats and dogs, this youngster from the Parrish farm had brought along his human friend—a mountain lad transplanted in the lowlands. It was not a particularly grandiose connection with the turf—to be a human accessory carried along to mollify the temper of a perverse horse, but Tolliver had seized upon it as an opportunity to see that part of the world which the colt might aspire to conquer.

Back there on the farm Tolliver had been the first to mount and exercise him, but today for the first time in his young life the brown had trodden a race course and for the first time in *his*, Tolliver Cornett had ridden on one. He sat here now mulling over these adventures.

Reared as he had been among mountains that shut a man in between ragged heights and forests that threw a mantle of solitude around a man's life, young Tolliver Cornett had not yet wholly accustomed himself to the flatness and outspokenness of a lowland world. Now a pang of nostalgia rose tidelike in his heart and made him deeply lonely for want of a lonelier place. That same moon was shining on the trickling waters of Troublesome at home to-night and the brown hills were beginning to breathe of spring. Soon the log rafts would come down swollen rivers and the laurel would break to bloom.

Aroused from these thoughts the boy raised his head. Along the moon-drenched

roadway just beyond the shadow came a figure that walked with that silent-footed tread which until recently he had supposed common to all men but which now he knew was the identifying mark of the mountaineer and the woodsman.

The figure halted, looking about in evident perplexity and seeming to count the buildings along the way. Then Tolliver recognized it and slipping down from the bale of feed he stepped out of the blue shadow and stood also in the moonlight.

"Cal," he accosted in that low voice which was the habit of his people, "Cal, are ye a-seekin' me?"

The man in the road wheeled suddenly at the sound, then nodded and came forward.

"I couldn't skeercely discern ye, setting there in the shadder," he explained. "They told me ye were in one of these here hugous big stable barns."

"Was ye seekin' to have speech with me, Cal?"

It would have sounded strange to any chance listener, to hear these two talking the rude dialect of the remote Cumberlands in a spot so dedicated to the sophistications of the turf. It might have seemed strange too to hear a seventeen-year-old boy addressing a middle-aged uncle by his given name—but these two were hillsmen and both had relapsed into the speech and the manner of their blood.

"I reckon," ventured the man irascibly, "thar ain't no patch of hills nor no woodses nigh hereabouts, where we-uns can go an' talk by ourselves, be there? I'm nigh sufficated with this here dead air in these here flat places. It p'int-blank gives me the all-overs."

The boy shook his head, but he led the way across the moon-bathed infield and up into the wide emptiness of the grand stand. There alone amid thousands of unoccupied chairs the two solitary figures ensconced themselves and looked away from the town. From that point of vantage could be seen a line of low round-shouldered hills to the south which, by free play of imagination, might be considered little brothers of mountains.

"I don't skeercely fathom my own aim in farin' down here to counsel with ye, Tolly," began Cal Deering in a hard voice. "There ain't no master aid ye can give. Ye was always a kinderly puny boy an' this business calls for a survigrous man person."

The boy met the scowl of his elder kinsman and engaged it with unflinching levelness.

"I ain't never giv' more'n half the road to no man yet," he responded evenly. "I ain't never took nothin' offen nobody, if that's what ye means, Cal."

The uncle laughed shortly.

"I wasn't aimin' to belittle ye, Tolly," he made half apology, "an' after all I reckon ye're full stout enough to handle a rifle gun—if only ye hadn't been fotched up to the idee of wagin' battles in co'te. Co'te, hell!"

The speaker spat contemptuously, and added, "A man's p'intedly got to fight the devil with fire—not with law books."

Tolliver Cornett let his glance stray to the hills.

"I reckon I knows what ye're drivin' at, Cal," he said quietly. "It's my pap ye're faultin' and censurin' because he aims to penitenshery Malone an' Cropper. Well, he's the prosecutor of the high co'te, ain't he?"

"If he enjoyed as much chance to succeed as snow does of layin' on the ground in hell," observed Cal witheringly, "I wouldn't censure him none—but he don't. Them men owns the co'tehouse betwixt 'em an' such as contraries 'em—don't gen'rally live overlong."

He broke off and sat with smoldering eyes, then he began exasperatedly again:

"Ye knows that what I s'ays is gospel true, Tolly. Your pap knows it, too, albeit he's too bull-necked to act heedful. There's some sev'ral men done contraried Malone an' Cropper afore now, an' is airy one of 'em alive to-day? Jesse Tavish was found layin' in the creek bed one sunup, wasn't he? An' 'Red' MacVey was haled to the door of his house in the nighttime an' drapped down an' died there, didn't he? But ye knows them things as well as me. An' yet your pap aims to go into the co'tehouse an' have the owners of the place convicted. He's plum fittified, Tolly, an' if there's anybody can turn him aside betimes it'll be a God's blessin'."

The boy rose from his seat and stood for a few minutes rigid and tense. His slight stature seemed shrunken to even smaller and less heroic proportions than the ordinary, but his dark eyes were ember bright and at length he turned, facing his visitor and speaking in a fiercely low voice:

"Them's the sort of doin's my pap aims to put an end to for all time, Cal. He ain't goin' to suffer it no longer that the hills of old Kaintuck shall lay under the curse of feud fightin' an' shots from the bresh. He ain't goin' to suffer it no longer that the best folks on earth stands disgusted afore all the balance of mankind. God A'mighty knows Cropper an' Malone needs killin' right bad—but it's got to be on the gallows so all men can see why they hangs an' so's they can be a sample to the world."

The boy broke off embarrassed by so long a speech but when no reply came to his declarations he went on again doggedly: "There's just one man in the mountains that's got the sense to see that an' that's got the heart an' cravin' to do his duty. That man's my pap."

"Does ye reckon, Tolly," demanded the man wrathfully, "if your pap had done campaigned afore the people on sichlike a fool platform as that, he'd ever have got elected prosecutor of the co'te? Does ye reckon prudent-thoughted men would have chanced death that a way by displeasurin' Malone an' Cropper?"

"No, I don't hardly reckon they would, Cal," replied the boy curtly. "I don't skeercely reckon you an' your like would of durst do any such upstandin' thing—an' like as not that's why my pap didn't tell ye aforehand. Malone an' Cropper ain't never stood up to no man yet in fair fight—but they've done hired their enemies murdered—an' the time's done come to hang 'em. Now my pap's comin' out in the open daylight an' I reckon there'll be a lavish of right-thinkin' men to foller in his lead. It takes a survigrous man to lead other men, Cal, an' my pap's that cut of a mortal."

"Right soon," observed the other, "he's liable not to be no manner of mortal at all."

A cutting scorn came into the boy's voice and gave impetus to his speech:

"I reckon ye ain't gittin' so bodaciously worked up jest outen love for my pap, Cal. I reckon there's somethin' else that hits closer home to ye then the risk he's runnin', ain't there?"

The man bit from a twist of tobacco and spat.

"Your pap," he admitted, without a trace of embarrassment, "aims to have me take the stand an' testify against 'em. If I does

that I can't go on livin' at home. I'd have to leave the mountains."

Tolliver laughed shortly.

"I lowed there was something else, Cal. So ye fared clear down here to beseech me to dissuade my pap? Waal, the devil himself couldn't dissuade him, Cal—an' even if I had more power than the divil I wouldn't raise no finger to turn him aside."

"If he goes for'ard with this fool pro-  
ject," warned Deering earnestly, "without takin' warnin' afore it's too late, come corn-drappin' time next year ye won't have no pap, Tolly. He'll be dead an' rottin' along with all the balance that got too feisty."

The boy shook his head.

"No, he won't be dead, Cal," he asserted confidently. "He's got the Lord A'mighty aidin' an' abettin' him an' I reckon that's enough." He drew a long breath. "But yet," he added in a lower tone, "even if he plumb knowed that come next corn drappin' he'd be dead for it, pap wouldn't forgo what he's undertook, nor I wouldn't seek to hinder him, neither."

Deering, whose sister was this boy's mother, laughed unpleasantly.

"Hit's plumb easy for a banty rooster to crow brave an' loud when he's a far distance off from the roosters he is crowin' at," he commented. "I reckon down here in the settlements Malone nor Cropper can't handily get at ye, Tolly. Ye can afford to talk briggity."

In the moonlight the brick-red flush of rage that flooded the boy's lean face went unseen, but in his voice sounded the tremor of hard-held fury.

"That's a lie, Cal Deering," he announced, "an' albeit ye're my own flesh an' blood I tells ye so to your face. I ain't so far away from home that I can't go back there—an' if so be my pap don't live to finish his job, God A'mighty knows I aims to fare back an' finish it for him—but I won't do it with no rifle gun from the laurel. I'll do it by hangin', just the same as he started out to do."

### CHAPTER III.

Early the next morning, when Colonel Parrish stepped out of his car before the long barn where his string was stabled, he read in the downcast face of John Powers, his trainer, that bad news of some sort awaited him.

"The Electron colt's coughing," announced Powers without preamble. "And he's off his feed."

"Have you had Springer in?" demanded Parrish, and the trainer shook his head.

"I've sent for him, of course," was the answer, "but he hasn't come." He gave a short, uncomfortable laugh and added, "Springer has more work on his hands this morning than three vets can handle. Horses are coughing all up and down the line. Meanwhile I've been doing what I could."

Colonel Parrish scowled.

"A cough epidemic going round," he said, "would put a nasty crimp into our outlook for the season. If we have to ship them all back to the farm now our training goes to pot. There isn't enough time before opening day."

The trainer nodded and cursed dismally in undertones.

"At least," he said, "we can find out something now. There comes Springer."

The veterinary was a stocky man who looked as though he had been lifted out of an English sporting print. He was gray and ruddy, with mutton-chop sideburns, and he came puffing up with his hand bag to inquire briskly, "Which stall?"

The brown colt was lying dejectedly on his bedding of straw and his great-muscled frame had a languid inertness which it was hard to reconcile with the rippling power and speed of twenty-four hours ago.

"Hullo, what's this?" exclaimed the veterinary as he stooped beneath the stall bar and saw a small, dispirited human figure rise from a seated posture on an overturned bucket in one corner; a human figure whose face was drawn into a mask of semitragic anxiety.

"He ain't goin' to die, is he?" demanded the boy fiercely, and while the veterinary explained that as yet he had made no diagnosis, John Powers turned to his employer.

"The Cornett kid heard him coughing late in the night," he said, "and came to wake me up. He's been sitting in there with him ever since holding the steam buckets under his nose and nursing him like a baby. I can't get him to leave for breakfast."

"Come on out, son," ordered Parrish in a kindly voice. "I guess we don't have to mourn over him yet. It's bad enough if he's got to break training and go back to the pasture, but that needn't keep you from eating."

"I ain't hankerin' for vittles," declared a woebegone voice. "I reckon they'd kind-erly stick in my throat."

Colonel Parrish clapped his hand on the thin shoulder.

"Nonsense, son, you don't have to take it so to heart," he reassured, though his own heart was heavy. "If the colt's going to be badly off we'll need you later on and you won't be much good on an empty stomach. Beat it now and when you come back we'll know more."

As, unwillingly and laggingly, the boy took himself away, Parrish stood looking after him. Here was an interesting human equation and one new to his experience. He himself had more than once sat all night long with a sick thoroughbred but he had bred and reared these animals long enough to know how perishable they are and had armed himself with a requisite philosophy. Here in this stall was a colt that had seemed to hold out to him an extraordinary richness of promise, such richness as would compensate for the many disappointments that came in the sequence of racing experience. Now perhaps that prospect of sending to the races another great performer was about to be blighted before the brown had ever been saddled under colors or faced the flag. If so it was only such a misfortune as he had met before and would probably meet again, but this boy had no monetary interest to be hurt, no pride of ownership to flinch, no memories of past exultation to fire him or past defeats to be compensated for. He had never even seen an actual horse race run.

Yet Tolliver would not willingly leave the stall, even for food—and after all, except for the boy's extraordinary influence with horses this colt might yet have been the savage young creature in revolt, whose stall no one could enter without bodily danger.

The colonel stood still pondering the vicissitudes of the game when, a half hour later, Tolliver reappeared, and in answer to the questioning eyes he said amiably, "Well, son, the colt doesn't seem to be in a very bad way—though it's disheartening enough, at that. We've got to ship him back to the farm."

"Ain't he goin' to race?" The question was almost barked out. "Ain't he goin' to show 'em what he can do?"

Parrish smiled ruefully and shook a dubious head.

"It doesn't look now as if he'd go to the races this spring—and it's a shame."

"It's plumb awful," echoed Tolliver tragically.

"Come over here, son," ordered the colonel, and when he had led the way to the end of the barn he lighted a cigar and studied the boy with interested eyes.

"Now the situation is this," he began, rather wondering why he should feel impelled to talk confidentially with a stable helper, yet feeling that, somehow, this lad could not be dismissed as only that. "It seems the most prudent thing to ship the Electron colt back home and condition him there. He's too good a prospect to take chances with. Powers will look after the rest of the string here, unless others get this cough too. Meanwhile you and I will give the colt such work as we can at home."

"I wouldn't skeerely want to tarry here—if he went away," came the immediate response. "I'd keep frettin' about him."

The owner shook an amused head.

"Perhaps he can be galloped again soon. He may still be ready for some of his spring engagements—but I doubt it. A colt can't face the barrier with only farm work—and I'd begun to believe the two-year-old prizes were his for the taking."

"I reckon he's the greatest hoss in the world," came the absurdly solemn assertion, and the owner smilingly shook his head.

"No, he's not that by a jugful, but he looks mighty good—or did before this cough. If he proves to have stamina as well as foot, there's no telling—" Suddenly the owner broke off and eyed the boy curiously. "But why are you so interested, Tolliver?"

"That colt," said the exercise boy slowly, "is just about the best friend I've got—an' the onliest one this side of the Kaintuck ridges."

"Is it only that colt you're fond of—or is it horses in general, Tolliver?"

"It's all hosses right smart—but it's him most."

The breeder puffed meditatively on his cigar for an interval of silence—a silence at last broken by the boy.

"I was just a-studyin' about somethin', colonel," he stammered shyly. "I was just wonderin' if some day, when I knows a lavish more'n I knows now—I might ride Fleetwing in a race?"

"Do you want to be a jockey, son?"

The boy's eyes gleamed but the enthusiasm of his thoughts came through a clogged and sluggish channel of speech.

"I'd plumb relish to ride in a real race," he announced.

"Have you been hearing stories of jockeys that make as much in a year as a bank president?"

Tolliver stiffened a little as though cold water had been flung into his face.

"I wasn't studyin' about the money," he made slow asseveration. "I don't know much nor care master much about money, nohow. Up there where I was raised up at, folks is most all poor an' nobody ain't ashamed of it."

A sudden shyness strangled his speech and silence came over him.

"Yesterday, Tolliver," interpolated Colonel Parrish thoughtfully, "when I told you who Billy Moseby was, you spoke of the Ten Broeck-Molly McCarthy race. That was run a long time before your day. How did you happen to know about it?"

Again the boy shuffled his feet uneasily.

"I read all about it in a book."

"What started you reading about such things?"

"I don't know as I can tell ye that. I just can't help readin' every word I comes across about race horses. It seems wondrouslike how all the race horses in the world come straight down from the Godolphin Arabian an' the Darley Arabian."

Once more the mountain boy broke off, smitten with self-consciousness for his own loquacity, and the man encouragingly prompted him. "Yes, it is a fascinating study. What were you going to say?"

"An' now," went on Tolliver Cornett, "the first daddy an' foreparent of all the thoroughbreds pulled a wagon round the streets of Paris, France, across the sea, afore they fetched him to England."

Colonel Parrish lifted his brows. Here was a fanatic for tradition and with a few well-directed questions he discovered a surprising fund of turf knowledge in a youth who bore the outward seeming of almost squalid ignorance.

"So you want to ride races," he said at length, "not so much because there's money in it as because you love horseflesh."

"I reckon that's about it."

"Back there a few miles from my farm in Woodford County, Tolliver," said Parrish quietly, "two great sires, Ten Broeck and

Longfellow, lie buried with stones and inscriptions over their graves."

"I knows it," came the eager response. "I've done fared over there an' looked at 'em."

"And old Frank Harper who bred and ran those horses," went on the colonel, "never bet a cent on a race in his life. He was a rigid churchman and it wasn't a money proposition with him."

"I knows that," agreed the boy. "He didn't deem it godly to gamble an' he didn't delight none to act sinful."

Parrish stood looking narrowly at this human curio who had turned up in his own training establishment and a speculative interest kindled his thoughts. When he next spoke it was rather to himself than to his young employee.

"God never made a sounder type of man," he said, "than the true sportsman—and the devil never made a trashier convert than the average sport." He paused, his eyes straying to a string of blanketed colts being led around a tanbark ellipse, and then he smiled somewhat whimsically.

"Do you know what it takes to make a jockey, son? I mean a *real* jockey?"

"I reckon a body's got to be right smart first off."

"Not only that. Rats may be smart. The good race rider must have courage and judgment beyond the ordinary—and he must blend them nicely. His head must work coolly while he's riding at the fastest speed that any four-footed creature, except the antelope, can travel on its own power. In the smother and confusion of back stretch, turn and finish, he must measure the gap between crowding saddle skirts and estimate almost to the inch whether that gap is wide enough to let him through. He must have the nerve to trust that judgment and seize his opportunity when it comes, though he knows that a miscalculation will carry his mount and other mounts down to a welter of broken bones—perhaps to death."

Tolliver looked down at his shoes and ventured the assertion: "I don't 'low I'd be flabbergasted nor affrighted."

"The outstanding jockey must be able to judge pace," went on the colonel. "He carries no split-second watch with him as he rates his mount, yet it's got to be ticking in his brain, and when he swings himself out of the saddle, if he's the real thing, he can

pretty nearly tell to the fifth of a second what each furlong was run in."

"I reckon a feller might tutor himself to do that."

"That's not all, even yet," Parrish supplemented. "He must have a magnetic something that communicates itself to the horse under him, the spirit that begets spirit. He must hold up the heavy head through the last heartbreaking sixteenth, when a horse begins to falter and reel. By his hand riding he must add length to the stride that desperate fatigue is shortening. He must know when to use steel and bat—and when not to use either—and with every mount he takes to the barrier he must change his treatment because no two are alike. It's because this combination of qualities is rare that a few outstanding jockeys earn as much in a year as the president of the country."

"Still there are some few that can do all them things."

"Yes—some very few, and some others that can do some of them."

"Then there ain't no dead-certain way of tellin' that I ain't one of 'em save only by tryin' me to see, is there?"

Parrish laughed. The tone of the assertion seemed to free it of the egotism expressed in its words.

The boy stood almost palsied by his eagerness. His dark eyes were wide and for a moment he forgot the demands of a racial stoicism. He had dared to voice an ambition which had seemed to himself too vaulting for realization and the man to whom he had spoken had given him a hearing, without rebuke.

But in Parrish's mind a fantastic conception was formulating that wholly engrossed him. He had before now been an experimenter in new ideas. He had tested original methods of crossing blood lines and of training. Now he was asking himself, "What would a jockey with a background be like?"

Here was a boy who, though he talked a crude idiom, knew something of the turf's past. His very ignorance in a general sense might make his mind virgin soil ready for tilling to productivity—and his illiteracy was a matter of geography and circumstance. The mind itself was a sponge eager and able to soak up knowledge. Slowly the breeder let a part of his thought find expression in words.

"It may be that you have born in you those qualities that must be born in a good

race rider. If that's true, the rest might be learned."

"God A'mighty knows I craves to learn."

Parrish nodded, then went on:

"I don't mean that you must just learn the things that are taught about a race track, son. You would need to have ahead of you and keep in view the idea of leaving the saddle when you get too heavy for it, not as a waster and a has-been but as a man who had been using the race track as a college. Perhaps it's a fantastic notion, but we might have a whirl at it. It's largely a question of stamina, I expect. Do you think you can carry the weight over a route?"

"I can strive to do it—an' I'm seekin' to get eddication other ways, too," declared the boy quickly. "I talks like an ignoramus because that's what most folks does where I comes from, but my pap talks like a dictionary, an' I'm studyin' every day betwixt chores. I aims to be a lawyer, some good day."

"A lawyer—fine!" exclaimed Parrish with delighted amusement yet with no trace of derision or condescension. "The law-student jockey! I don't believe it's been done before. But why the law, son?"

Tolliver's eyes narrowed and he hesitated; then he spoke on a note of intense defiance:

"My pap's mixed up in some lawin'," he said, "that's right apt to last longer than what he does, hisself. If so be he should die afore he plumb finishes it, I've got to wind it up."

The colonel nodded. "Now as to size," he said. "How old are you? Of course you may get too heavy before you learn to ride."

Tolliver's face burned brick red and this time he spoke with the agitation of an old and festering shame.

"That's the one thing that would make me plumb willin' to give up ridin' races," he announced vehemently. "I comes of a stock of men that stands up six feet high, bare-footed—an' I'm the only runt that ever took the name Cornett. Folks up there in the mountains all disgusts me for bein' half-sized. They don't 'low I can ever be much of a man, noways—an' I'm seventeen now, goin' on eighteen—an' I weighs about as much as a calico sunbonnet."

This unexpected flare of self-contempt had burst from the thin lips with the erup-



tion of long repressed mortification, and its sincerity was unmistakably anguished. It had been one of those flashes in which youth reveals itself and uncloaks its depths of tragic feeling.

"When you get your full growth," reassured the man, "you'll probably be as big as Napoleon Bonaparte. Meanwhile we'll find out if you have the makings of a jockey. If you develop well I'll try to get you a mount or two as an apprentice at Lexington and we'll see what you can do in silks."

The black cloud of misery which had enveloped the boy with his brooding over his pygmy proportions was dissipated as suddenly as mountain skies clear after mountain storms, and his eyes gleamed triumphantly.

"I'll aim to do the best I knows," he made fervent avowal.

#### CHAPTER IV.

"The jockey with a background!" chuckled Paul Creighton. "The law-student knight of the pigskin! That's rather price-less, I should say."

The tall man with prematurely white hair stood at Colonel Parrish's elbow on the training track at Woodstock Farm, where those youngsters that had not been shipped to town were being handled. The place had a background of spacious paddocks with whitewashed fences and in the distance stood the old Parrish mansion.

"And yet why not?" inquired the colonel gravely. "If this young barbarian is genuinely ambitious, he can be studying in his ample periods of leisure—and a developing mind will help his riding. Then when he goes heavy he won't be a burned-out candle. He can unsaddle and salute the judges after his last race, with money in the bank. He can step across to the courthouse with a brief case in his hand instead of a racing bat—and salute the judges there. If he fails it doesn't disprove my theory at all. It merely proves that I tried it on the wrong boy."

Creighton laughed again. On these bright spring mornings when the thud of hoofs beat their cheerful tattoo on the soft earth of his friend's training track he could forget certain things in the memory of which he found no satisfaction. For one thing, he could momentarily forget that of all these

fine old places with their ripe traditions his was one of the few that had passed under the hammer of the auctioneer into alien hands and that the house he now occupied had been in other days a tenant's cottage. There was little solace in the realization that extravagance and inordinate vanity had let him down. Once he had set the pace in open-handedness and like other early pace-makers, human and equine, he had seen the ruck trail past him. He had been an "also-ran." Now nothing was left him but memory and vain pride and he lived as did the "tobacco yaps" whom his class pride despised. At times he wished he were hidden away somewhere where no one could look back through the corrosion of his fortunes and perceive the completeness of his decay. Yet anywhere else he would be only a neglected insolvent and here he still walked with the high-headed assurance of a d'Artagnan in faded cloak and bedraggled plumes. Here no word ever reminded him of difference between himself and the men and women whom he had once wined and dined.

For himself that consideration might be an empty consolation after all, but for his two daughters it was more. It placed them socially and absolved them, in a fashion, from his own failures. Elsewhere he and his would be poor whites. Here they were still of the gentry and in memory of his past grandeur he was still called "King" Creighton.

"Are you racing Greentassel at Lexington, Paul?" inquired Parrish and his old friend shook his head with a wry smile.

"Winter racing has left her stale, Clay," he answered, "and I can't afford racing that doesn't pay. I'm hoping to slip her into a soft spot or two, later on, at the Downs."

Parrish nodded. He knew the unique history of this family of three; how Cary Creighton, a young woman of twenty had taken over a woman's responsibilities before she had left childhood behind.

"Cary," said Creighton quietly, "knows as much about horses as I do—more. She knows enough to run them for the purse and to leave the betting shed alone, and Shirley can outride a good many present-day jockeys. If my girls were boys the Creighton colors would come back to their own."

Realizing that the conversation was drifting into woeful shoals of personality Parrish turned it sharply aside.

"I want this mountain boy well grounded in the history of the turf," he said musingly. "In my scheme of things he's got to acquire background you know. May I send him over now and then and let him sit at your feet, Paul?"

Creighton laughed.

"By all means old man. Any protégé of yours is welcome—though I don't much fancy the unwashed louts he lives with. I've had neighbors I enjoyed more."

"His father is a court prosecutor up in the mountains," observed the colonel. "A courageous fellow of some learning and I dare say of good, if run-down stock. Indeed"—he laughed reminiscently—"Tolliver tells me he talks dictionary words."

It was with a disturbing perturbation of spirit which brought his heart into his throat that the exercise boy from the Parish stables stood at Paul Creighton's door and summoned up his courage to rap upon it. Indeed he who was accustomed in his own country to shout his name from the stile, rapped so timidly that no one heard and after a little he summoned up his courage to knock again.

It was night and the moon rode high over woodlands of hickory, walnut and oak, and through the lowlands twisted and wound the shallow Elkhorn, a creek that "headed up" in his own mountains and whispered to him of its distant beginnings.

But there were no comforting curtains of high-flung peaks and no whippoorwill calls from the heaviness of timber. Here the country rolled with a gentle swell and to him it seemed flat.

Then the door opened, swinging back on a yellow curtain of lamplight and in this frame, silhouetted against it, stood a slim girl of perhaps fifteen with an aura from the inner illumination about a dark head that was set pridefully on her shoulders.

The girl, who was still a shadow contour, looked out and, thinking at first that this roughly clothed lad at the doorstep was the emissary of some gypsy caravan, she blocked his way and demanded curtly, "What do you want?"

Tolliver could find no answer. In the simple gospel in which he had been reared hospitality opens the door without challenge to every man who is not a professed or suspected enemy, and questions him, if questioning be necessary, inside the threshold.

To his cheek bones mantled the color of

affront and at last he said in a level quietness: "I reckon I don't want nothin'. I've done come to the wrong place—an' I bids ye farewell."

But Creighton, from his dilapidated easy-chair inside, had heard the question of his younger daughter and its answer, and now he laughingly sang out, "This is the right place, Tolliver, only Shirley didn't know you. Come right in."

Fastidiously the girl drew aside, and edging around her at as great a distance as he could contrive the boy entered the house. Between him and her, as he came, shot the hostility of a childish feud, founded on first impressions.

Inside the place he saw, too, the elder daughter, a slim young woman with masses of dark hair and large dark eyes who greeted him with a musical little laugh of friendliness and understanding.

Then the girls disappeared and as Creighton sat back with half-closed lids Tolliver was listening to sagas of great races and drinking in the achievements of horses and horsemen.

The man who talked knew his topic and the boy who listened loved it, and to the youngster the charm was in no way discounted by the fact that Paul Creighton was by nature a Munchausen who embellished his narrative and pictured himself as the hero of many adventurous episodes in which he had actually played no part. Creighton was that type of egotist who comes to believe his own yarns and whose mendacity is innocent self-glorification.

Tom Burtley went into the cubicle off the *Tribune's* city room which was the sanctum of the managing editor, wondering vaguely why he had been summoned into the presence, and Doyle left him for the moment to his speculations while he marked changes of make-up on a first-page dummy.

Having finished that, the M. E. turned and announced abruptly: "I want you to go out of town, Burtley, on an assignment to the mountains. I'm not sending Stengler—because he's a married man."

Even the dignity of high chiefs failed to quench the breezy exuberance of the young reporter and now he grinned.

"Is it as bad a job as that?" he questioned impudently.

"I'm sending you up into the bloody hills," came the amused response. "Two

companies of the First Regiment are ordered to sit on the lid at Hixon while a couple of murder barons in the pure-feud belt are being tried and convicted. They entrain before daybreak and you are to entrain with them."

"So there's a new war cloud in the local Balkans," grinned Burtley even more broadly. "Well, every Kentucky reporter who nurses an ambition to write the great American novel has to cut his teeth on that adventure, I suppose. What's the present eruption about, sir?"

The managing editor thrust out a sheaf of clippings, a typed telegraphic dispatch or two and an envelope containing expense funds.

"You'll find what information I can give you there," he said. "The rest is for you to dig up. There's a prosecutor up there who's girded himself with the might of righteousness and started in to break the power of local despots. There's to be a special term of court with a judge from another district sitting. There are to be distinguished defendants and learned counsel. Likewise, since the coming of law and order is uninvited, there is to be a cordon of bayonets for the maintenance of order."

"This prosecutor you speak of, sir——" Young Burtley scratched his nose with his pencil. "What impels him to seek martyrdom?"

"If it's self-exploitation," answered the M. E., "it's a bad game. The best he can get is the worst of it. He'll convict no one and when the tumult and the shouting dies, when the captains and platoons depart, there's rather likely to be a quiet little killing up there in the crags, and the bold prosecutor will be the killee. His name is Tolliver Cornett."

"Tolliver Cornett," repeated the younger man thoughtfully. "That's a name that sounds familiar and yet it's not a common one." He searched his memory for a moment, then exclaimed ungrammatically: "I've got it. I saw an exercise boy out at the track a few days ago who wasn't any common stable swipe. He had the same name."

Tommy Burtley was young enough and imaginative enough to find a thrill in the situation.

Here he was on a train, running as a special from Louisville through the rich

Bluegrass country, through the broken foothills beyond and on into the Cumberlands. Of those mountains he knew only from reading and hearsay but he thought of them in the colors and shapes of picturesqueness. There, cut off from east and west by parapets of stone and the raggedness of forests dwelt a race that had for two centuries held aloof in turreted pride and poverty, in ignorance and sullenness. There one heard a quaint and ancient idiom spoken and there one still encountered the sporadic and grim upleaping of human passions into the blood feud. So to young Burtley the train was taking him not only some two hundred miles from home and back into the hinterland but also two centuries into the past. And the train was a troop train carrying lowland guns and bayonets to enforce lowland ideas of law on a highland fretfulness of spirit. So little delusion of welcome went with the invaders that during the last steep stages of the run a pilot engine would be thrown ahead, as a reconnaissance point is thrust out before an advancing column of infantry, to guard against the surprise of dynamite on the road bed.

Of the two men who were to face trial, so hedged about with the trappings of authority, the reporter knew little enough that was authentic and much that was legendary. One had been a county judge and the other his sheriff. Both were now retired from office and both were, by mountain standards, rich. And the pair were reputed to hold in the hollows of their hands the destinies of that country, and now, because a lawyer fired with an uncompromising spirit had challenged their autocracy, they stood indicted for murder. They were to be tried this time not by a local judge who faltered in awe of their power but by a man from beyond the borders of their baronial jurisdiction and alien to their thought—and the commonwealth charged that not one but several enemies had fallen dead under the hands of assassins who were in effect and in fact their mercenaries.

Young Burtley almost found it in his heart to pity these unfortunates, who had for once appeared to overreach themselves. He pictured the rough-hewn pioneer types who had failed to calculate that the arm of the law could reach into their stronghold and haul them out of its false security, as if by the scruffs of their unshaven necks. He had heard of them as men who in famine

time fed the poor and in times of anger avenged with death, and though plainly evil they were, to his thought, beguilingly picturesque—too picturesque to hang.

His emotions quickened as the scenery changed from a land of white turnpikes and ordered country houses to one of clay roads, tangled undergrowth and unkempt log cabins. When the rivers began to be log laden and cloud wisps to trail, like arrested shrapnel puffs along the upper slopes, his pulses leaped as if on beholding a romantic stage set. There was grandeur in these forests and beauty along crags white as foam with elder blossom and pink with laurel.

Finally at Hixon Town itself, which was their destination, the train halted at the shabby red station which squatted at the edge of a shack town and Burtley stood aside as a civilian must, while the uniformed and armed men of two companies detrained. They lined up on the cinders between crowds that spoke no word of greeting but that stood sullenly wordless and blackly scowling.

As the troops, with swinging rifles and shouldered packs, wheeled from line into column, these human clusters of jeans-clad natives gave grudgingly back before them, not so much as if in fear of their arms as if in avoidance of contamination. Tommy Burtley dropped off the train and lingered inquisitively behind. It was his purpose to engage some of the bystanders in conversation and, as he would have put it, to feel the pulse of local sentiment.

So he addressed himself affably to a patriarchal-seeming man, shirt sleeved and heavily bearded, who rapped on the cinders with a long hickory staff.

"Good morning, sir," said the reporter. "It's a fine day, isn't it?"

The man raised sullenly burning eyes and slowly raked the young stranger from hat crown to shoe leather. He made no reply except for that deliberately hostile scrutiny and when its scornful appraisal ended he turned his back and strode contemptuously away.

Burtley flushed with quick anger and his glance went rapidly about the place to encounter on every other face an equal animosity.

Here was a spirit which might at any moment break into a more assertive anger and the silence gave into a low growling chorus. If these had been dogs instead of men the

same mood would have brought their hackles upstanding along their shoulders. Suddenly it was borne in on Tommy Burtley that, for the present at least, it might be discreet to follow the troops before too great an interval opened between their rear guard and this native unwelcome—yet he was unwilling to seem speeded by a hostile demonstration. He glanced appraisingly about him. Surely in a crowd numbering two-score there must be some representative citizen who would sponsor so unoffending a stranger.

Meanwhile he stood under a volley fire of enmity.

He had endured this ostracism of unkind eyes beyond the limits of comfort when he saw a new figure arriving through the edge of the crowd: a native who raised his hand and heartily called out to him, "Howdy, stranger."

The man was of medium height and neither thin nor heavy, but stockily set up and dressed much as a somewhat careless business man in town might have been dressed, except that no necktie graced the meeting of his white shirt and low collar. In the face of this new arrival, though, was a twinkle of humor and his jaw had the composed set of self-reliance. Now as he came forward the crowd opened for him with a sort of rude deference and he nodded brief recognition to its greetings though he did not pause until he had reached the side of the newspaper man, who stood in the embarrassment of his snubbing.

"Well, sir," accosted the newcomer in a genial tone, "you seem to be a stranger among us—and to judge by the train you came on you have some connection with the soldiers."

Burtley smiled.

"I'm a reporter," he said, "but without waiting to find out who I was or what I came for your fellow citizens seem to have decided I'm an undesirable."

The clean-shaven man smiled again, and picked up the reporter's suit case, after which he led the way along the muddy street in the wake of the militiamen who marched ahead at route step.

"Our folk hereabouts are good bodies but simple," began the local citizen in an amused drawl. "They judge a man offhand by the company he keeps, and they resent outside interference; especially when it comes bristling like a hedgehog—with bayonets.

They saw you with the soldiers and that point-blank stamped you as a meddler."

"God knows I'm neutral enough," objected the reporter. "I represent a newspaper and I come without any bias."

"Yes, son. I reckon that's true, but these are unthoughtful folk in a fashion and you can't handily blame 'em. They believe we can handle our own affairs up here in the hills and they resent 'fotched-on' law-giving. It looks to them as reasonable that they should shoulder their guns and go down to Looeyville to superintend your court-day activities, as for you to come up here to mix in with ours. They're mighty partial to self-government hereabouts. It's all in where you stand as how a matter looks anyhow."

Burtley shot a glance at the face of his companion and felt a friendly response to this proffered kindness.

"I was sent to give facts, not opinions," he said simply.

"I'm sure you were and when you get to know 'em you'll find our mountain folk the best people in the world. You'll find 'em honest to a fault; hospitable to a degree—but powerful sot in their ways, and content to be so. For two hundred years and more they've lived in a backwater of the world—an' lived free. You can't yank them forward two hundred years by a jerk on leading strings. They love well and hate well—but you'll find all that out for yourself in due time. Where were you aimin' to go, son—to the hotel?"

Burtley shook his head. "No," he said, "I believe the commanding officer is going to give me a tent."

The escort frowned thoughtfully but nodded.

"All right," he assented, "I'll go along with you till you're among your friends again. I guess seein' you an' me consortin' peaceable will sort of ease folks' minds about you anyhow."

The two were approaching the courthouse now, a shambling structure about which somehow hung a redolence of medievalism, and on the narrow board walk stood a figure which answered to the preconceived ideas that Burtley had brought with him from the lowlands. This was a tall, gaunt fellow with tense and uncompromising features, about whose rawboned frame flapped a long-tailed coat rusted with age. There was strong assertion of purpose in that face

and a grim humorlessness, and as Burtley and his companion passed him, he eyed the pair with pupils that lighted into an almost baleful hostility.

Neither Burtley's escort nor this other spoke in greeting but their glances engaged and clashed like foil blades, and then the walking pair passed on and the standing man remained monumentlike and unmoving.

"An interesting type, that," hazarded the reporter and his companion nodded.

"That," he drawled half humorously, "is the Honorable Tolliver Cornett, the watchdog of the law. He's the gentleman that started all this trouble and brought you and the soldiers here to regulate us."

Involuntarily Tommy Burtley paused to look back. The figure still stood there, giving the rigid impression of bronze or granite, and Tommy felt a dramatic tingle along his scalp. Here was a principal actor in the drama he had come a long way to watch and chronicle.

"The soldiers seem to be haltin' there around the co'tehouse," announced the townsman, "so I guess I can bid you farewell."

"Thank you," exclaimed the correspondent heartily. "I'm indebted to you. My name is Tom Burtley, of the Louisville *Tribune*. And yours—"

"Me? I'm a Tom, too," laughed the other easily. "My name's Tom Malone. I'm one of the fellers you gentlemen came up here to hang."

Burtley stared. His lips hesitated on the verge of speech but the other nodded good-humoredly.

"I ain't bein' hampered in the jail house, if that's what astonishes you," he went amiably on. "I'm still free to walk abroad on bond and I hope you'll come in and have speech with me some time. I run that store just across the street from the co'tehouse and you might as well hear both sides before you start in writin' your pieces for the paper."

"Thank you," stammered Burtley. "I'll come."

Judge Malone, storekeeper and alleged murder lord turned away, then halted again, in afterthought:

"I wouldn't wonder if you'd want to talk to the Honorable Tolliver Cornett, too," he said. "His office is just round the corner there, when you get ready to seek him out and hear his story."

## CHAPTER V.

Burtley eyed his new acquaintance with increasing amazement. The last few moments had given to the face, the bearing and even to the lesser physical characteristics of this man a fresh significance savoring of electric interest. He was no longer a mountaineer who happened to stand out in contrast with his surly fellows by reason of a courtesy and urbanity beyond their own. He had suddenly taken on the stature of heroic or villainous bigness and his conduct and words leading up to his self-revelation had paved the way for his announcement of identity precisely as dialogue and business build for the initial appearance of the star on the stage of a playhouse. It had all worked up his entrance.

For a moment Tommy was tempted to believe that this theatric effect had been premeditated, planned; but at once he abandoned that idea as fantastic. This man with no necktie might be a lord of guile but he was hardly a dramatist as well.

"Of course," said young Burtley, "I must welcome information from all channels and naturally I must talk to the prosecutor as well as the defendant. But the Honorable Tolliver Cornett looks to me like a grouch with a curdled disposition and I'm prepared to dislike him. Moreover he didn't come to welcome me and rescue me from the gathering rage of the mob. You were good enough to do both and I feel grateful to you."

Judge Malone smiled quietly.

"I don't hold no brief for the man that's seeking to hang me or make me sulter in the penitentiary," he admitted. "But yet a man's got to be fair. Cornett didn't happen to be down at the deepo when you got in, so he couldn't handily welcome you." An inner amusement made the steady eyes in the strong face twinkle as he drawlingly added: "An' if so be he'd been there he wouldn't have had any master influence with those fellers that were standin' round to see the cars come in."

Burtley saw the man about whom so many well-nigh incredible stories had been broadcast walking calmly away, then he turned and looked at the old courthouse itself, and again a prickle came to his scalp; that goose flesh which is the test of inescapable drama in life as well as in fiction.

The century-old building was as the heart of the town and it stood in a large square

with hitching posts strung along its front and flanked on one side by the squat structure which was its "jail house."

The columns at its front and the cupola on its top were alike gray with the scaling of long unrenewed paint. He made out pocklike scars about the shabby trim and remembered stories of a feudal battle fought here in the town, years ago, when one clan held that courthouse as its citadel and another attacked from street barricades. Blackened stains still carried reminders of the fire which had finally smoked out its defenders. Behind it and beyond the town, which was scattered over broken levels, rose parapets of scowling mountains; the mountains which had by their wildness fostered and preserved human wildness and held these highlands quarantined and immune from the march of contemporary life in the world below.

Now in the square about that building, like an invasion of modernity into an ancient place, the militia companies from Louisville were incuriously and efficiently stacking their arms and making themselves at home.

"It might as well be now," Tommy Burtley commented to himself, and with a nod of his head he stowed his suit case by a stack of rifles and turned his steps toward the spot which Malone had pointed out as the law office of the prosecutor.

There on a shacklike building hung the shingle which carried the legend, "Tolliver Cornett, Lawyer," and to the door the newspaper man proceeded.

With the ignorance of one unschooled to a usage in which a man shouts out his name and his innocence of purpose before he enters another man's house he put his hand on the knob and swung open the door, which was unlatched. In this place and under these conditions of taut hatreds such conduct was both discourteous and dangerous, but the boy committed the solecism in callow innocence.

At once he realized his mistake. The man whom he had glimpsed a few minutes before on the street standing so stiffly quiet was seated at the deal table which served him as a desk, with his head bent low over some legal task. The table was littered with papers and rusty law books whose sheepskin bindings were scaling from use and age.

This picture Tommy Burtley saw in the part of a second, but only for that scrap

of time was there such a quiet picture to see.

At the sound of the opening door and with an amazing swiftness of motion the seated figure had risen and changed of aspect.

It had not come to full erectness as an attorney ordinarily rises to greet a client but had sprung up with catlike agility to its feet standing in the half-crouched posture of one ready to attack or to resist the violent onslaught of an enemy. The right hand, which had an instant before been busy with pencil and foolscap sheets was now thrust forward, gripping a tremendously heavy and wicked-looking revolver, into the face of the reporter.

It must have been an instinctive gesture which led the young man from "down below" who had never before looked down such a muzzle to raise his empty hands to the level of his head, but he found himself doing so with a dispatch that was commendably discreet.

The rugged face which was looking into his own startled him into a full realization of the actual. The eyes were like pools of lighted ink and they held the expression of a man who is physically without fear, yet who walks in momentary expectation of an encounter with death. The quick intake of breath in the forward-bending body told the story more compactly and wholly than words. Tolliver Cornett knew his own uncertainty of life and when that door had opened, without the warning of knock or shout, he had risen to meet the expected with his face fronting it—resolved if possible to exact a price.

"I'm Tom Burtley—a reporter," said the young man rather breathlessly and he felt that his voice trembled.

Tolliver Cornett straightened instantly and laid the weapon down on the table before him.

"Up here in the hills, Mr. Burtley," he said in a low-pitched voice, "and in times like these, a man doesn't enter another man's door without raising his voice in advance, to declare that he comes in peace. But you are from the lowlands—you wouldn't know that." He waved his hand in a gesture of belated welcome. "Have a chair," he invited.

"I represent the *Tribune*," said Burtley, taking the proffered seat but perching nervously on its edge.

Tolliver Cornett went over and closed the door and this time he latched it before he returned to his table. Then a grim ghost of amusement flashed into his inklike eyes.

"There aren't any tacks in that chair you're sitting on, son, are there?" he inquired and, with a sense of a strain mercifully relaxed, the boy laughed and shifted himself back more comfortably in his seat.

"The fact of the matter is, sir," he made candid response, "I don't think I'd know just now whether I were sitting on tacks or not." He paused, then went on: "I've been in this town only a few minutes and yet it looked as though the citizenry wanted to lynch me at the station. I was rescued by Judge Malone, an accused murderer—and then when I come in to interview the prosecutor, who should be the protector of the innocent, I find myself looking down the throat of a six-gun. Such things are disconcerting until one becomes acclimated."

Cornett nodded. His somewhat wintry smile had lasted until the mention of Malone's name and had died on its utterance.

"The first information you need, then," began the lawyer seriously, "is this. It's the fact that you represent a newspaper from down below which the people resent—that and the further fact that you came with the soldiers."

"But why does every one assume that my reports will be biased? I haven't taken sides, have I?"

Cornett shook his head.

"You don't have to take sides. Your being here is offense enough," he said. "Malone and his minions resent the publicity I'm giving to the outside world as to what is going forward here. It tears away the veil of privacy from their reign of terror and they hate interference. We mountain folk feel that the world beyond these ridges is unsympathetic. The lowlands think of the mountains only when the mountains are in eruption—and forget them utterly when they are starving quietly."

The newspaper man raised his head and looked with puzzled eyes at his informant.

"You quote that dislike of publicity as the viewpoint of Malone and his crowd, sir," he said. "And yet there is a feeling in your voice as though you shared the sentiment."

The lawyer nodded and rapped nervously with his fingers on the table top.

"I was a mountain man, Mr. Burtley,

before I became a lawyer," he answered. "It's because I love this country that I'm doing a thing that in all likelihood marks me for death and a thing that stamps me before my countrymen as a traitor to my blood. There is little true friendliness for us down there where you live easier lives. We are rough men here and ignorant. We disgrace our more cultured brethren. We are bred and reared in eyries and we have a high, wild love of freedom. We are human hawks up here, sir. The very crimes that brand us before the rest of the world are crimes of distorted virtues and warped viewpoints, rather than of inherent infamy."

"And yet it is you who are forcing these trials and focusing outside attention on them. Why? If you feel as you say, in Heaven's name why?"

"Have you asked Malone that question, sir?"

"No. I'm asking you."

"If you did ask him, he would tell you that I'm seeking to advertise myself by slandering my kind; that I want to go down below where the pickings are richer and practice law on the strength of a reputation I've made up here as a fearless and sensational prosecutor."

"And what do you say, sir?"

The lawyer rose and stood towering, fiery with the fanaticism that makes martyrs.

"I say that I realize I am marking myself down for probable death or sure exile. When this work ends I shall no longer be able to live here in the only land I know; the only land I love. If I stay I die, and if I go I must make a new home among strangers. I must be a rough country lawyer among polished practitioners."

"That's a pretty grim realization for a man to work with—but it doesn't yet explain your motive."

The lawyer nodded again and his answer was disarmingly simple.

"I am the prosecutor of this district. The law says murder must be punished."

"And yet"—the young man spoke gravely and without intent of impertinence—"you have had predecessors who have lived safely."

"By disregarding their oaths," Cornett caught him up. "Here are two men, Malone and Cropper, who have built up a dictatorship—and built it on murder. Their friends inherit the earth, rocky and sterile though it be. Their enemies fall in the

creek-bed roads—by the shot from ambush—and no jury dares punish them. No witness dares raise his voice in accusation against them. What is every man's business is no man's business—but I can't take refuge in such generality while I hold office."

He paused and Tommy Burtley leaned forward in his chair.

"And so——" he prompted in a low voice.

"And so, at the cost of giving the truest Americans in all America a bad name; at the cost of becoming an outcast myself, I have had to do what is manifestly my duty. I hate it, but I have no choice."

"Malone," hazarded the young man half timidly, "had the seeming of a suave and good-humored fellow."

"Malone," came the quick rejoinder, "knows that through the spokesmen of the press the world will hear the story and he angles for your sympathy. Malone does not, like the ignorant men he plays upon and uses, know only the shut-in life of the hills. He is well-to-do. He goes to Louisville. He vacations at French Lick Springs. He has acquired the urbanity of the lowland politician—though here at home he cultivates a native rudeness." The lawyer paused and his eyes blazed fiercely. "I don't blame these other fellow men of mine for adhering to the code of the feud. They know nothing else. They learned it in Indian warfare. They fed on it at their mothers' breasts. Isolation and ignorance have blinded them into a savage exaggeration of clan loyalty—but Malone has no such excuse. He exploits their simplicity to make them his tools and assassins. He should pay the law's price—he and Cropper both. I'm seeking to make them do it."

The courthouse bell was clanging loudly but as yet in the room where the drama was to be acted out the old pewlike benches were empty and the stage was unset except for squads of militiamen strategically disposed about the place. The great doors that gave access to the trial room were closed and this contravened the custom of the country which made of that place a public forum open to the pleasure of every citizen.

And to-day the roads that led to town were traveled ways. Men came riding astride and in side saddles; men drove cov-



ered wagons, even shaggy and unkempt fellows who were the "branch-water folk" dwelling "back of beyond" came afoot and plodding after ox teams. They were gathering to witness this duel between the old order and the new. And because it was not assumed that the lords of high dominion would tamely submit to lowland dictation they brought with them the high expectancy of seeing fight. The concomitants of such occasions were not wanting; flasks of white liquor made overnight and armpit holsters bulging with pistols.

But now because a new method was being employed this far-journeying audience was halted outside the house of law by sentinels with crossed bayonets, and forced to shuffle indignant feet without its walls. Under such indignity antagonism took flame from pocket flasks and to young Tom Burtley waiting for the opening of the doors the situation seemed ripe for a capricious jumping to clash and trouble.

It was with a sense of relief that he eventually heard the brazen summons of the courthouse bell from the tilting cupola, though its first note made him start nervously. That summons meant the opening of the doors and either a loosening of the tension or a new and immediate tangent of excitement.

He was standing at the elbow of one of the doorway sentries and had before his eyes the courthouse yard with its sullen crowds and the street with its line of empty hitching posts.

Because those hitching posts stood unused Burtley felt the more uneasy. It meant that men were not trusting their "ridin' critters" to a place which might be raked by gunfire. Those many mules and horses were tethered instead to willow branches down by the river, shielded by the overhang of its clay banks.

Near the reporter stood Judge Malone and his codefendant Asa Cropper, and the two wore expressions of sphinxlike gravity except when they smiled with indulgent composure, as men came up singly and in groups to register friendship and offer good wishes.

Now along the grass-grown walk from the street to the steps proceeded the official party, and Tom Burtley caught his breath. The sheriff, carrying a long hickory staff, came first, and he bore himself as though official requirements were forcing him into

uncongenial company. Behind him followed the well-tailored judge from "down below" who was to sit at this session of court. He was a stranger arriving without welcome and though he bore himself with the dignity of office one could see that his nerves too were edgily set for possible crisis, and that he realized the official family which surrounded him was a family at outs. Tailoring the group and with defiant eyes that raked the elbowing crowds through which he uncompromisingly passed came Tolliver Cornett, the prosecutor.

Malone and Cropper met that gaze and returned it with half smiles of insolent contempt.

The judge turned on the top step with his back against the unopened doors. He raised his hands for silence and cleared his throat to address the crowd, but as he faced them a growl swelled up from bearded throats that ran like gathering wind and made speech impossible.

Judge Softridge flushed indignantly, then realized that this was the wrong and undiplomatic note. So he forced a smile and continued to gesture mildly for attention.

"To hell with yore fotch-on law," belted a bull-like voice from the fringe of the crowd. "Ye kain't jail a man for contempt of co'te outside the co'tehouse, I reckon, an' contempt is all ye gits hereabout."

Before the guffaw of laughter that greeted that sally had passed its crest of sound Malone had mounted the steps and stood beside the lowland judge. It was Malone who stretched his hands high for silence. It was Malone whose voice went out as clear and strong as a trumpet blast over the crowd.

"Silence, men!" he belted, and there was a dwindling of astonished voices to gradual quiet.

"It's only guilty men that fear the law," thundered the accused. "It's only uncivil men that affront a visiting judge. This man comes here not of his own will but because he's sent. We ask only what the law guarantees us—justice. Our friends will hearken to what this gentleman says, because we ask it. Our enemies *needs must* hearken because we bids 'em to!"

There was instant and electric effect. The crowd seemed to shrink back into itself like a jackal pack before the angry lion. Their voices were stilled, and with a slight non-

committal bow to the man who had come to try him Malone stepped aside and dropped to the level of the ground.

"Men of Heaton County," began Judge Softridge in a clear and melodious voice, "I have come to your county seat to hold court in compliance with the law. This court seeks to dispense exact justice without bias; without partiality. Every defendant stands unprejudiced here until the charges against him are proven. Even more, he stands entitled to the benefit of every reasonable doubt. No man can be wrongly convicted and no man is so strong that he can hope, save by the vindication of the evidence, to escape full justice. Because there is a possibility of deep and passionate feeling here no man may pass through these doors armed. The courtroom belongs to the public but every one seeking admission will be searched for weapons before he crosses the threshold. I myself will first be searched." The judge turned as he spoke and raised his hands while a sergeant of militia made a perfunctory gesture of running hands over his pockets, side, breast and hip.

But a new growl went up at the announcement and it was again Malone's voice that thundered over it. "That's fair enough, men. That's what we want. A man lays aside his weapons when he comes into my dwellin' house or yours. It's seemly that we do the like in the house of the law."

The judge and officials of the court went first under the arch of crossed bayonets; the crowd trickled after them. But Malone and Cropper paused as they came for a word here and there and their manner was that of barons passing among loyal vassals.

Again Tommy Burtley had the sense of values shuffled and readjusted to the tune of drama. Here in a place which Malone entered as the accused, and where he might be expected to remain with the humbleness of a suppliant, he stood forth as one indulgently permitting a farce to run its foolish course. He seemed almost one insisting that fretful home children share their toys with a visiting playmate for whom they had no liking.

Then, sitting at a small pine table with his pencils sharpened and his paper laid out before him, the reporter gazed at the dusty windows and the cobwebbed walls while directly at his front, as shaggy and grizzled as some old sheep dog, the collarless sheriff

pounded on the floor with his hickory staff and sang out sonorously, "Oyez, oyez, co'te is now in order pursuant to adjournment an' may God bless this commonwealth an' the honorable co'te!"

## CHAPTER VI.

Young Tolliver Cornett paused in the early morning at the door of Fletch Deering's house where he was living here on the land of "down below." Such a house, in the mountains, would have been deemed good. Here, in the bluegrass, it was, by the comparison of life, squalid. His own upland country was the land of "do without," and where no man is rich neither is any man poor, and where no man is poor none is shamefaced. Poverty there was the lot of the pioneer—here it was the brand of indigence.

Now Tolliver found his mind revolving about vexing readjustments of thought. Down here the opinion held of his own folk was not the high, proud opinion they held of themselves. Down here people said that the true pioneers were long dead; that the men of the hills were no longer forward-pushing argonauts attacking a wilderness but retarded and shiftless camp followers of civilization stagnating between an East and a West that had quickened their currents.

They were anachronisms. They were people two centuries behind their times and their ideals were as outworn as flintlock squirrel guns. This boy had been used to hearing another gospel preached. The mountaineer looked on his lowland brother as a man who had fallen into the decadence of an enervating luxury, and Tolliver was discovering with surprise that the lowland brother had once been the pioneer too, and that since his frontiering he had built a culture over the scars of hardship and set paved streets above the blazed trail of the frontier.

Even along the waters of Troublesome the uncle with whom he lived had been indulgently ridiculed as "the disabest, shiftlessest, stand-roundin'est feller on three creeks." Here, Tolliver found that uncle called a "tobacco yap" which meant a white tenant farming tobacco land on shares and occupying a social status little higher than that of the negro.

Another thing was perplexing and troubling Tolliver even more than social distinc-

tions. When his father had suggested his coming down here "where there were better advantages of education," the son had been too delighted to question or to seek for a deeper motive. Now he began to see that his father had also had an undeclared reason. The elder Cornett had been looking ahead to the time when he was to declare war on men so strongly entrenched that his own future became precarious. He had been clearing his decks of noncombatants against that day.

"That's why pap sent me down here," the boy declared to himself as he stood outside the rough house in which his "poor white trash" kinsman dwelt, and for the first time in his life contemptuously compared poverty with affluence. "He sent me down here because he knew the mountains ain't goin' to be healthy for no man that takes the name of Cornett."

He broke off on this thought, and his mouth twisted into a pained grimace that brought the deep red of mortification to his face. "He point-blank knowed that—an' he knowed likewise I was a runt, a disable, puny sort of body that ain't skeercely no better'n a cripple—so he sent me down here where I'd be safe at!"

For an instant hot tears scalded the boy's eyes and he dashed them away with the back of his hand.

"I reckon even if I get to be a lawyer," he made scathing self-appraisal, "I'd be a plumb ridic'ous little rooster standin' up in a co'teroom palaverin' with full-sized men. I reckon the jurymen would plumb laugh themselves sick at me."

Suddenly he stiffened and clenched his hands into fists.

"There's one thing that even a leetle, sawed-off fragglement of a man like me can do, though, it 'pears like. He can ride race hosses—an' albeit I told Colonel Parrish I didn't care nothin' about the money, he 'lowed a first-class jockey sometimes gets rich. Waal, mebby after all I can use them there riches."

He nodded his head sagely as he laid that germ of comfort to his soul.

"Malone an' Cropper *hires* their killin' done," he told himself. "An' likewise I reckon if need be I can hire my lawin' done so far as the oratin' in co'te's consarned." He smiled confidently, then, and the furrows in his forehead cleared to smoothness as his youth brushed aside all

difficulties in the attainment of a distant end.

"So all I've got to do now is just to get to be one of the best jockeys that ever rode a hoss an' to be such a smart lawyer that them other lawyers I hires can't swindle me. Then—if pap don't succeed—there'll still be a Tolliver Cornett on the job."

And that reminded him that he was almost due over there at the front of the farm where the morning work on the training track would be under way and where the whole atmosphere was, to his simple thinking, an atmosphere of luxuriant, almost stupefying wealth.

As he followed the wagon road through the woodland pastures, between green wheat and young corn, his imagination kindled with the zest of the spring brilliance and warmth. He put by grim forebodings for more alluring fantasies and saw himself riding to victory after victory always astride the magnificent young son of Electron—for now the cough had subsided and Fleetwing was rounding into such shape as promised a meeting of his major two-year-old engagements. Tolliver saw himself and the colt that he loved so absurdly becoming famous together until—vaulting ambition—a year hence he should perch in racing silks and tack on the brown when he went dancin' out to parade before the judges for that classic which seemed to him the epitome of all greatness—the Kentucky Derby!

He did not doubt himself. He asked only the chance.

He knew he could ride. He could judge pace with an almost uncanny precision. He had the seat and the hands. On these points he had been assured by such past masters as Parrish and Creighton. The one great unanswered question was how he could ride in company and in combat. His mentors told him that was another proposition—and as yet it was untested.

Thinking of these things with pulses that jumped to excitement he came to the training track, and there at the stable where the brown colt was being saddled stood Parrish and Creighton and a group of gentlemen and ladies whom the boy had never seen before. They were plainly visitors at the Parrish house and as the boy came up and heard a name his pulses throbbed quicker because he recognized it as one belonging to an Eastern millionaire whose success on the turf was legendary and whose

Bluegrass breeding farm was a show place that lay not far away.

Here, then, though small in numbers, was an audience of celebrity before which a boy must show what he had, but Tolliver's brows contracted in displeasure, because, standing with the group in breeches and boots, like those of a boy, was Shirley Creighton, the girl whose fastidious drawing back, as from an inferior, had poisoned his first entry into the Creighton house.

Parrish called Tolliver over and introduced him, as though he too were a member of the family; then he beckoned for Fleetwing to be led up.

"I want you to jog and canter him a half, Tolliver," he instructed crisply. "Then break with him at the end of the half and set him down for a work-out." He paused, then added, for the Easterner's benefit: "On this track you can't ask for the speed of a pasteboard footing, but try to step every furlong in thirteen flat—and clip a bit off the last eighth—if you can."

Tolliver nodded but he saw the Eastern turfman's brows go up in an expression of good-natured skepticism.

"Do you have exercise boys who can rate a mount as precisely as that—even if the track permits the pace?" he inquired and Parrish laughed.

"Time him," he answered, "and if you want the test even more exacting tell Tolliver what to ride each furlong in and see how close he meets your requirements."

The Easterner tapped a cigarette on his wrist and a twinkle of amusement lit his pupils. Then he met the boy's eye.

"Suppose you do the first eighth in thirteen and two fifths; then get down to thirteen—if the colt can manage it—and on the last furlong carry him as fast as he can go."

Again Tolliver nodded and turned to his employer.

"Do I have a pacemaker?" he inquired.

Parrish nodded.

"Mr. Creighton wants to work out Green-tassel. Miss Shirley is going to ride her."

Abruptly Tolliver's high mood of exhilaration collapsed to a chilling chagrin. He had been invited to demonstrate for a great man of the racing world abilities which the great man doubted—and now he was being coupled in partnership with a girl for whom he had acquired an intense dislike—a girl to whom he was "white trash."

But he said nothing as he turned half sullenly toward the colt and was tossed to the exercise saddle.

The girl had been mounted too and she sat her mount as easily and as confidently as he. As they started their horses away at a walk and eased into the preliminary jog trot, then as they broke into the slow warming-up canter, no word passed between them. The boy looked only at the glistening brown neck and the delicately pointed ears ahead of him.

The girl rode easy postured but with her chin disdainfully uptilted, as regardless of his presence as though he had been a groom who had presumptuously come alongside instead of keeping his distance behind.

Then, since they were both young, they forgot their absurdities of resentment as together they bent forward, rose in their stirrups over the withers of their two mounts and lifted them out of their dull canter into the explosive launching of the work-out against time.

Tolliver poised his light weight over the smooth-flowing shoulders of the brown with his hands close to the bit rings and his reins double wrapped.

The girl crouched with as professional a poise as his own and for a little space—a very little space indeed—she carried the old mare ahead of the colt.

"Come on, why don't you?" she taunted. "Are you going to let me run away from you?"

Tolliver made no answer. He was rating his mount to the fifths of seconds and he recognized her purpose. Mischief was in her and she realized that she could not long lead him. She could not even cling long to his saddle skirts or ride lapped on the brown flanks—but she was trying to make him forget his whirlwind mathematics; seeking out of the sheer devilry of fun to make him forget that he was to do the first furlong in thirteen and two fifths—no faster and no slower.

Tolliver was not forgetting but Fleetwing was bound by no impalpable stop-watch ticking in his brain. Here was opportunity for contest. He knew that and his abundant strength and hurricane fleetness chafed at being outfooled by an inferior, so he fought for his head and struggled to take the bit away from the hands that held it under wraps. He sought to bolt into a runaway and cut his own speed pattern.

The first post flashed by. The mare was now nose and nose and Tolliver gently loosened one wrap. Each of the next two furlongs he could travel two fifths of a second faster—and in the last he could cut loose!

The mare tossed her tail up, then down, in the signal of surrender and as she drifted rearward, the boy flung back a vicious challenge across his shoulder.

"C'mon, why don't ye? Are ye goin' to let me run away from ye?"

But the mare was hopelessly outfooted and trailing now and two more posts flashed by. Then Tolliver let out his last wrap and settled down to a hand ride. That last eighth was straightaway and the time ought to be almost as good as on the Downs. He was sustaining and supporting the brown head, seeming to lift and throw the speeding mass of horseflesh into a longer and a swifter stride, and the thing in his head told him that with a youngster which had never faced the flag and here on a country training track—though an unusually good one—he was reeling off a flat twelve.

He turned and trotted back when he had pulled up, passing, with no sign of recognition, the girl who had been his riding mate.

"What do you think of that colt, sir," demanded Colonel Parrish, who for all his seasoned control found the hand that held its stop watch trembling a little. "Don't you think he'll do?"

The Easterner started at the question as though his thoughts had been elsewhere.

"The colt—er, yes—decidedly," he answered. Then he laughed. "That colt is a comer," he testified enthusiastically. "But to tell you the truth I wasn't thinking of the colt. I was too much preoccupied with the boy."

All morning Tolliver Cornett's head had been in a swirl and from time to time he looked down with a thrill at the stable badge which he wore pinned to his sweater. They were back at Churchill Downs and in his old stall there stood Fleetwing, by Electron out of Blue Gown, who this afternoon was to face the flag for his first start.

Of course Tolliver was not to share the glory of that first victory, for he felt, with the faith of certainty, it would be a triumph. That honor belonged to Snip Button and Tolliver tried to banish envy from his heart. Stable secrets had been well kept

since the return to the Downs and only the stable staff knew with what fleet speed the son of Electron could carry weight over a route beyond the demands usually made upon his juvenile division so early in the season. Now, Tolliver reflected joyously, the colt would go to the post almost as an unknown, and the betting "talent" would disregard him with the scorn of ignorance.

"Waal let 'em," mused the boy. "They won't never dare neglect him herea'ter. This one time he'll pay a price."

And yet there would not be a dollar of gain in it for Tolliver Cornett. Colonel Parrish had impressed on him that the gambling temptation carries the seed of ruin for the beginning jockey and the boy had taken that text to heart.

It was Snip Button's undeniable right to pilot Fleetwing to-day and though he acknowledged it, the mountain lad felt a pang of heartache because he must watch that running from the ground.

He had ridden as an apprentice in a few inconsequential races back there at Lexington and only once had his mount been in the money—but then he had never been given a starter with a winning chance. His mounts had been put in only for racing work-outs and not as candidates for victory.

Now he drew from a hip pocket several form sheets thumbed to raggedness, wherein, with official brevity, appeared the statistical history of the events in which he had taken part. On one of those "dope sheets" appeared a footnote that he read over again now with a pitching pulse, though already he knew it by heart.

"Black Death was pocketed and knocked off his stride at the start but made up three lengths of ground on the home run. He was cleverly piloted by T. Cornett, an apprentice who got him up in time to take the show money by dint of classy riding."

It was the first time he had ever seen his name in print and to him it was the first taste of fame.

Now the trolley tracks were an unbroken crawl of overcrowded cars. The streets were freshets of motor traffic and the gates of the Churchill Downs were taps through which those mighty jets of holiday humanity poured, bubbling, into a common reservoir.

Across the infield intensely and freshly green under the May sun flashed the new paint of rapidly filling stands and clubhouse and the confettilike color scraps of bunting,

To Tolliver Cornett the Lexington races had been the gayest and biggest spectacle which had ever entered his experience or outdone his imagination. Now as the first strains from the band stand floated across to him he realized confusedly that this was to that as is saturnalia to a county fair—though of course he did not know what saturnalia was.

The first four races of that opening day Tolliver watched from the picket fence by his stable. The packed stands and lawns were remote and across the field, but the thunder of the back stretch, where is the beginning of the end, was under his eye, and in his ears was the hurricane hoof roar of bunched and flying silks, with their cacato of whipping silks, their wailing strain of stirrup leathers and their chorused babel of boys shouting to their mounts and cursing each other for crowding. And these are intimate noises that the grand stand never hears. Back there, too, the tails of horses that had been used too hard in early pace-making went up with the distress signal, and those that had been saved moved up in the fast procession.

The fourth race Tolliver did not see at all for, trembling as he had never trembled in his own races, he was watching the brown colt being prepared, and though he was not to ride him he was at least to go with him across that green stretch of field and into the paddock beyond. He was to stand with him in his stall and when post call sounded he was to lead him out, with Snip in the saddle, to the gate of the track itself. An ague of stage fright shook him, not for himself but for the son of Electron, and he found himself almost sobbing as he stroked the brown nose and muttered exhortations into the brown ear.

Then came that avalanche of sound which he knew. It was the many-thousand-throated howl that goes along the stretch with the decisive strides of a finish.

"All right, boys, lead him out!" ordered Colonel Parrish quietly. "He has stall four in the paddock."

With knees that knocked together Tolliver Cornett found himself holding the bit ring and whispering to a brown colt while the green infield and the stands beyond swam giddily before his eyes. Behind him came negro rubbers with towels and sweat scrapers, and at his side walked Colonel Parrish.

## CHAPTER VII.

The program announced this event as a half-mile dash for two year olds, with a field of eight, and there was only one scratched entry.

That meant seven youngsters to line up at the barrier, none of them thoroughly schooled to the noise and excitement of the breakaway and two or three of them facing that ordeal for the first time. It was the sort of field that tries the patience of a starter and frets the nerves of a jockey. It was the sort of field that often leaves a favorite standing flatfooted at the post when the rest are away and on the wing.

Now as he led the lightly blanketed Fleetwing around a circle under a spreading buck-eye tree on the paddock lawn Tolliver's head spun giddily. Once in a while he looked up at the roof of the jockey room where, sitting perched on the rail, were a half dozen boys in tack and colors, and sometimes when he glanced at the close-pressing crowds of race-going men and women he burned red with the realization that he was gulping nervously. "Plumb like a gawk from back among the branch-water folks—that ain't never seen nothin'," he nervously reproached himself.

Then came the flurry of a bugle—the saddling call—and Tolliver led his charge into stall four, where the blankets were stripped off, leg bandages finally tested, saddle cloths delicately adjusted and girths recinched. The colt waited with his veins nervously upstanding under his satin coat and his nostrils redly distended. His flanks quivered and Tolliver whispered reassuringly to him and stroked his nose.

Into the stall, nonchalant and self-complacent as a moving-picture favorite, strolled Snip Button in the white-and-cherry quarters of the Parrish silks with his bat thrust into his boot top. He stood there waiting and then again came the brazen voice of the bugle—mounting call this—and a stentorian command from the paddock judge, "Lead 'em out."

Colonel Parrish himself gave Button a leg-up and the boy leaned from the saddle for his last word of instruction as he thrust his feet home into the irons.

Tolliver, trembling so that his fingers balked, yet obedient to the already ingrained technique, knotted the rein ends close on Fleetwing's neck, and taking the bit ring led the brown out of his stall to his place as

fourth in the procession that was to parade for inspection.

At the track gate he must stand aside. His work was done and from now on Snip Button was in sole command.

As the gate swung closed after the last starter, a black filly, Tolliver clung to its palings and hung far over.

Fleetwing who, for him, always went about his work with a quiet and unexcited ease was nervous now and just beyond the gate he plunged suddenly and began to curvet fretfully, thrusting for the bit.

Button took him up quickly and it seemed to Tolliver with a needless rough handedness and drove the unarmed side of his boot heel against the colt's side.

The youngsters in their queue of bright jackets trailed past the kiosk where the judicial eye overlooked them and then, each dismissed with a nod, they set out at a canter for the starting point at the half pole across the track. But the son of Electron was fuming and threatening to bolt and Button took him to the outside of the track and held him close reefed, so that he danced crabwise and sweated fretfully as he made his way to the barrier.

Watching these things Tolliver fretted too. Fleetwing was missing him and sulking under an unfamiliar bridle hand and Fleetwing had somewhere under his acquired docility that dash of devil in him that had caused so much anxiety in the early days of his handling.

"They're at the post," went up the shout at last, and the mountain boy strained forward until the tops of the pickets bit into his chest.

Over there was a wheeling, plunging tangle of horseflesh and colored jackets—a kaleidoscopic shifting. The field was never fronting one way. It milled and kicked and fumed and whenever it seemed ready to be sent off something spun capriciously about and showed its tail to the starter, whose expostulations were drowned in the distance.

The undisciplined babies were in a collective tantrum. Heels lashed out and across the infield one could hear the pistol-like crack of black-snake whips. Exasperated "hold-on Johnnies" swung on to the bits and sought to hurl the disorderly youngsters into their places with the futility of man power against horse power.

Tolliver's eyes were glued on a shirt of white and cherry quarterings and his hands

were clamping the gate top. He did not feel the pressure of men who leaned against him from behind.

Then there was a growling outcry, as another effort to get them away failed and something wheeled, reared high and bolted—the wrong way of the track.

Tolliver groaned with utter despair. It was a brown colt whose rider was in cherry and white—and beyond doubt it had taken the bit for a runaway.

Those things that jockeys do Button did. He sought to wrest the bit out of the clamped teeth and to pull the head sideways. He carried Fleetwing to the extreme outside of the track; which a race horse knows by all the instincts of his training is not a place dedicated to speed. But the son of Electron had gone bad. The rubber-coated steel of the bit was clamped viselike in his strong teeth. He reached for his head and felt his power almost pulling Button over his withers and then he was away like a cyclone which once started is beyond control. With the bar in his teeth like that, it was the power of a horse against the strength of less than a hundred pounds of boy—and skill was scrapped.

The multitude howled its derisive disgust and Button, artful in his business, worked frantically and fought hard at the brakes. But it was only as he came in front of the grand stand itself, going the reverse way of the track, that the furious speed which no one was timing subsided to a gallop and fell off to a curvetting and snorting fret.

"Take him out," bawled a voice as the chorus dwindled. "Take him out!"

The Parrish jockey paid no heed to the yells that battered in his ears. He wheeled his mount and let the field wait over there while he made his way cautiously back. The longer they fretted and pitched about in the dust during this delay the more would be taken out of those others—that had not already raced a half mile. But as he went, with the sweat running into his eyes and blinding him, the boy was thinking hard and foxily. This youngster that he rode was, as he knew, precocious in strength and endurance. It was a bare possibility that even yet his untried reserves of power might hold the stamina to win—but that would be almost a miracle and at his age and at this early season the asking of such a performance might endanger his future useful-

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Button was sore and with good reason. A friend had placed a heavy bet for him on his own mount and that bet had not been for place or show but for a straight win. "No—don't spread it across the board," he had instructed his commissioner. "Shoot the works flat on the nose."

Now the race must be abandoned, so far as first money went, and if it was to be lost at all there was no sense in straining the colt's strength or uncovering his abilities. The poorer his performance now the better would be the price about him on his next time out. The public was disgusted—let them stay that way for the present.

He came back and a "hold-on Johnny" swung to his bit. They had stopped caring now whether the brown was left at the post or not. He had forfeited all right to consideration.

The webbing of the barrier flew up, the starting judge bawled, "Go on!" and it was only as the field went plunging away that the starter's assistant let go his hold on the brown's mouth. As Fleetwing vaulted madly forward after the others the hold-on Johnny speeded him with the best he could give from his long black whip.

The Electron colt was winging after them, lengths behind at the start, yet running as though he were fresh from his stall, but Button took up a wrap and sat steady choking off his ardor and holding his undistinguished position. He was not illegitimately "pulling" his mount. He was merely, as racing ethics sanctioned, saving a colt that had already had enough work, and accepting the fortunes of war. Yet Fleetwing was not trailing the field and finishing "absolutely" because he had to. With such a ride as Snip could have given him he might even yet have overhauled the ruck. He might have picked up and passed the straggling rear division in the stretch and finished as well as third. Snip alone knew what a residue of power he was suppressing—he and a boy who was glued to the paddock gate.

The race was run and the steaming colts and fillies came back to the judges' stand. Tolliver Cornett was waiting there with a blanket over his arm and he was chalk white to the line of his hair. He looked at the lime semicircle, into which only the winner steps, and saw a red-headed boy in a green jacket ride a black filly into it and raise his whip hand in salute. He saw the boy slip down and nestle his head against the

black barrel as he loosed his girths and took his saddle and weight pads over his elbow to weigh out. Then on the outer edge of the horse group he saw Fleetwing standing—"like a poor boy at a frolic" as he told himself, gulping down a throat lump that seemed strangling him—and he went over with his blanket.

Back at the barn as he scraped and rubbed and talked comfortingly to the colt whose fine head hung ingloriously he was fighting a battle between the demands of a stoic code and almost uncontrollable tears that burned back of his eyes. To him this thing was raw tragedy, and Colonel Parrish, who had followed across the infield, stood watching him for a half minute before Tolliver knew that he was there. As he looked on a light of amusement and interest kindled in the owner's eye. His own philosophy, long trained in defeat and victory, was unruffled.

"Tolliver," he said and the boy straightened up with a violent start as if the sound of his name had been a whip lash, "if you had been riding that race—after the runaway—what would you have done?"

Tolliver had to gulp again before he could answer.

"There wouldn't have been no runaway," he declared wrathfully.

"Perhaps not—but suppose there had been?"

"After that, I wouldn't skeercely have broke him down by sufferin' him to run two races, I reckon," admitted the boy reluctantly. "I reckon what Snip Button did was the seemly thing to do, but——"

He broke off and turned away. The tears were threatening his eyes and in defense he glowered sullenly.

"Don't take it too hard, son," smiled Colonel Parrish. "This game is built on uncertainty and the cloud has its silver lining, after all."

Tolliver straightened up and his glance was questioning.

"I had a sentimental feeling that I wanted that colt to be unbeaten," went on Colonel Parrish, "and for once I thought I had that kind of colt."

"If he'd only got away——" began Tolliver defensively and the owner raised his hand.

"If he'd gotten away," the colonel took him up, "he'd have spread-eagled his field. True enough, but he didn't get away." He



Colonel  
Lay. Chimney  
in the classic with But-  
p. If he wins I won't be astonished.  
If he loses I'll be still less astonished."

Tolliver wasn't passionately interested in Chimney Swift and his expression showed it.

"That's the fifth race on the card," continued the breeder, "and the fourth is the Bashford Manor, for two-year-old colts and geldings—with a purse of five thousand."

"Ye aims to win it with Fleetwing—don't ye?" The voice leaped excitedly and again the colonel smiled his quiet smile which was altogether a matter of the eyes.

"I aim to start him," he said, "and because he seems to be so fussy about his rider—I aim to give you the leg-up, son. I should say it's your big chance."

Then, despite his stoic ethics the tears brimmed over and Tolliver found himself jerking the sleeve of his sweater across his eyes.

Tom Burtley stood rolling a cigarette on the steps of the time-bitten old courthouse at Hixon. The steep panorama that closed about the mountain town had lost its first strangeness to him now and in the place of that first strangeness had come something else. The brooding spirit of those high-shouldered ridges had a fashion of getting under a man's skin, of stealing into a man's neck. He had sat at the doors of smoky cabins up creek-bed roads and watched the moon come up in silver over cobalt walls, when the little waters sang their lullaby and the whippoorwills called and all the night voices became softly vocal. At these times a wizardry of beauty had come over him like a tide. He had heard ancient song ballads crooned to the plaintive plucking of banjo and "dulcimore," and in the witchery of it all he had felt preconceived ideas crumbling and altering. If he stayed here long enough he might become so mountainized as to almost accept certain habits of thought that had, a little while ago, seemed incomprehensible.

He was seeing how, up here, a fierce content for life went hand in hand with a

business  
and dignity—and he  
that Malone and Cropper had  
been able to victimize these souls so damn-  
ably because of their simple, if twisted, vir-  
tues.

"Ye talks a heap about law, sonny," had drawled an old man who had with a totally disarming simplicity led him up a laureled ravine and shown him his moonshine still.

"Ye talks a heap about law, an' yet w'ere did these here laws come from in the first place—God A'mighty? Mebby some sev'ral on 'em did an' a righteous man ain't licensed to tamper with 'em none. But most on 'em was jest projicked up by men, like you an' me, an' I reckon men like you an' me are licensed to spew 'em outen our mouths if we've got a mind to."

This rustic sage had paused and sent a cloud of tobacco smoke out between his raggedly bearded lips.

"Mebby in some fashions we're ornery up here an' mebby we're fair to middlin' godly, too. I reckon if ye takes by an' large, folks kinderly balances up." Again he paused then capped his preachment dryly: "I've done took note that there ain't but one point-blank mean family of human critters livin' an there ain't never been but one—an' that's them that's done come down from Adam an' Eve."

But there in the courtroom witnesses had evaded and shied and palpably perjured themselves. Court officers had brought back with returns of "not found" many commonwealth subpoenas. Yet the story which "Old" Tolliver Cornett was writing into the stenographic record of that murder trial was one of which the ugly truth was inescapable and Burtley as he sat at his table in the cobwebbed courtroom, with his pencil racing, marveled that the face of Tom Malone remained clear and unconcerned—so close did the shadow of the gallows seem to creep and darken over the place where he sat.

"Are you worried, judge?" the scribe had once or twice made facetious inquiry and the response had always come with a smile.

"I'm worried right smart, sonny. P'intedly worried. I'm a-fearin' these proceedin's 'll drag along so dilitary thet I won't get down there to Looeyville in time to see the Derby run, an' I'd done plumb set my heart on seein' that hoss race."

Now after long days of it the end was

Capas

audience became the  
sans of the accused. This passion  
pressed itself in no violence of word or tone.  
It was almost deadly in its quietness but  
unmistakable and strong.

On these things Burtley was pondering  
as he lounged at the courthouse door while  
the sun was westering, and, as he thought,  
the answer came to him. In the rootage of  
this people's belief as to life and justice one  
principle was the tap root: it went down  
below the subsoil and wedged itself in the  
granite.

"Let us govern ourselves, right or wrong,"  
ran their creed. "We would rather be infamously  
ruled at home than perfectly and  
justly from abroad."

"And after all," mused Tommy with a  
new philosophy, "that's the rock we're built  
on as a nation—though it seems to be pretty  
generally forgotten."

This last afternoon had shaken the young  
reporter. Throughout its hours he had listened  
to the arguments of counsel: The  
attorneys for the defense, facing an array of  
black and proven guilt, had seemed almost  
languid; well-nigh bored. It was as if they  
knew their jury and felt all this to be only  
a formality which must be emptily observed,  
yet which would in no wise affect results.

But Cornett had swept the boy, as he listened,  
under a cascade of forcefulness, under  
a blistering of invective and denunciation  
that had seemed to shake the corners  
of the house like the roar of a chimney fire.  
It had scorched and consumed with a crude  
but genuine eloquence and it had ripped pre-  
tenses with the rough edge of untaught  
genius.

Now came the conclusion. After the supper  
recess the jury was to be locked up for  
conference and verdict—and Malone sat inside  
chatting with friends as though he were  
holding a reception.

Up the street where razor-backed hogs  
wallowed in mudholes lounged the proces-  
sion of venire men. Most of them were  
shirt-sleeved and one or two of them walked  
in bare feet. At their head, also coatless  
and shaggy-maned, came the sheriff carry-  
ing the long staff cut with a jackknife from  
a hickory sapling and with the armpit hol-  
ster of his pistol outside his open vest.

Again the bell in the cupola clanged its  
summons, as that grim parade filed into the

picturesque  
his lank height  
from the chair in which  
lone slouched impassive.

"I feel," answered Cornett simply, yet  
with a voice of imprisoned passion, "that  
the man is guilty and his guilt proven be-  
yond reasonable doubt. That ought to be  
enough." He broke off and raised a  
clenched hand to let it fall inertly again at  
his side. "But proving a case doesn't mean  
a conviction in this district—and after all  
it is I, not he, whose fate is being decided  
in that jury room."

"You!" Burtley questioned, though he  
thought he understood. "You're not on trial  
here."

"If they free him," came the weary re-  
sponse, "they might as well hang me. I've  
declared war and it's war without quarter.  
I'm reasonably sure of life so long as the  
soldiers stay—and possibly long enough  
thereafter to let the excitement die down.  
After that——" He shrugged his shoulders.

"They can hardly refuse to convict—even  
here," protested Burtley and as he spoke,  
though the panel had been out less than  
five minutes, a rap sounded on the door of  
the jury room, echoed by a gavel rap from  
the bench.

"There's your answer," announced Cor-  
nett, sinking his voice to a bitterly ironical  
undertone. "It didn't take them long to  
decide a question that has been thrashed  
out before them for weeks, did it?"

The shaggy line of men filed slouchingly  
into the courtroom and stood in a semicircle  
before the dais, while the voice of the judge  
made formal inquiry: "Gentlemen, have  
you arrived at a verdict?"

The foreman nodded and handed a slip  
of paper to the clerk, and the clerk dispens-  
ing with a full reading announced briefly,  
"Not guilty."

By his table Tolliver Cornett stood gather-  
ing his papers and his law books. He  
said nothing but his face was dead white  
and in his eyes for an instant the reporter  
read such a look as might have been ex-  
pected there had the words of the foreman  
been his own death sentence.

## CHAPTER VIII.

"The soldiers are breaking camp this morning, sir, and I must go back with them this afternoon. I've come to say good-by."

Young Burtley had not entered Tolliver Cornett's law office this morning without knocking. The weeks of his stay here had taught him some lessons.

He had found the prosecutor standing by the window of the room with hands gripped at his back, looking off at the purple of the mountaintops, and he looked out of eyes that were tired to desperation, yet doggedly unyielding.

"I'm glad you dropped in on me, son, for a word of farewell," came the slow acknowledgment of the older man. "You have seen the court debauched and the jury system degraded and through your eyes you have made the outside world see something of it, too. Perhaps some day the people may care enough to stop such things."

"I didn't do much," began Tommy modestly, but the other shook his head.

"You did a great deal that was well worth doing. There were times when I feared that even for you the incident might not end safely."

"And you, sir——"

The lawyer raised his hands and let them fall again at his side. It was his gesture for passing with philosophy under the yoke of the inevitable.

"My job isn't done yet," he said. "It's just beginning. I can only watch my step and hope for luck."

"But surely duty doesn't flog a man on forever to undertake the impossible!" protested the young lowlander with some heat. "You've made a conscientious effort and if you've failed it's not your own fault. Now, you can, with good conscience, call quits. Your own life is worth something to the community and to your family."

The lawyer's face hardened to a stonier grimness. He stood for a moment quiet as his eyes kindled, and then a molten wrath broke from them.

This was the figure of a man grotesquely thorough in his passions, alike in his devotion and his hates, and when he spoke again the reporter knew that those passions could be broken only under the sledge of actual destruction.

"Call quits, did you say?" he echoed incredulously as though he could not believe a friend had expressed so craven a senti-

ment. "Call quits with the man whose hand I refused to take when court adjourned—the man who means to murder me for challenging his infamies? Young man, I hardly think I can have heard you aright."

"You have made your fight, sir. It's a lost cause now."

"By God, no!" The voice rang out like a battle shout. "Most of the great causes have been lost—or all but lost—before they were won. When I go down I'm going down in a fight—not tamely." He broke off and stood with clenched hands and head thrown back; with eyes that were black pits of jetty flame.

"You have seen behind the curtain here. You have seen a mockery made of the law because the murderer owned the court: because every official upon whom I had the right to depend was *his* slave and because every witness perjured himself out of terror. Yet I know beyond doubt that more than half of those witnesses would have gladly told the truth had they dared. That same jury panel would have sent Malone to the gallows with a hurrah of fervor if every member hadn't known he must ride home afterward along laurel hills where death waited." Again the vibrant voice broke off and the lawyer's chest heaved to a mighty emotion.

"And am I to let this country rest under such a curse of terror? Am I to doom every wife in the mountains to live waiting all-ways for the shadow of murder to fall on her home and children?"

"Yet what more can you do?"

Cornett paced the floor until he had commanded his wrath, then in a quieter voice he said: "The next phase of my fight is before the State assembly. A law must be passed permitting change of venue on the motion of the commonwealth in such cases. Our present statutes give no such permission. It must be possible to take the cock off his own dunghill—to compel him to face an unterrified jury. That is my next campaign. Softwidge has pledged his help—my other cases won't be tried here. I can bide my time, but before God I don't quit!"

Across the narrow street from the courthouse, at that same moment, and in a room above the place which bore the legend, "Malone's Mammoth General Store," another man was looking on at the entraining preparations of the troops with a different emotion.

Tom Malone stood in that upper room alone. He had just dismissed Cropper, who was riding back to his own house at the head of Stagnorn, and was waiting for another confidential associate.

He heard a step on the stair and then a rap at the door and his voice gave brief permission to entry.

The man who came in was not yet thirty and he presented to the eye little that was pleasing of aspect. His hair was long and moist and his face sneering and malevolent. His breath reeked of raw and illicit whisky—and his name had been often spoken from the witness stand in the days that had just ended.

The newcomer closed the door behind him and came cautiously over to the table. His voice when he spoke was low but atrempble with suppression of passion.

"I 'lowed ye'd be sendin' after me, Tom," he announced tersely. "so I come along without bein' fetched."

"Why did you 'low that, Bert?" inquired the former county judge suavely, and the somewhat inflamed eyes of the younger man glittered sharply.

"Their milishymen are goin' away, ain't they? I reckon ye aims to have me get Tolliver Cornett now, don't ye?"

Malone raised his brows and affected a large surprise.

"Why should I want you to get Cornett?" he demanded. "He's brewed his little pot of broth—an' scalded himself, ain't he? I've done come clear, haven't I? He didn't avail in seekin' to hamper me in the penitenshery, did he? Seems like I ought to be fair to middlin' satisfied."

Incredulity filled the eyes of Bert Heaton. He stood staring with a jaw that dropped. This was a reversal of all precedent. Heretofore a man had challenged the authority of the Malones and the Croppers at his peril, and failing of success had paid the price. Bert Heaton knew because more than once Bert had been designated to exact that payment.

A man does not perform such tasks for the love of the butcher's trade. Bert had, in the first place, accepted his responsibilities and their attendant perils only because he feared his master more than the dangers to which obedience committed him. Now it might have been expected that his face would have cleared from its ill temper to the more sunny aspect of relief.

But it was not so. The man was shaken by a gusty rage that burned in his eyes and snarled at his lips, revealing an ugly and yellowed raggedness of teeth. His breath labored in his throat and chest and he came closer and rested his knuckles on the top of the table that separated him from Tom Malone.

"Afore this here trial come on," he declared speaking gaspingly in his tenseness and larding his sentences with profuse obscenities, "ye posted me up here in this same room, an' ye giv' me a shotgun loaded with buck, to git that ornery bird when he went by."

"And," observed Malone dryly, "you failed to get him."

"He was a-totin' a baby in his arms," the assassin made reminder, "an' I wa'n't hired to slay young children. I'd done besought ye, in the first place, to let me have a rifle gun 'stid of a scatter gun—an' yet ye faulted me fer holdin' my hand that time. Ye censured me an' tongue-lashed me. Ye said there wasn't no sense in bein' so persnicketty about the brat—he'd have to be kilt some day anyhow because he was the breed that needed killin'. Like as not ye disremembers all that, Tom?"

"Maybe I do, Bert." The words came with the chill of an ice shower. "An' maybe if I disremembers it, it might be as well for you to do likewise."

"Mebby so an' mebbly not!"

Here in Hixon County the germ of a new and disquieting development seemed to be incubating. Here was a murder hireling speaking in a tone of bold insolence that savored of mutiny and Tom Malone straightened and stiffened. He leaned forward until his eyes were close to those of his rebellious underling and from them rained blistering torrents of wrath. But his tone was chillingly cool.

"Bert Heaton," he inquired, dropping into the dialect beyond the wont of his quieter moments and into a nasal roughness of voice, "did ye fare up here to censure me an' backbite me? Since when did ye get to be so survigrous strong thet ye dasts to lay down the law to me? If I spoke the word to-day ye'd lay dead afore sunup, an' full well ye knows it. When I wants a dog of mine to come I whistles him up—an' until I whistles ye can scratch at your fleas outside."

But this seemed to be a new Bert Heaton.

and though he flinched houndlike from habit, under the verbal lash, he speedily recovered himself and thrust his bloodshot eyes close again.

"Does ye know what this Cornett aims to do?" he demanded. "He aims to get that furrin' jedge workin' down below. He aims to boil his next kittle in the legislater an' to change the law so they can drag us down an' try us in their lowland country, where every man disgusts the mountings. Ye says ye can have me kilt to-night—an' that's gospel. Likewise I can kill *you* to-night—an' once we-uns that have done hung together falls apart—we'll all fare to the gallows sure as hell's hot."

Malone felt for the first time that his victory there in court had not been complete. Its developments left in the consciousness of his henchmen an inkling of their own powers in rebellion, but to acknowledge such a thing would be folly.

"Bert," he said, "hearken to me right heedful. I've done kept ye outen jail an' I've done supported ye. If ye aims to fall out with me, do it now. Ye've got a short gun there under your armpit. I ain't armed—but unless ye kills me here an' now don't never open yore face to yap at me again, withouten ye seeks death."

He broke off his ultimatum and stood waiting while, for a taut interval, the two glared across the narrow table.

Bert Heaton's hand crept toward his holster and touched the pistol grip; then it crept aimlessly away again. His eyes faltered and dropped—because, as Malone knew, a man can only control others, whether in good or evil mastery, by inherent power, and he had both tested and proved that power of control in himself. And a man only murders for hire because he is weak and must rest in the shade of a greater strength—and such was Heaton.

So Malone went through these elongated moments when he was physically at the mercy of this enraged minion, with lashes that never flickered and a smile that never lost its satirical ascendancy, and when he knew that the weaker man had wilted his voice became almost conciliatory.

"Now listen, son," he said. "Ye've done displeasured me but I forgives ye because ye've served me faithful aforesimes. Why are ye so rampageous to kill an enemy that's a'ready licked?"

"Because he ain't licked, Tom." The an-

swer came quick, though the manner was now a wavering between the cringing and the rebellious. "Tolliver Cornett ain't never licked till he's dead. In this here last trial he was a-goin' after you. Next time hit'll be me. He can't handily get his witnesses to talk free on the witness chair, but he knows I laid in a la'el hill for Red MacVey—an' once he gets his co'te settin' down below he'll plumb *prove* it. He'll have me as dead to rights as a fish on a mountaintop."

The man broke off gaspingly, then went hurriedly on again. Palpable terror was riding him with spurs and lash.

"If he lives another year it means I'll hang. I done them things for *you* an' now ye aims to let him live long enough to ruin me. All right, Tom. I ain't never kilt a man afore onlessen ye bade me to do it. Now, if need be, I reckon I can act for myself."

For a few balanced moments Tom Malone stood reflective, then he nodded and his voice was as ingratiating as the pur of a cream-fed kitten.

"Bert," he said, "Cornett doesn't know such a lavish about ye as what I knows. If ye breaks with me I don't handily see how ye can go free for long. I can hang ye or penitenshery ye at will, an' albeit I likes ye, I'll be compelled to act that a way if ye defies me. I'm plumb bound to keep my rules. Nonetheless, ye're right in a fashion an' while I gen'rally keeps my own counsel until I'm ready to talk, I'm a-goin' to tell ye a thing now that no other man don't know."

"I'm hearkenin' to ye," came the non-committal response.

Tom Malone went over and looked out of the window. He stood there for a matter of minutes in deep preoccupation; then he wheeled.

"I thought ye confided me, Bert," he said quietly. "I thought ye knowed full well that I ain't never let no man get away yet that I'd done marked down to die." He paused and a black light blazed in his eyes.

"I've done marked Tolliver Cornett down to die. I ain't a grudge-bearin' man but it's plumb needful for him to die—albeit I aims to use my own judgment as to when it comes to pass—an' it can't be right now."

"Why can't it?"

"Because the soldiers are just goin' away

—an' we don't seek to have 'em come back in no tormentin' haste. Because the newspapers down below have done been advertisin' our lawlessness to all men."

"To hell with the furriners!"

"That's right, too, Bert. But they fergits quick. Come corn-shuckin' time they won't remember Tolliver Cornett no more—an' when they fergits him I'll send for ye again, Bert. Till that day we can both of us bide our time."

"An' in that time what-all can *he* do?"

"Mebby not much more than I can do, Bert, if ye displeasure me too far. If ye'd been smarter than me, son, mebby ye might be where I am now. As things stand, ye've either got to go on confidencin' me—or else have me for an enemy 'stid of a frien'."

The man whose status in life had depended on his marvelous skill as a marksman seemed to shrink with a realization of relative powers.

"I ain't seekin' to fault ye none, Tom," he made sheepish confession. "I only wanted to make sure ye hadn't done been beguiled into lettin' Cornett live on an' run too free."

"I ain't beguiled none, Bert. I've done writ Cornett's name down to die. Only I aims to use some horse sense afore I fixes on the day."

Heaton jerked his head in a nod of forced assent and went out, closing the door softly behind him.

For the race track at Churchill Downs there is one day in the year and its name is Derby Day. If one reads the program one sees that the first field goes to the post at two-thirty, but the large excitement and the abounding romance begin with dawn.

Every barn that shelters under its roof a three-year-old colt, gelding or filly royal enough for eligibility is up and making ready from daybreak.

From the Parrish stables Chimney Swift was to carry the white and cherry quarterings into the *mêlée* with a fair chance of victory, and in public talk his name was a coin that passed current from tongue to tongue. So overshadowing is the interest of this classic race that every lesser contest on the day's card is eclipsed into a triviality, by contrast. But Colonel Parrish himself realized that if, in Chimney Swift, he saddled the Derby winner to-day, it would be a windfall of golden fortune due to the

caprice of racing luck. There were colts and geldings there that should outfoot Chimney Swift over the mile-and-quarter route unless some break of chance favored him—he would hardly come home victorious unless some better youngster was pocketed or bumped or unless some jockey lost his head and threw the race away.

Yet he himself was not greatly disturbed by these realizations. He felt sure that his colt would run in the money—and so would more than "pay for his groceries," and later in the season with more work under his girth he would be likely to win almost equally coveted handicaps. To-day he hoped to surprise the racing world. To-day, with the big event eclipsing lesser things in general attention, his own sentiment was wrapped up in the capture of the Bashford Manor Stakes and in springing on an unsuspecting public a sensational claimant for preëminence in the two-year-old division.

The colonel thought sanely of the matter but the boy who was to ride the juvenile in the Bashford Manor Stakes had been in a state of exaltation that bordered on unbalance. Last night he had brought his blanket out of his own sleeping quarters and had spread it on the straw against the wall of Fleetwing's stall.

Lying there, almost under the heels of a horse that had once been accounted a man-killer, he had had a nervous chill, due to excitement and hope. He had shaken it out with his teeth chattering, wakeful, until the night had spent itself far along, and sleep crept over him near dawn.

Tolliver Cornett had awakened from that restlessness with jumpy nerves but with the assurance of triumph, and though his cheeks were pale and his pulses jerking he had managed to get through the day's early hours with an outward seeming of laconic calm.

But that morning, freshly back from the mountains, young Tom Burtley came out to the track. He had many new points to cover but before visiting them he went to the Parrish barn to seek out young Cornett and deliver his message.

"So he lost out?" said the boy dismally. "I feared me he didn't have no real chance—an' yet I didn't skeercely dare to lay by hope."

"He's not through yet," Tommy gave reassurance. "He has an idea of a legislative

amendment that will perhaps open the whole matter up again."

The boy, who had been palpitating with anticipation, who had felt the magic of that spring morning with its promise of great achievement, seemed to shrink into himself and to shudder with some grim sense of foresight.

"He's not through yet," he echoed slowly. "An' yet I mistrusts he's done been doomed."

"Why?" demanded the reporter militantly. "My own opinion is that though he's fighting against odds he's got them on the run. He made a wonderful fight and at the end of the trial Malone came up and offered to shake hands. Your father refused."

The boy stood wriggling the toe of his shoe in the dust.

"When he did that," he declared with a somber conviction, "he knowed he was elected to die. Malone's just waitin' for the soldiers to get away. I reckon he's a'ready give his orders to the hired man he's picked out for his killin'!"

He broke off and his body was suddenly shaken. "But I come after him," he declared passionately. "An' I reckon he won't die without he's paid for."

He stood there against the background of the freshly whitewashed barn and on the verge of his own great opportunity and across the sparkle and the throb of it, the intoxication of it, fell the shadow of his mountain heritage. His thin face became gray and his eyes burned into momentary ferocity.

## CHAPTER IX.

Tolliver Cornett did not, on this day of days, watch the running of the first races from across the track. To-day with all the boys who were to have mounts in the six events of the card he had answered roll call in the jockey room. From now until his duties ended he was a prisoner under lock and key by the law which the stewards lay down, to isolate riders precisely as if they were jurors. It was an imprisonment which he could endure without grievance and, looking smaller than in his street clothes, he perched on the rail atop his place of confinement, his thin legs incased in soft racing boots and the white breeches of his uniform—his body jacketed in the Parrish silks of white-and-cherry quarterings.

Below him seethed a multitudinous ferment in which individual entities were lost. To-day the sporting world had eyes for this spot only. Those measureless crowds tallied not in thousands but in scores of thousands, congested stands and lawns and overflowed into the infield where they sweated and elbowed while squads of mounted police rode them back, Cossacklike, from carrying away the fences. Only in the boxes and favored reservations of the clubhouse could shoulders swing free or lungs breathe unrestrictedly. The betting inclosures were maelstroms of slow and panting battle, yet over the whole yeasty ferment lay a golden sunlight and the thousands laughed as they jostled and bared their heads to the light breeze. Pennants took the air with light palpitations of color and as one brass band fell off its blaring gayety another took up its jazzing relay.

Between compact human walls the track itself lay smooth and clear and lightening fast, and the announcement boards loomed high and readable.

The magnet that had drawn them there in motor cars and trolleys and on foot, unendingly astream since early morning, was that event which tradition has hallowed since "the little red hoss," Aristides, won its first running. The lure that had beckoned in a score of special trains, dumped a second townful on top of a city and laid siege to every hotel until it closed its doors in despair was the Kentucky Derby. That was a race which Tolliver Cornett was to watch from the ground, and yet when its field paraded to the post, the day would for him be ended, in inexpressible triumph or unutterable defeat.

Now he perched there on the jockey-house roof gallery and looked down on it all. While the other boys chattered wisely in the argot of their calling he sat as nearly aloof as the confinement of the quarters permitted and schooled his face into an iron quiet, while his heart and arteries were aflood with quicksilver.

Through the feverish excitement of that afternoon Tolliver had maintained a stolid front, yet under that masquerade of manner he wondered whether he could ride at all and gravely doubted it. Now when opportunity had come, he feared that his delicate judgment of pace had gone dead in his brain. He felt that his surety of hand had deserted him and so unsteady was his con-

fidence that if Fleetwind lunged, in all that uproar, he thought he must fall from the saddle.

Sitting here over the heads of the slow eddying multitude, and looking down on the mad game in which more than a half million dollars would change hands to-day, he was seeing a picture strangely remote from the spirit of his surroundings.

His fancy was picturing a steep upheaval of forested peaks and he was seeing a lonely man there who had defied powers greater than his strength; who had made a bitter fight and lost it—who perhaps faced the bitterer consequence of reprisal. The specter of assassination for that man haunted Tolliver as he sat in his white-and-cherry motley and he knew now that it had haunted his father too. That was why he had been sent away to this safer life, which already seemed his natural life.

There was nothing he could do about it now, just as there was nothing which he would leave undone, if the nightmare turned to truth, but to-day his job lay here and to-day his bridle hand mustn't tremble with vague premonitions nor his racing judgment be muddled with forebodings and broodings.

Yet the first and second races had seemed to swim through his consciousness as things taking place at a great and nebulous distance, and a clammy, despairing sweat stole out on the boy's face. He who had been armored in self-confidence was in a blue funk. He wondered whether he oughtn't to confess to Colonel Parrish that he had crumpled under the strain and that for him to take a horse out there to-day meant only to disgrace himself and sacrifice the mount's chances of victory.

The other boys who had ridden in those first races had come back hot and dust caked into the jockey room. Their voices rose loud and contentious as they wrangled in post mortems over issues that were already dead, but above them, on the roof Tolliver Cornett slumped in this strange apathy that he had never known before.

"It's a big crowd to shame myself before," he told himself shudderingly.

Then it was time to go below and make ready and he stumbled down the ladder as if going to ordeal instead of victory. He found his valet adjusting his wristbands and tying the tape of his peaked cap and mounted the scales as if in a dream with

his light saddle and weight pads over his forearm. He almost quailed before the inquisitorial eyes of the official who shot at him perfunctory questions of equipment.

"Bat?"

"Yes, sir."

"Spurs?"

"Yes, sir."

"Blinkers?"

Tolliver straightened as if in resentment for a blow as he shot back his truculent answer, "No," and this time he omitted the deferential "sir."

Now blinkers are also known as the rogue's badge, and they put their blindfolding restrictions only on the bad actor who cannot be trusted to look bravely at his adversaries. They permit him to see only straight ahead and deny him side vision, and when a horse runs in blinkers he tacitly makes confession that no confidence in his common sense follows him. At such an imputation for Fleetwing the boy shot out his reply in a vocal spurt of wrath.

That little prickling seemed to bring him back to sanity—to focus him to steadiness. His nerves stopped jumping and became quiet. His eye ceased to wander and brightened and now in his ears sounded the uproar of a finish and his race was next.

He waited in a sort of suspended animation, yet with a sense of keenness, and when the bugle from the track sounded its fanfare and the voice inside shouted, "Boys out," he was among the first to pass through the door and make his way along the tanbark to the saddling paddock.

These slight silk-clad lads walked between walls of men and women from the four quarters of the continent, but to Tolliver Cornett, just now, they were no more individual than fenceposts would have been. At the door of the stall he saw Colonel Parrish, and standing with him the Eastern millionaire who had on that other day skeptically set him the task of judging pace.

As Tolliver went into the stall the Easterner caught his hand and shook it. "Good luck, boy," he said heartily, and Tolliver felt as though a fresh strength had passed through his grasped hand and into his heart.

He stood for a moment at the colt's head. He noted that again the two year old was trembling as with an ague and that his nostrils stood wide and feverishly red. He stroked the nose and the satin neck. He whispered something into the twitching ears



—and they quieted into an alert composure. Then the bugle spoke again and a voice sounded out, "Boys up!"

Tolliver turned his face from the back of the stall to the front and then abruptly, as he was about to give his foot to Colonel Parrish for mounting, he stood stock-still and a maddened blaze spurted in his eyes.

There against the side post of the stall stood an unexpected figure and above its stocky shoulders a face smiled blandly.

Tolliver knew that figure, which to the others was only the figure of a countryman come to town for the races. The man wore dark store clothes and a broad-brimmed black hat. He was shaven to the blood, but between the neckband of his white shirt and its collar there was no blending of a necktie.

Tolliver thought for an instant that his imagination had materialized before his eyes the person of Tom Malone, and then he knew that this was no trick of fancy but the substantial attestation of fact.

"Howdy, Tolly," the man without a necktie greeted him affably. "Are ye astonished to see me here?"

Sudden and volcanic passions of fury leaped in the boy and his answer was a strange one.

"You ain't got a necktie on," he spat out. "You ought to have one—made of hemp."

Only the bystanders that pressed immediately about the stall caught the words, but Tom Malone caught both their sound and their meaning. He smiled suavely and his own voice was low.

"Mebby hereafter, sonny, folks'll get what they ought to have—an' not only me."

It had all taken only a half minute of time, yet in its passing Tolliver had been through an earthquake. Now he felt himself hoisted to the saddle, automatically knotted his reins, thrust home his feet, and heard as through confusion the shouted command, "Lead out!"

"Steady, son," Parrish hurriedly cautioned him. "Don't let anything fluster you. Hold his head up and keep him in the clear. Win going away—but don't burn up the track unless you have to."

Tolliver could feel his knees shaking in the aftermath of that surprise and its passion. He knew that Fleetwing felt them shaking too and just outside the gate the colt lunged and began rearing.

"That's a bad breaker," declared a voice

that carried to the jockey's ears above the hum of the crowd. "He won't do nothin' but ball the start up an' delay 'em at the post. To the pound for him!"

"To hell with Malone," muttered the boy fiercely. "There's time enough for him to hang hereafter. This is a horse race," and he settled down over his high knees, took the knotted reins in one hand and let the other slide caressingly along the brown neck. "Steady there, boy," he exhorted reassuringly. "You an' me ain't got no call to git tetchious. This race is our meat!"

Gradually the curvetting two year old smoothed out of his fractiousness. His crab-like side-stepping settled into the calm swing of a rocking horse and when he came, in the procession, under the judicial eyes of the kiosk—eyes that remembered him unfavorably from last Monday's fiasco—he was a picture animal, superb of proportion and velvet smooth of temper, with the manners of a veteran and every inch the thoroughbred.

Suddenly all the world except that bounded by the rails and furlong poles had melted from the jockey's mind, and all his own nervousness was sloughed off, just as Fleetwing's blanket had been left behind.

"That startin' judge won't have no great likin' for us, boy," he said, talking low to his mount. "He will remember what a fight you give 'em last Monday, I reckon. He won't take no master pains to get ye off pretty—an' your place ain't so good nohow—out there on the outside."

The little procession of youngsters with their monkeylike riders in gay silks cantered the three and a half furlongs to the place where the starting staff awaited them—for the Bashford Manor is run at four and a half furlongs and the field is sent away from the back stretch.

Then the jockeying began and, as before, two or three youngsters were whirling and kicking, to the hot exasperation of the starter and his aids.

To-day Fleetwing was not one of these incorrigibles. Under that hand that caressed his neck he stood poised, with gathered muscles—but held on the extreme outside where he was safe from flying hoof plates.

As they wheeled and shifted they came for a moment into line and the rubber tape flew high.

"Go on," came the yell as six sets of stirrup leathers creaked and six two year

olds burst forward like shells from a battery. Six jockeys sat down and began to ride and on the extreme outside went Fleetwing with the cherry-and-white body humped almost even with his extended neck.

"You ain't never showed me the full of what you can do," yelled the boy wildly. "Show me now!"

He must get to the lead, free of interference, and slip in on the rail, and to do that he must outfoot the quick breakers far enough to cross their front, at a winged speed that would take the starch out of anything but a stayer.

There was a din in Tolliver's ears like the roar of a hurricane. Leather was groaning, silks whipping, hoofs drumming and a swelter of fierce straining effort overhung the close-bunched field. The hill boy seemed riding in the center of a tornado, and his eye was gauging that tricky angle that he must make across the squadron front.

If he cut in too close, even though he won, his mount would be disqualified for crowding and he himself would be "set down" in suspension during the pleasure of the stewards. But he did not cut it too close: only close enough to a hair's breadth. His mind functioned in that confusion as accurately as clockwork. He figured it mathematically, exactly and with pluperfect skill. He opened his lead on the outside and bored evenly in, and as the steaming mass of horseflesh punched, struggling for positions, at the far turn he found himself on the rail with only a black nose at his knee and the exhortations of a green-capped boy in his ears. Then, with the race hardly half run, Colonel Parrish took his binoculars from his eyes and put them calmly away in their case. "Gentlemen," he said to two companions with whom he had made private bets, "you pay me."

Tolliver was sitting stock-still with his reins still wrapped about his knuckles. He heard the bat fall on the black and under that summons the black nose crept even with the brown. The black was crowding him unpleasantly close to the unyielding fence and once Tolliver's near knee scraped the whitewash. But the black was laboring now, gamely and magnificently under steel and rawhide which fell at each stride, and the rest of the field was stringing into a wake of broken-hearted exhaustion.

Tolliver bent a shade lower over the brown neck. His hands let slip the wraps

and took hold of the head. "Romp home son," he begged. "Romp home, but not too fast. Don't show 'em all you've got just yet. You don't have to!"

Fleetwing shot forward until the black nose panted at his rump, until daylight showed between, until he was galloping without company two lengths ahead, and still with a firm restraint on his bit.

A sixteenth of a mile beyond the stand Tolliver had pulled him down to a walk. "We could have hung up a new record if we'd been minded to," he told himself exultantly, "but they cautioned us not to burn up the track."

Slowly he rode back and, as he came, the scores of thousands were standing. Though most of them had lost on that race their cheering swept like artillery thunder up into the blue overhead, and reverberated its greeting.

The boy rode to the kiosk, where already other jockeys were unsaddling, and there—emptily waiting for him who had the sole privilege of entering it, was the half circle bounded by white—the victor's reservation.

Tolliver's face was stolid again, by a hard muscular forcing, as he raised his whip-hand in salute, and then when it had been answered by a nod he slid to the ground and began unsaddling. It was his first victory and as he stood on the scales with his gear his knees went suddenly weak. When he walked back to the paddock after the blanketed horses he realized that this colt had come into his own. As yet he was not thinking of himself.

It was as though through a dream that he watched the running of the Derby itself.

Next year Fleetwing would be starting in that; in the Preakness, in the Withers, in the Belmont—in all that succession of major handicaps where three-year-old preëminence is decided—and perhaps he would be riding!

Snip Button nodded commendingly in the jockey room, just as he went out for the great race. "You didn't do so worse, kid," he deigned to admit. "And here's where we make it two straight for the Parrish barn."

But they didn't make it two straight. Snip rode faultlessly but he couldn't run the race as well as ride it. Under his stretch drive he brought Chimney Swift to the saddle girths of the winner and held him there across the wire—but between a saddle

girth and a nose lay enough difference to be measured in many thousands of dollars and much glory. It was not Chimney Swift that stood in the chalk circle while the huge horseshoe of roses was hung around his neck and the cameras clicked and the stands rocked to their cheering. It was not Snip Button who was called into the judges' stand to receive from the governor of the State the great trophy plate or who was carried back to the jockey room on the shoulders of howling maniacs. One other three year old and one other boy had taken the measure of Chimney Swift and Snip Button.

## CHAPTER X.

The master of brush and palette or of pen and page may strive through long years toward a recognition that still flits elusively beyond his grasp. But, as the pace of the home stretch is hot and fickle, so fame on the race track comes and goes with the bright and sudden flare of the rocket to horses and men alike.

News writers set down the record of that Derby in columns and dismissed the lesser events of the day with paragraphs.

The Bashford Manor, they said, had been won by a good colt that breezed home at a hand gallop and with much to spare. He had been ridden by a new boy who showed sense enough to sit still and let the colt run free of fussing. Only a few shrewd observers noted that the race had really been run and won in that first sixteenth or that a jockey had used a cool and quick judgment in angling across a flying front from outside to inside. These few recognized that it was only because he had grasped that opportunity and made it his own that he could sit still and gallop home as he liked.

But before the Louisville meet ended the Parrish string was shipped to Belmont Park, and Tolliver found himself transferred to the bewilderingly broadened horizon of the metropolis.

Here he found a racing life and a race-going public almost as different from those of Kentucky as Louisville had been different from the mountains. Here there was no candid mob of speculators swirling about the "iron men;" no official recognition of track betting at all—and yet through the activities of the "oralists" more money seemed to fluctuate than on any but feature days back there at the Downs.

Here, too, was a new group of jockeys, held in Eastern esteem to be the cream of the profession, and here was a spirit of mild contempt for the horses and the boys that came out of the West.

"You've got to get wise, kid, that you've left the tall timbers behind now," Snip Button gave him patronizing assurance. "Everything west of the Hudson is hick stuff, see? These are regular guys, here. A horse may be a world beater back there in the sticks but when he comes here and meets up with class it's the quick fade-out for him, see?"

"If I ever gambled on any hoss," declared Tolliver indignantly, "you'd have a chance to win a bet off me if you think there's any two year old round here can take Fleetwing's measure."

Snip laughed disdainfully.

"You win three races with him in Louisville, didn't you, kid? Well, you've got them three to remember like mother remembers baby's little shoe. There wasn't no two-year-old class to speak of there, see? Just good sellin'-plater stuff an' that's why the Electron trick stood out like a sore thumb. Here it's something else again." The jockey paused and grinned derisively.

"I get pretty straight info the boss is going to take a shot at the Juvenile with the brown baby and you're going to be in the pilot house. You'll get an eyeful then, kid, take it from me."

"All I ask is to be there when they start," came the grim retort. "Fleetwing'll see to the rest."

He found echoed in the racing columns of the papers that same Eastern self-sufficiency; that same causal patronage for the West, and one day he complained hotly of it to Colonel Parrish, who only smiled.

"We bank on that a good bit, son," said the colonel. "New York doesn't admit that anything good can come from any other place. This town forgets from year to year that all its champions are recruited from abroad."

"But they ain't got no license to despise Fleetwing. Can't they read the dope sheets?"

Again the turfman smiled.

"They'll read them—and heed them—only when they bear a local date line," he said. "And that's all right too, since they pay for their egotism."

But the Juvenile was not interesting, ex-

cept in advance discussion. An Eastern colt, saddled by a famous stable, went to the post an odds-on favorite and the time hung out snipped a fraction off the track record—but Fleetwing made of the race such an easy parade, with the favorite laboring three lengths back and the rest nowhere, that the element of contest was flattened into void.

That victory was so easy—to all seeming—and called for so little spectacular jockeying, that though the metropolitan press acclaimed the son of Electron indubitable master of his division the boy who rode him was damned with faint praise as one who was called on for little finesse and who under such circumstances proved adequate.

Tolliver accepted his mediocrity without heart burning. He had never yet brought home any victor except the one colt who would run only for him, and an exercise boy could have done that much. As yet no other stable had come seeking second call on his services and when the brown remained in his stall Tolliver watched the races from the ground.

Even from the ground there was plenty to see for a lad who a year ago had known only the land of do-without, hemmed in by mountain ranges.

But Chimney Swift, who had finished second in the Kentucky Derby, had trained well and would be ready for the Suburban, and three days before that traditional event Snip Button riding in other than Parrish colors was called into the judges' stand on the claim of a foul made by a boy in a blue jacket and cap.

"He tried to put me over the fence," panted the profferer of charges. "He bumped me off my stride when he wasn't crowded an' when he seen I was gettin' through on the turn he belted my mount across the nose with his bat."

"It's a lie," said Snip, coolly meeting the eye of his accuser.

"We will wait," announced the presiding judge crisply, "till the judge of the course gets here." And while they waited the official bell did not ring and the result did not go up on the board. Around the judges' stand milled partisans of each contestant and when the official whose duty had been to watch the far turn galloped across the infield on his old hunter he spoke briefly and to the point.

"You made it too raw this time, Button," came the prompt verdict. "We've had our eyes on you for some days past. You are on the ground for two weeks."

So on the evening before the Suburban's running Colonel Parrish called Tolliver into his hotel room in town.

Through the open windows came the grind and roar of Sixth Avenue and Broadway, and the colonel was grimmer of face than the boy had ever seen him.

"I've decided to put you up on Chimney Swift to-morrow, son," he said. "I've watched you and I don't see why I should go outside my own staff for a boy. But this time you won't have any easy race. Danceaway is a five-pounds better horse than my colt and Jimmy Earle is the cleverest boy riding in the East. If you lose I shan't be bawling you out—but it will be a duel of jockeys and if you can come home first—well, you'll beat a good man."

"I aim to do the best I know," said Tolliver.

"Listen, son," went on Parrish earnestly, "you've been riding a mount that could make suckers of his field—once he got away clean. To-morrow you'll have to be using both hands and both feet and your head every jump over the mile-and-a-quarter route. Chimney Swift's got to be rated back of the pace to the turn home. He can't lead all the way and if you misjudge the moment to make your move with him, he won't have enough left to come from behind. If you save him, just long enough—and drive him to the last ounce he's got in the last stages—and keep him clear of pockets and bumping—he may poke his nose ahead of Danceaway on the wire. It's a large order but if you do that there'll be as much talk in the papers about the rider as the horse."

The boy flushed, then turned pale.

"I aim to do the best I know," he repeated laconically.

Among the twenty-five thousand racegoers who watched that Suburban run there were many conflicting opinions as to just what happened and how it came about. Perhaps the story which the sporting editor of the *Blade* wrote that night in the clatter of his office near Park Row may be taken as authentic. It ran:

The six originally named went to the post, with Danceaway carrying the wise money at the short price of two to five, and Charlie

Chaplin a strong second choice, but when the race was over an unexpected development stood out for contemplation and digestion. Danceaway was a beaten though not a disgraced horse and over the horizon of metropolitan racing had risen a new and bright star. An unknown jockey had leaped to recognition. For the Suburban of yesterday, though all horse race, was still less a horse race than a duel of riding, and in that duel Jimmy Earle, the idol of these parts, went down before a lad whose name has not heretofore been widely known. This was a lad who talks slowly in a Southern mountain drawl, but who rides like a streak of galvanic fury, under the control of an ice-cold thinking machine. Danceaway was giving away some weight, but even with his impost Danceaway figured to be a good ten pounds the better horse. Until yesterday it would have been deemed sacrilege to say it, but to-day it must be confessed that T. Cornett looked a little more than ten pounds a better boy than Jimmy Earle, and that tells the whole sad story.

Though the start was on the turn, Mars Cassidy got the field away as straight as a tight string and Doubt-Not used his brilliant early foot to go at once to the front.

There followed a description of the first stages of the race, then this:

Charlie Chaplin was being rated along in third position as they reached the far turn, while Earle, with the favorite, lay back in fourth place, several lengths behind the first division and Chimney Swift, on whom perched the unknown mountaineer, was lapped on his saddle skirts.

Earle moved up slowly while the first formations shifted around the turn home, and when they straightened for the stretch it was seen that the talent's choice was only galloping. That surprised no one. What did surprise every one was that, as he moved along toward seemingly easy command, the bay colt on his saddle skirts stayed there, and when he drew away from the rest the bay colt drew away with him.

Earle rode that finish in his best style, but clever as was his work the new jockey, Cornett, was undeniably a shade more clever. He timed his finish to a nicety. He held Chimney Swift together in a superb hand ride, and inch by inch ran down the favorite to beat him by a half head on the wire. Had Cornett made a move to go to the bat on the Parrish colt he would have tossed off his victory. Had his hand ride been other than flawless he could not have gotten up. The boy was given something of an ovation after the race, but to all compliments he had one response, and he made it somewhat shyly, "Colonel Parrish told me how to ride him—an' I just rid him thet a way."

Tolliver awoke to find himself not only famous in a limited circle, but rechristened. He might insist on his name as emphatically as he liked but always thereafter the turf knew him as "Thetaway" Cornett.

"What's so funny erbout sayin' 'thet a

way?'" the boy demanded of Colonel Parrish, "thet they writes it up in newspapers and gives it to me for a nickname?"

The bluegrass man laughed. "It's what might be termed a marked colloquialism, son," he answered. "The dialect of the mountains strikes these people as quaint enough for comment—and you know you do still speak that dialect."

"Nobody ain't never told me thet afore," observed the boy thoughtfully and his patron reminded him:

"You were never a figure of public interest before."

Tolliver mulled that statement over during a long silence and then he announced abruptly: "I reckon I've got to mend my speech—an' my manners."

Parrish smiled and changed the subject.

"Tolliver," he said, "I suppose you know that the average horseman who had developed a boy like you this far would put you under an apprentice contract and bind your services for several years?"

The boy nodded. "I'm ready to sign up," he said, "if you think I'm worth hirin' thet a way—I mean that way."

But Parrish shook his head.

"No, son," he said, "that's not my idea for you. I want you to get ahead as fast as you can—and to be studying meanwhile. The object of such contracts is to give the discoverer and developer of a promising lad the cream of his exclusive services. I'm not going to tie you up. You are to ride as a free lance—only giving me first call. I'm mentioning that now because after the Suburban you won't have to watch many races from the ground unless you want to. They'll be after you—and I'm leaving you free."

Tolliver gulped down his emotion of gratitude. He sought for and failed to find appropriate phrases of acknowledgment and then he said slowly:

"I'm obleeged to you."

Parrish watched his protégé narrowly but without comment. He knew that now came the testing time and he was satisfied with his observations.

This lad, raw from the backwaters of life, was being approached by those devious influences which are the rank weed growth of the sporting world. Rat-eyed and rat-shrewd characters of the Tenderloin were recognizing him with overtures.

Young women of a type new to his ex-

perience and rather dazzling to a youth not yet competent to appraise their coarseness were willing to associate with him not as a small-statured boy but as a man whose name and picture were common in print. And Tolliver was changing. His clothes were no longer rough and his speech was smoothing—yet so far as Parrish could make out his dark eyes remained cool and unbugled.

The summer season about New York drew to its end and the horse cars moved on to the cool and beautiful environment of Saratoga. In those lists that statisticians compiled Thetaway's name stood often in the roster of jockeys who brought their mounts into the money. A growing coterie of gamblers played starters that he took to the post.

Then with the first turning of the leaves and the first coloring of autumn they were back once more at Louisville for the fall meeting.

There as he came out of the jockey room in street clothes at the end of one day's program Tolliver found Paul Creighton waiting to shake hands and with Creighton were his two daughters, Cary and Shirley.

The boy grasped the man's hand and then as he met the friendly eyes of the older girl he flushed, and as he encountered those of the younger he stiffened.

He had never confessed it to any one, but he had carried for that older girl, several years his senior, a boy's blind worship since she had first smiled on him and he had told himself vindictively that he hated her sister. Now Shirley was polite, too, and congratulated him on his success and, had he not altered his speech, he would have explained his own attitude by saying that he "had ter make his manners" with her.

"I wouldn't know you, Tolliver," said the younger girl. "You don't look the same or talk the same, since you became famous."

"They made considerable fun of me," confessed the boy. "They sort of shamed me into watching my p's and q's but I guess I'm the same underneath."

"When you get back to Woodford County," invited Creighton, "come and see us. I used to tell you stories of the turf. Now that you're a man of the world you must tell me a few."

"The best of them he won't tell," commented Colonel Parrish, "because he's still modest. But I'll fill in the blanks."

The little group stood in the paddock

waiting while the crowds drifted toward the gates. In the air hung the spicy fragrance of a Kentucky autumn, and Thetaway Cornett who had known a childhood poisoned by the humiliation of his size and a youth shadowed by yearnings for a broader life felt something like a fullness of content. He was no longer "poor white trash" among affluent people. He stood on his own feet and belonged to this larger world. He was a success and life had relish.

A messenger boy came out of the jockey house and some one there pointed toward the group. The boy came along shouting out: "Tellygram for Mister Cornett—tellygram for Mister Cornett!"

Tolliver did not at first hear him but Colonel Parrish did and beckoned to the boy. He took the yellow envelope and handed it over. "Some Eastern turfman trying to get you for the Handicap, son," he smiled. "But you will ride that race for me."

Tolliver laughed and ripped the covering. A year ago he would have regarded the receipt of a telegram as an astounding event. Now it was all in the day's routine.

But as he spread and read the paper his slight figure grew rigid and his face stiffened into the set and stamp of tragedy. He gulped and into his eyes, which had first been filmed with dazed amazement, crept a slow-growing fire that blazed into spurts of utter, wordless fury.

Still he did not speak. He handed the paper to Colonel Parrish and stood staring ahead with the motionlessness of a bronze figure, and Parrish read the message:

Father shot dead at courthouse door this morning. Come. MOTHER.

Parrish turned, though the boy seemed to see nothing of his immediate surroundings, and whispered to Creighton. "Take the girls away, Paul. This is tragedy." Then he gripped the elbow of the lad and began steering him like an automaton toward the track gate and across the greensward of the infield.

Almost to the back stretch the boy walked without a sound. He seemed to move in the heaviness of trance and before the opposite side of the track was reached Parrish halted him, still holding his arm.

"Son," he said, and he spoke as if the word and the feeling were real and not merely a form of address, "there's still a

man that feels himself a father to you. I have no boy of my own, you know."

Tolliver tried to answer but failed, and Parrish went on:

"I'm going to get you to the train in my car. Of course you'll have to cancel your engagements here. I'll attend to that for you."

Slowly Thetaway shook his head.

"I'm goin' to the burying now," he said, "but I'll be back to ride right soon."

"Back to ride! My God, boy, your father lies dead—murdered."

The cloak of apathy fell from the boy's shoulders and a lightning bolt seemed to shoot through his body. His eyes blazed afresh.

"That's why I'm coming back," he burst out passionately. "He lays dead—murdered up there where he made his fight. I told you once that I didn't care about money. Now I need money—heaps of money. Now I'm not riding just to win races. Henceforth I'm working to hang a man that it comes high to hang—an' I reckon I'll ride like I never rode before."

## CHAPTER XI.

"There is a night train to Hixon Town from Lexington but no connection out of Louisville, so I'll have to put you into Lexington by motor," declared Parrish crisply when they had driven to the hotel. "It's ninety miles but the right driver can do it."

The colonel could not go himself but he left Tolliver in his room under pledge to remain there quietly while he effected the arrangements and the boy, whose thoughts were groping along grim and dark corridors, sat unmoving in the chair where he had been left. Soon enough his life would break to the speed of a more violent activity but just now he was thinking and some mentor in his consciousness kept warning him, "Don't let your feelings bolt—because if you start wild you'll run mad."

"It would be plumb easy," he told himself, "to meet Malone and shoot this business out on sight in a hand-to-hand fray. It would be easier still to hire him killed. But my pap died to end that sort of doings. I reckon he couldn't rest quiet in his grave if his own boy turned backslider from his teachings. I reckon if his gospel was good enough to him to die for it's good enough for me to foller."

It was that conviction which forced him into an immobile quiet now when every vein and artery pounded and every thought blistered him with an overpowering thirst for speedy and personal reprisal. That thirst was as hot and dry in his heart as the craving of an alcoholic fighting his appetite. It had been bred through generations of undeviating and clannish blood; it struck back to a spirit which held the delegation of such accountings to juries as a cowardly and ineffectual makeshift. Against it warred the conviction of a single generation; that of the man who had failed and fallen dead for it. It was the bequest of a father set against the cumulative heritage from a long line of grandsires—that and his own sure belief that his father had been right.

If the son lost the fight that was waging in his own bosom now he was lost to his father's creed: he had reverted to the code which his father repudiated as savagery. Besides that, the quick and merciful end of the bullet's shock was too clean a finish for Malone. Brave men, like his father, went that way to death. For Malone there must be the humiliation of the hangman's rope and the black cap; of the days of shameful contemplation and foretaste; of the mortifying walk to the scaffold under the eyes of witnesses no longer held in bondage. Yet all that seemed a remote and sluggish method when his instincts cried out that it was his own right and duty to punish with his own hand and at once.

The boy's face was chalk white with his large eyes burning out of its pallor, and his clenched fingers bit into the palms of his hands and stained them—yet he sat still.

"More races are won at the start than in the stretch," he kept reiterating to himself. "Right now I'm seekin' to hold a runaway, an' hell's boilin' inside me—but I know what *he'd* bid me do." In the bag he had hastily packed there was an automatic pistol, and slowly Tolliver took it out and looked at it, turning it in his hand. Then with a stiffly set jaw he shook his head and thrust the thing aside. To be armed would be to traffic with temptation—and if he saw Malone's face at the station when he left the train a moment of passion and madness might blast into débris hours of hard-fought resolve.

Parrish came into the room and nodded and Tolliver rose and followed him. The colonel knew that Thetaway Cornett could

not make his way through the hotel lobby without being stopped by some enthusiastic member of the racing public. So he had arranged an exit through a service door onto the side street where a car stood parked at the curb.

So oppressively vivid in the boy's mind was the picture of that house up there in the mountains where a body lay quiet, so remote and lax was his grasp on present things that when he thought back on that departure from the Louisville hotel he could never recapture its details. He did not notice who was in the car, but flinging his bag into the tonneau he took his own place in the front seat and remained staring ahead as unseeingly as if the wind shield had been opaque.

It was only when the machine had swung onto the Shelbyville Pike and left the city limits behind that he realized it was plunging ahead at a speed which defied every traffic restriction and that its driver was handling it as he himself might have handled a mount on the track; rating it with a realization of a ninety-mile stretch and time enough to do it only by setting a scorching pace.

Then slowly, as if waking by degrees from a stupefaction, Thetaway turned his head and saw that the face which held its eyes to the front and the small hands that gripped the wheel were those of Shirley Creighton.

She was not looking at him and her attention was all for the road. A limousine swung out between the stone gateposts of a country place, making a wide turn, and from the back seat came the startled shout of Paul Creighton, "Careful, girl!" But Shirley swung her wheel, whipped round the obstacle and was on the straight again with the needle of the speedometer standing at forty-five.

They had covered some ten miles before Tolliver spoke: "I didn't know you were aiming to drive me," he said. "You're taking a heap of trouble for me."

The girl did not turn her head even then. Her profile was a clear-cut cameo of determination and her curling hair, with glints of bronze in its brown, whipped in the wind.

"That's all right," she said briefly. "I can get more speed out of this old boat than father." After a minute she added quietly, "Nothing is trouble when a friend's in distress."

"Thank you," said the boy. "I'm in right sore distress."

It was between midnight and dawn when Tolliver swung himself down from the platform of the rickety local at Hixon Town, and seemingly both station and street were deserted save where the yellow glimmer of the signal-room window told of an operator still on duty. But as the boy hastened at a stride that was almost a run along the empty way a noiseless figure detached itself from the shadow, back of the building, and went to report to Tom Malone that "Little Tolliver" had come back.

The dead prosecutor's house stood on the skirts of the town and the boy climbed to it along a black and steep path, but its window too sent out a feeble light across the murk of the sleeping village and as the gate creaked Tolliver raised a voice which seemed to thunder through the stillness:

"It's me, ma, it's Tolly—and I'm coming in."

Cal Deering, the uncle who had come to the race track in Louisville, swung the door cautiously for the boy and latched it after he had entered.

Suddenly in the dejected glow of a single lamp a dozen forgotten details of that "settin' room" leaped up before the boy's eyes, proclaiming themselves as squalid. The narrowness and the sordidness of this whole rude land and its life smote him like a stifling smell—and yet this house had been that of a man lonely in his progressive spirit, of a man who had laid down his life for change and advancement.

Now on a sofa—whose springs were broken—a white sheet was heaped with a deadly stillness over something that had been that man.

Just inside the threshold the boy halted as though he had been slugged on the temple and stunned. There was nothing to surprise him here, nothing for which he had not come prepared, yet as his eyes confirmed the thing which he had until this moment known only through the written word it was somehow as though it all engulfed him anew. He paused and groped with his hands as if he had become blind, and for that moment he was blind; clouded of vision with the red mists of fury and outrage that swam before his pupils.

His mother sat in a rocking-chair by the sofa where lay her head.



She sat leaning forward with her ash-gray face staring and she looked almost as though she too were lifeless, in the stillness of her misery. She did not rise to greet her son. She did not even look around. She did not know he was there and the boy started as at some inappropriate raucousness of sound when the nasal voice of Cal Deering broke the hushed tenseness:

"Sally, hyar's leetle Tolly. He's done come."

Still the woman did not move and Cal went over and thrust out his hand to rouse her by his touch, but Tolliver jumped forward and caught his shoulder violently, as though his interference were a sacrilege.

"Don't tech her," he whispered in a still fury. "I'll tell her myself."

The man fell sullenly back and the boy knelt at his mother's side and laid his arm across her shoulders.

Then she slowly turned her face and looked at him. He saw that her eyes were dry and lusterless as with a sort of nod she reached over and folded down the sheet from the covered face, exposing its still features and the dark Sunday suit and fresh linen in which the body had been clothed for burial.

"They got him," came the slow, laconic words in a dead and unnatural voice. "There he lays, Tolly."

"Ma," burst out the boy suddenly, "ain't you cried none?" and the woman shook her head.

"You've got to cry," he urged desperately. "You've got to cry or it'll kill you."

"It's done come to pass just like I foretold it would," volunteered Cal Deering as he stood looking morosely down from the foot of the couch. "He couldn't be dissuaded—~~an~~ now he's done paid for his folly."

Tolliver came up from his knees and wheeled on the speaker.

"Shut up!" he commanded in a gasping voice. "It's better to die like he did than to live craven—like you."

"I ain't faultin' him for fightin' Malone," went on Cal stubbornly, and it was plain that to his understanding had penetrated nothing of the true issue which had cost this life. "It's just because he went about it in such a chuckle-headed fashion. Now if he'd got hisself a forty-some-odd an' shot a mess of dog meat offen Malone's bones that—"

This time the boy's voice was dangerously still and warning:

"I've told you to shut up, ain't I?"

It may have been the sound of the voices raised in altercation that brought the woman out of her trance-like apathy. From her lips ran a long and strangling moan, then she bowed her head and her delayed tears came flooding.

After that rocking spasm of loosened grief the widow straightened a little in her chair and told the story. It came with the jerk and fitfulness of broken sentences.

"Your pap knowed he couldn't go on livin' here," she said, "an' when he finally come to see I couldn't endure it no longer he consented to move down to the lowlands. He'd done been seekin' to get some new law passed—~~an~~ it looked like he might succeed—if he lived long enough." She broke off and at length Tolliver prompted her gently.

"He had decided to move? Where was he going?"

"Lexin'ton," she answered. "He'd done took a house down there an' we'd done packed up. We was goin' down on the cars—to-day."

"To-day!" exclaimed the boy. "Do you mean that in a few hours more he'd have been safe?"

His mother inclined her head.

"He knowed that every time he set his foot abroad in town he took a chance of dyin'—~~an~~ every time he went to the co'tehouse I walked betwixt him an' t'other side of the street—where Tom Malone's store sets."

She paused and again the prolonged moan came from her lips.

"But I'd done gone to the deepo to buy tickets, an' whilst I was away he recollected some matter he'd done overlooked down there at the co'tehouse, so he went there by hisself—just once."

"Yes," he urged. "Yes?"

Tolliver drew a long, rasping breath: "He'd done finished his matter up—whatever it was—~~an~~ he was comin' outen the door. Then the rifle gun cracked—it just shot one shoot—that's all."

"Where," demanded the boy, "did that shot come from?"

"There was folks standin' all around," answered the widow with a bleak irony of tone, "but they all norates that they couldn't make out the which nor whether of it."

"I reckon I come nigh enough knowing," declared Tolliver grimly.

"An' now," suggested Cal, "I reckon mebby ye sees the folly of fightin' devils with law books, don't ye, Tolly?"

The boy kept his back turned on his garrulous kinsman and spoke again to his mother.

"Ma," he said, "you've heard what your brother counsels and you know what *he* fought for and died for." His hand went out toward the sheeted body. "What do you say? If I kill Tom Malone I won't make any great mistake as to the man that's responsible—but unless I *hang* him, I turn my back on my father's teachings for all time. What do you say?"

The woman sat staring at the quiet face on the pillow.

Suddenly she came to her feet and stood swaying with her thin hands clenched into fists.

"I'm a mountain woman, Tolly," she declared. "My folks wouldn't see but just one thing to do—an' they'd do it." She turned her eyes again to the shape under the sheet. "But still," she went on, "if he could have the breath of life back just long enough to speak some siv'ral words, I knows full well what he'd say—an' what he'd say are both text an' gospel to me, Tolly."

The boy's eyes held those of his mother as he put his question insistently:

"What would he say, ma?"

"He'd say that the curse of feud killin' must go. He'd say that so long es the doctrine of punishin' one crime with another crime went on there couldn't be no betterment. He'd say he'd lived an' died in vain. He said that mighty nigh with his last breath—an' if he could speak from his grave he'd say it over again."

"An' is that the law you want me to follow?"

The woman covered her face with her hands. Conflict of spirit pulled her two ways as a tug-of-war strains at a rope.

"Yes—because it's his will." Suddenly the hands came down and the eyes that had seemed so dead flashed into volcanic frenzy. "An' yet——" she panted, "if I follered my own heart an' cravin' I'd bid ye not never to lay down to rest till Tom Malone stretched dead. An' if ye failed me—I'd take up a gun myself——" She broke off abruptly and turned her back. After a mo-

ment she said in an altered and fainter voice: "But I knows that's sinful talk an' I'm *his* widow. He'd censure me for such-like talk as that."

"Mebby," suggested Cal morosely, "wimmen folks an' puny boys can pleasure themselves turnin' t'other cheek. As for me. I'm afeared I may come next—an' I'm studyin' about settlin' this score for myself afore it's too tardy."

Tolliver turned and walked over till he stood close, facing his uncle.

"Cal," he said contemptuously, "Malone kills men he's afraid of. He's not afraid of you. He won't fret himself about you, but *I will!*" The voice shot suddenly up into gusty anger. "My father has given his life for his gospel. I'm going to preach it and enforce it! His life shan't be wasted. His death shan't go for naught. I'm goin' to hang Malone—and kinsman or not, if you lift your hand in assassination, so help me God A'mighty, I'm going to hang you too!"

The dreary funeral had ended, dreary that is in all but the flaming magnificence of the woods. They burned along the mountain walls in crimson and yellow and burgundy under the touch of an early frost. It was as though the hills had garlanded themselves in splendid tribute to a man who had sought to lift their curse. Along the distances the peaks were wreathed in an ashen violet, as if funeral pyres sent up memorial smoke from every slope and summit. Yet at the grave even the preacher had seemed to fear lest in too eulogistic a pronouncement for the dead he might offend the living, and now Tolliver Cornett was taking his mother to the train, to go away and make her new home among strangers in Lexington. The house from which the coffin had been borne was locked and its chimney smokeless.

At the railroad station that afternoon Tom Malone stood idly talking to fellow townsmen, and as the family of his accuser came along the cinder platform he drew back with an air of deference for their grief. His manner seemed to say, "I offer no condolences because it would sound hypocritical—but I sympathize."

Tolliver saw him and once again spots of red swam giddily before his eyes, but he marched by as though the other man had been transparent.

When he had helped his mother into the

day coach, though, and stored her diversified bundles about her, he came out again, and while the bystanders drew back in excited surprise he walked over to the man to whose punishment he had dedicated his life.

As he went he carried his hands wide of his body, in assurance that he contemplated no swift draw from a hidden holster, and despite his maddened fury of a few minutes back he spoke now with a steady and controlled voice.

"Tom Malone," he said, "I want to have speech with you."

Malone stood with folded arms. He knew that at his back were two henchmen who were ready and quick, if need for protection arose. He himself could afford the posture of cool indifference.

"Right readily, son," he replied. "An' afore ye speak, I want to say that when you start in to hunt down your pap's murderer I stand ready an' willin' to aid ye."

"If you were," answered the boy, "you wouldn't have to hunt far. I'm goin' away now because what I've got to do takes money. I'm goin' away to earn it, but I'm comin' back. And when I come back—you're going to hang."

The men at the back let their right hands slide under their armpits but Malone smiled and they did not yet withdraw them.

"You're excited, son," said the local baron, "an' a man can hardly blame ye. I've heard talk like yours before and I'll give ye an answer outen the Good Book. I counsels ye to tarry at Jericho till your beard grows—then when ye come back, God willin', I'll still be here."

The boy turned and walked to the train. He did not look over his shoulder as he went, and because the place was too public for discreet murder he went unmolested.

## CHAPTER XII.

The "Widder Cornett" huddled on the threadbare and cinder-gritted plush of her seat in the day coach and scarcely once did her eyes turn to the window which framed a receding panorama of the mountain world, which was the only world she knew and the world which she was leaving.

She gazed in silence and fixedly at the case which contained a brightly painted ax

for use in case of wreck or fire and this was the only thing she saw, if she saw anything.

Tolliver was realizing as he sat there at her side a thing that had never demanded a place in his thoughts before—the austere loneliness of life which his father must have known. His father must have had largeness of thought and ideals that cried out for spaciousness of environment and the shoulder touch of fellow thinkers. He had had none of these things. When the elder Cornett had contemplated the need of moving to the lowlands, with what a tangle of emotions must he have fronted his future. He had spoken of himself as a crude country lawyer going to compete with cultivated practitioners. But now Tolliver could see that the man himself could soon have adapted himself to his new surroundings, because though the rough bark was on him the trunk and branch and leafage of his nature were sound and strong and spreading. Tolliver would have cut out his tongue rather than put into words the thought that stung its way into his realization now. It was his mother who could not have changed, and though no mountaineer would admit shame for his own, his father must have fretted in sure foresight over the mortification which would be inevitable for this woman down there among alien sisters. In the fundamentals of life she had always been a rock of strength and support, but in every external she was as unpolished as rock and as unamenable to change.

He himself must have seemed to his father an unlicked cub and for all his intense family devotion that father had lived mentally unaccompanied. Now there lay ahead of young Tolliver himself at eighteen the task of equipping himself to carry on a fight that the other had laid down. It was a fight that meant changing the written law of his State and bringing to justice men who lay behind breastworks of organized power and money strength. Such warfare called for the heavy artillery of funds.

It was a large order and the boy nodded grimly in acceptance of its obligation. "It'll take a bit of riding—and studying," he told himself, "but it's got to be done."

He reflected too on the words he had spoken to Malone. That accosting of his enemy had been a silly thing and yet it was a gesture of defiance and the serving of a

notice which his own self-respect had made imperative. It would be three years before he came of age—a long time for him to wait but a short time for Malone to finish life and freedom in, and a short time too for him to do the things that stretched before him for accomplishment. Malone might, except for that challenge, have thrust him out of mind as a boy whose family had been “run out of the mountains.” Now he would make no such mistake. He would know that a boy who had walked up to him where he stood flanked by his gunmen could not be contemptuously dismissed. Hereafter Tolliver could go to his boyhood home only as a marked man. In that respect at least he had placed himself squarely in his father’s stead and he knew it, but he had not found it endurable to leave in the dumbness of a terrorized refugee.

The boy was gazing outward through the window at the flaming forests and inward at the desolateness of his realization.

“It’s three years before I can be admitted to the bar,” he told himself, “but right now I must see that the newspapers don’t let the people forget this murder—or why it came to pass. Right now I must get Judge Soft-ridge to work for that new law, while the remembrance is fresh—and in those three years I must make all the money a jock can make. I’ve got to ride like no boy ever rode before. If I can’t be a full-sized man I’ve need to make it pay to be a runt.”

It was with an anxious face that Colonel Parrish took the booted foot of his jockey in his hand to give him a leg-up for the Autumn Handicap. It would be a grueling race, calling for all the support that a boy could give a horse and out of the eyes of the lad who had come home from the hills, youthfulness seemed to have been winter killed: It was a somber face, full of age-old solemnity, and around the corners of the lips hovered a grimness that ought to belong only to disillusioned age.

But the racing public did not see enough of Thetaway at close range to speculate upon any change in him and the racing public was ready to give him assurance of their partisan support. Men who usually read only the sporting columns had followed the story of that tragedy in the hills into the news pages and this was the favorite jockey’s first public appearance since he had

doffed silks and tack to go home and bury his dead.

Colonel Parrish need not have worried. The true actor may come fresh from the frostbite of tragedy but once he has crossed the invisible line that separates the darkened wings from the footlights he passes into the world of his art and his stage character. The shadow waits for him but does not follow into the calcium—and once Tolliver gathered his reins and thrust home his feet into the irons he became the Cornett of the track and left behind him in the paddock all but the psychology of the thunder through the dust of back stretch, turn and finish.

This was the mountain boy’s idea of loyalty. Some bereaved people say it with flowers and tears. Tolliver meant to say it with success and a vengeance nourished on the iron of success.

When his mount appeared on the track it was the signal for an ovation, because there is nowhere a more sentimental world than the sporting world, and the stands stood up, and the lawns leaned forward, and into the jockey’s ears poured tidal waves of exhortation, encouragement and tribute.

“Attaway Thetaway! We’re ridin’ with you, Thetaway! It’s Thetaway all the way, in a walk! You’re home already, boy!”

Thetaway did not smile or look around. On the track an idol does not “take his call,” but he rode for them and won for them and he did it in a finish of such hair-raising excitement that it looked like a dead heat to the stands and required the more absolute viewpoint of the judges to split apart the winner and the place horse. With the same mount an indifferent jockey might have been as good as third in that finish where four starters could have been covered at the wire with a single blanket.

After get-away day at Louisville the Parrish horses and the Parrish staff went back to the Woodford County farm. For them the racing season was over until next spring, when the Electron colt would come back in three-year-old form, which is the high noon of a thoroughbred’s day. Lesser stables, where class was not so highly held or tradition so esteemed, would race on through the winter on the Mexican border and in Havana. Some handicap horses would make those pilgrimages too—but it was Parrish’s view that those meets catered to the confirmed habitué who must have horse races

of any sort; the habitué to whom the turf is a gambling enterprise as unequivocally as Monte Carlo or the pavilions along the Promenade des Anglais at Nice.

Colonel Parrish himself left them alone. He could afford to winter his stock and wait for the spring and for a while Thetaway Cornett, too, went to the farm where his mother, who had given up the house in Lexington, was making her home with her brother Fletch, and slowly going the way of heart-break and melancholia.

It was after a call of courtesy upon the widow at Fletch's cottage that Colonel Parrish walked along the woodland road with Tolliver, toward the scarcely better house of Paul Creighton.

"You've got to a point, boy," said Parrish, "where you must look well ahead. You've had a successful season but it's only a start. You must study now and study hard—and must make money. Softridge is coming down over the week-end and I mean to throw myself with all my energy into this fight for the change-of-venue amendment. That's a thing you may safely leave in my hands."

"Thank you, sir," said Tolliver. "It's a thing that's mighty vital to me."

"We're partners in that," declared the colonel. "You have a father's assassination to avenge. I have a pride in my State that calls for a housecleaning. Meanwhile you oughtn't to let up in your riding during the winter. You ought to follow the game to Tia Juana and Havana."

The boy looked up in surprise.

"I had the notion," he said, "that you didn't think much of that winter racing."

"Neither do I," came the quick response. "When you go to those places you will run the gantlet of every temptation that can be thrown in a jockey's way, but if you can't stand up against them you can't carry through your program. I believe you have a spine—and if I'm wrong I want to find it out."

"I see," answered Tolliver. "I want to find out, too."

"Next spring and summer," went on Parrish, "gives Fleetwing his chance to show whether he's the superhorse—or a flash in the pan. You know what morning-glories are: horses that spin off sensational time in morning work and then fold up and wilt in afternoon races. There are morning-glories too that are seven-day wonders as two year

olds and that break every promise when they turn three. The Electron colt may be one of them."

"He won't be," declared Tolliver stoutly. "He's a miracle colt."

"I hope you're right. Except for that first start when Button let him run away he's never lost a race—and except for that flivver he's never been ridden except by you."

"It's just happened that way," came the modest response.

"No." Parrish smiled that quiet smile of the eyes but he spoke gravely. "I've seen to it—and I confess a thing now that I wouldn't care to advertise generally. I doubt strongly whether Fleetwing would run his race for any other rider. He's a type I've never encountered before. He's a one-man horse—at least I'm afraid he is—so if I lose you I may lose his victories and he may lose his career."

The boy nodded gravely as he said in sober brevity: "I guess you can count on me."

At Paul Creighton's house Colonel Parrish turned in and Tolliver went on, but as he followed the creek banks he came upon a girl seated on the jutting roots of a white and tremendous sycamore—and halted.

It was Shirley, the enemy who had once hurt him with her unforgotten snub and who had then driven him to Lexington when he had needed a friend.

Now he knew in a flash of realization that his chief reason for resenting that snub so bitterly had been that she was the sort of girl in whose eyes it stung him to seem "poor white trash." As she sat there on the twisted roots against the fiery splendor of the autumn he recognized her as the loveliest thing he had ever seen, pliant, slender, young and wholly alluring.

He stood embarrassed and thinking of nothing to say until the girl rose and her face colored. He wondered why.

"I hear," she said, quicker than he to fall back on the commonplaces of conversation, "that you're going to ride in Mexico and Cuba."

Suddenly an insistent demand arose in him to make her understand that this business of riding races was, after-all only a means to an end, but he lacked the graces of expression in which to tell her so.

"You folks down here," he said with a brusqueness born of shyness, "think that we

mountain people are poor white trash. Maybe we are, but two hundred years back your people and mine started out from Virginia alike. Mine got stalled there on muddy roads and rotted while yours went on ahead. Back in Virginia we were quality too."

"Of course," she said quietly, "you don't have to tell me that."

"No," he admitted shamefacedly, "but I want you to know. You know my uncle Fletch. You know he's trash. You know that I'm a jockey—and jockeys are servants that people like you pay wages to. But I'm riding in races to make money—and I'm studying to be a lawyer."

"Yes," she answered with an almost humble note in her voice, "father told me about that. He said you'd be as good a lawyer as you are a jockey."

Suddenly the boy who had plumed himself on his stoicism and on a tough-fibered pride that asked no favors wheeled from her and covered his face with his hands.

"I hated you," he blurted out childishly, "I hated you because you despised me. I couldn't bear to have you despise me—and then you drove me to that train."

The girl came over and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"I was nasty to you," she said penitently, "but it was before I knew you. Driving you to the train wasn't anything. I loved it. It was exciting. But I've been thinking ever since about what you were going to—up there."

The boy turned impetuously and uncovered his face. He was trembling and he held his hands at his sides clamped into fists.

"I'm a jockey," he said speaking in a panting brokenness of utterance. "I'm a tobacco yap—and I'm a runt. But some day I'm going to be a man—some day I'm going to be a gentleman."

The tense tragedy of his face and posture was a synopsis of all his recent anguish and confusion of mind; an index to his undigested conflicts of illiteracy and ambition.

Instinct told this girl that he was reacting to the influences of grim antecedents and that what he needed just now was to laugh.

"Unless you do," she declared with a sparkle of the eyes that came dancing through a mistiness of sympathy, "we lose

our bet. We're playing you across the board, Tolly."

She had never used his first name before and the boy flinched as though under an unspeakably delightful shock.

"And if I do make good," he broke out in a fiery spurt of boldness which amazed himself, "I'm coming back to thank you—because I'll owe it to you—because I love you."

She stood there with her cheeks blazing as her lashes dropped, then suddenly she raised her head and said with starkly simple candor, "I love you too."

He went to Mexico and Cuba and he came back with a smattering of Spanish and with much diversified experience. He came back with a knowledge of many devious things of which he had taken no knowledge away with him, but because he had been anchored by a hate that was undeviating and a love that was secure, though new, he came back much as he had gone away. That is except for certain things that he had learned out of books as well as out of life.

### CHAPTER XIII.

It was a raw morning in April at Churchill Downs and Billy Moseby, the colored trainer, wore his overcoat collar turned up about his throat as he leaned against the palings of the back stretch with his stop watch in his hand.

Toward him as he stood there a little apart from the fifty or sixty scattered rail-birds drifted Tommy Burtley of the *Tribune*.

"Here we are again, Billy," he made genial if bromidic comment. "It's the first time we've met this spring. Where do you come from?"

The colored man waved his hand in the comprehensive gesture of the nomad. "All over, Mr. Burtley," he said. "New Orleans last, but before that Havana and down Mexico way."

"And now," laughed the newspaper man, "back again to the old stamping ground doping the Derby six weeks ahead."

"Yes, sir," responded the colored man gravely, "back to the old home track. Down in them winter places I feel like I was in an outdoor pool room, but here—it's different."

Through the gates came a big brown stal-

lion neither high nor low in flesh, with a blood bay at his side, and the negro's eyes brightened.

"Thar he comes, white man," he exclaimed. "He got here yesterday from the farm. I reckon you don't need to ask his name this year, do you?"

Burtley grinned. "If I had to ask Fleetwing's name," he admitted, "I couldn't hold my job long on the sporting page. And this time I won't forget to snap my own watch on him."

"Time him all you like and print whatever you've a mind to now, Mister Burtley. He don't need his secrets kept any longer—he's public property these days—but did the old man lie to you a year ago? Did I call the turn on that baby or not?"

"I'm told," commented Tommy irrelevantly, "that Colonel Parrish has been offered seventy-five thousand for the colt."

"Yes, I heard that too, and he didn't dally long over givin' 'no' for his answer. Why would he? The colt's only got to win the Derby, the Preakness, and the Belmont—just them three—to earn more than what was offered."

"But he has to win them all," amended Burtley, "and no horse has ever won them all yet."

"Thar's one that will—unless he goes wrong or——" The speaker left his proviso unfinished and the newspaper man prompted him.

"Or what, Billy?"

"If they ever have to put any other boy up on him excusin' Thetaway Cornett, he's as liable as not to run the wrong way of the track again or stand still—or turn somersets."

"Hasn't he been cured of that crazy streak yet?"

The trainer shook his head. "Not to my knowledge," he answered. "Colonel Parrish has got the hoss of this generation right there, Mr. Burtley. It ain't that he's just an uncommon speedy colt—it's like as if he was a different breed of animal that can run faster than the hoss breed." He shook his head and added reflectively: "An' yet any time you switch jockeys on him he's apt to quit cold and let a bunch of dogs trail past him."

"The colt made the boy as much as the boy made the colt," mused Tommy. "I'll gamble on Cornett to stick to the Parrish colors."

The colored man nodded.

"He seems level-headed enough," he admitted, "but the Derby this year's goin' to be a mighty big race. There's men in the East that would give more to carry off that horseshoe of roses an' that silver cup than the purse is worth—there's men that set monstrous store by saddlin' the winner, regardless of what it costs."

He paused and wagged his head dubiously before he added: "An' maybe I'm not the only man that's had a certain hunch."

"What hunch, Billy?"

"That the one lonesome chance any Easterner's got this year to cop that prize is—to split Fleetwing and Cornett apart."

Tom Burtley shot a swift glance at the boy who at that moment galloped by on the big brown and eased him to a walk.

"And that boy," he admitted meditatively, "needs big money. He needs it bad. He's bent on carrying on his father's fight." Suddenly he demanded: "Billy, you went the rounds of the winter tracks where Thetaway was free lancing. How did he behave?"

The colored man made his reply judicially.

"He kep' himself to himself. The other boys in the jockey room didn't have much use for him. They called him a tightwad an' a ridin' parson—but he went on lookin' solemn and makin' money and puttin' all he got into the sock—an' studyin' his books when he wasn't workin'."

"So you think he didn't fall for the bright lights—even in Havana?"

"No, sir, I'm sure he didn't, but——"

"But what?"

"But he looked to me like he plumb worshiped money—an' that's what I'm studyin' about now. They'll cover this track with greenbacks to get a holt on him. They'll outbid the devil to take him away from the man that could, as easy as not, have sewed him up with a contract tight as wax for three years."

The colored man fell silent, for Thetaway himself had slid from the saddle now and turned his mount over to a stableboy, and with Colonel Parrish he came over and shook hands with Burtley.

"Your colt looks as good as ever, colonel," ventured the reporter and the turfman smiled as he answered:

"He's as sound as a dollar so far—but there are six weeks yet in which he may

bow a tendon or split a hoof or take a cold." He paused there, then added: "Or in which something might happen to Tolliver Cornett."

"It's all a game of chance, colonel," admitted the younger man, "but barring accident it looks like a grand season for you—with the big prizes at your mercy."

"It looks so good to me," acceded Parrish soberly, "that I'm afraid of it. It looks so easy that I feel as if the old hoodoo must be lurking behind some corner with his piece of gas pipe neatly wrapped for a wallop. The thing my heart is most set on is this Derby—here at home."

Moseby nodded a sympathetic head.

"There ain't no other race like it," he declared as if answering a litany. "I rode in the first one—back in 'seventy-five when the purse wasn't quite three thousand. I rode Bob Woolley—an' Aristides won. Then two years later on I brought in the winner. It was Baden-Baden that year an' I beat Bobby Swim on Leonard in the stretch. I reckon you remember Bobby Swim, don't you, colonel?"

The turfman smiled. "I remember him. It seems hard to realize that any turfman has forgotten him."

Tolliver stood looking at these elders as they talked, and Burtley stood looking at Cornett, wondering what was in his mind. To the veteran breeder and the veteran trainer that long span of years and experience stood not only for a series of events in which men gambled on horses. To both of them it was a thing surrounded and hallowed by tradition and to their memories came back the thunder through stretches of champions long dead but still alive in history.

Some day, thought Tolliver, when his job was done, he should like to look forward to some such life as Parrish's: to seeing fine animals develop out of long-legged foals at the side of royal matrons into handicap contenders running in his own silks—and after that retiring as sires and dams themselves, carrying the strain down to new generations. But his future was sternly fixed and dedicated to less gracious and self-indulgent uses—and when whatever fortune he could build was spent, as he must spend it, the little day that bounds a jockey's golden opportunity would have closed—and there would be for it no redrawing. It was a life that ran to a quick end.

His face was unsmilingly grim as he stood there on that April morning.

The Cartley stock farm stands a few miles out of Lexington and to it visitors make pilgrimages because in a land of famous studs it stands as one of the most notable. Here pastures of lush bluegrass shaded by oak and walnut give cool grazing and the limestone water builds greatness of bone, but that is true also of other and lesser farms. Here an owner, who visited his place only occasionally, though it was the apple of his eye, had been able to lavish on its development every attribute of completeness, so that its barns and paddocks and training tracks were all models of their kind. Here visitors are taken, as if visiting royalty, to see the sires that stand in the stud there, headed by the mighty stallion who was imported from England, with a Three Thousand Guineas, a Derby, a St. Leger and a St. James Park to his credit. It is a plant possible of attainment only to the turfman who has enthusiasm and millions.

J. C. Cartley, who also maintained a stock farm in the East, was setting his heart this year on sweeping the three-year-old board with a son of the British horse which he had called King George, and in his house on Madison Avenue he was conferring to that end with George Breck, who handled for him the bulk of his racing interests. These were interests of large scope in themselves yet only a part of the Cartley activities and a part more wrapped in sentiment than in the need or wish for gain.

"The colt," said Breck thoughtfully, "has rounded to nicely during the winter and he's as right as a trivet. If he trains on during the next few weeks without mishap he ought to give an argument to any man's horse."

"An argument isn't enough," smiled Cartley. "He's got to give a drubbing to every man's horse—and as a two year old he was always knocking at the door but he never quite got in."

"That part of it doesn't make me lose any sleep," said the manager. "He had a bad leg last year and he's a late developer. I didn't make you any rash promises about him in two-year-old form, did I?"

"No."

"Well, I'm making promises now. He's answered my questions this year," went on Breck confidently, "and I have no fault to



find—or wouldn't have if it were any other year."

Cartley raised his brows.

"Why any other year?" he questioned and his major-domo laughed.

"Because if that colt of Parrish's goes on as he's started no man's horse can hold his pace without hitting the stretch dizzy and drunk. I don't usually kick on another man's good fortune—but with Fleetwing in the running it's like racing horses against a wild duck."

"What assurance have you," inquired the owner of King George, "that the three-year-old Fleetwing will be as great a horse as the two year old?"

"None," answered Breck, "and that's the hope we're banking on. Barring Fleetwing we need ask no favors—but that one looks to be a superhorse and we might as well admit it."

Cartley puffed contemplatively on his after-luncheon cigar and after an interval of silence, the manager spoke musingly as if to himself:

"There's a feature to it that is unusual. The impression seems to prevail that Fleetwing will run his race for only one boy—Thetaway Cornett."

"And Parrish has no contract on his services."

"No-o, that's the unique angle of the situation. The boy is free so far as contract goes. I'd like to make him an offer, Mr. Cartley."

Cartley looked suddenly up.

"Do you feel that he could be legitimately approached? I shouldn't care to do anything unethical." He fell silent for a space then shook his head. "If it were a case of trying to get Cornett because we genuinely wanted the boy I suppose there's no reason why we shouldn't go after him—but if it's just to keep him off another man's horse it wouldn't do."

Breck shrugged his shoulders.

"Leave that phase out of consideration then," he suggested, "though even from that angle it's fair enough. Parrish might have put his boy under contract—and he didn't. That's his own affair and he's bound by the consequences. But aside from keeping Thetaway Cornett off Fleetwing, you couldn't make a better investment than in getting him signed up on your staff."

"If you approach Cornett," remarked Cartley decisively, "it must be with the full

knowledge of his employer. I insist on that. The rest is up to you."

"How far may I go in the matter of salary," inquired Breck and his employer laughed shortly.

"That's up to you, too," he asserted, then suddenly he leaned forward and brought his fist down, not violently but in soft emphasis on the table.

"I want the Derby and I want the Suburban and the Belmont," he said, "but I want the Derby most—I don't care a whoop about the stakes. You can go so far as to tell that boy that if he brings my silks in first in any or all of those events he may regard each purse as a bonus to go to him in addition to his salary."

George Breck looked up and his eyes took on an expression of wonderment as if he had been jolted by a stiff-arm jab which had dazed him.

"Am I dreaming, Mr. Cartley?" he demanded. "Say that again if you really did say it," and Cartley said it again.

"There's only one answer any boy in his right mind can make to that proposition," observed the manager of the Cartley stud, "and after all this one bids fair to be the season's premier jockey. As such he belongs in the black-and-blue jacket. Parrish is a strong man on the turf but Cornett has graduated into our class."

That same evening Breck took a train for Kentucky, having wired for a joint meeting with Colonel Parrish and his jockey.

It was in Colonel Parrish's hotel room that the three came together.

George Breck, though he had persuaded himself that his purpose was ethically as well as technically irreproachable, went up in the elevator with the sense of one charged with an embarrassing mission. When Parrish opened the door there was back of his smile a shadow of anxious gravity.

"I might as well get right down to brass tacks," began the Cartley emissary awkwardly. "I didn't want to take any step in this matter except with your full knowledge, colonel. I want to lay all my cards face up."

"You mean," Parrish spoke slowly, "that you want my boy. Is that right?"

Breck nodded with the feeling of one thrown on the defensive as he amplified: "My understanding is that Cornett has no contract with you—that he's free to act as he sees fit."

"Yes, that's true—and I've seen this coming." The self-control of years kept the Woodford County man's features steady but inside him he felt a nausea of disappointment as he saw the future of his great colt so absurdly yet dangerously threatened with collapse.

"Yes," he forced himself to go on, "and now, having shown me the courtesy of an explanation, the rest of your business is with him. He's a minor, of course, but I suppose his mother will ratify his decision."

Breck turned to the boy.

"I understand you're ambitious," he began, "and when you ride in Cartley colors you ride for as prominent a stable as there is. The salary——"

He paused and Tolliver, whose face had lost some of its bronzed color stood waiting. He had given no indication of any kind as to what reactions were stirring in him as he listened. Now he prompted jerkily and in a queer voice: "Yes, what about the pay?"

Breck named a figure at which the boy gave an involuntary start of amazement, then without giving time for any answer the manager launched his climax: "Mr. Cartley races for the satisfaction of winning," he said. "The Derby and the Suburban and the Belmont are the things he covets most. The purses of each and all of those, that you win—will go to you as a bonus."

Tolliver Cornett braced himself as if against the buffet of a breaker and instinctively his eyes turned to Parrish. Parrish himself had winced at that bolt of unprecedented prodigality. He moistened his lips with his tongue.

"I don't see, son," he said dismally, "how you can well refuse."

#### CHAPTER XIV.

The boy turned away for a moment and stood with his eyes fixed on the raised sash and they seemed unreadably sullen eyes. In his mind some storm was gathering that let no indication of its emotions escape outward and Breck suggested when the silence had outlasted his patience:

"Perhaps you'll want to think it over, maybe talk with your mother."

"No," said Tolliver slowly and speaking with an evident effort, "I don't need to talk it over with anybody. Only one person could counsel me and he's dead. I'm ready to give you my answer now."

"Good!" exclaimed Breck. "We can draw the contracts later. All I want now is the one word 'acceptance' to wire to Mr. Cartley."

Tolliver shook his head.

"That's not the word, Mr. Breck," he said. "The word's 'no.'"

"No! Do you realize what I'm offering? Do you know what those stakes are worth in money?"

"I know what every one of them has been worth in money for years past," answered the boy steadily, "and I know what money means to me—and why—and Colonel Parrish knows too. But I'm riding those races in Parrish colors this year."

Breck stood in the dismay of one who realizes the futility of arguing with unreason and it was Parrish himself who spoke, and spoke against his own interests.

"Son," he urged, "I know what's in your mind. You realize that this money isn't being offered you to ride King George, so much as to take you off Fleetwing. You know, too, that with you up Fleetwing has the season in a sling, and without you he's beaten already. He'd be a centaur with the man part cut off. But that's sentiment and I'd be the last man to let you sacrifice yourself to sentiment."

"Fleetwing and I started together," said the boy obdurately, "and we aren't ready to dissolve partnership yet."

"I'm going to give you a chance to change your mind," suggested Breck persuasively. "I'll see you again to-morrow."

"There isn't any use in that," Thetaway told him seriously. "I'm mightily obliged to you—it's the most generous offer I ever heard of—but my mind's made up."

It was after George Breck had gone that the boy turned impulsively to Parrish.

"The reason I let him talk on," he said apologetically, "was that I wanted you to hear what he had to say. I hope you don't think I had any notion of quitting you."

"I know what your heart is set on," answered Parrish brusquely. "I know that you regard money as artillery and ammunition for your fight—and he almost offered you the kingdoms of the earth."

The boy's eyes darkened and became inscrutable again with that seeming of sullenness which was his defense against emotionalism.

"Where'd I be now—except for you?" he demanded. "If it was just avenging *him*

and not *how* I did it I could have settled the score before this—by lying in the laurel with a gun. He didn't fight that way and I don't fight by deserting my friends for money. I reckon I can make enough without that. Did you look for this to happen, colonel?"

The turfman nodded his head.

"I've been waiting for it," he said, "and wondering what you'd say. I couldn't have blamed you."

"I've been waiting for it too," announced Tolliver, "and I've known right well what I'd say."

Such a character as is developed only in the unique life of the Appalachians was Brother Littlefield, self-taught practitioner of rude medicine and unordained preacher of the gospel. Gaunt and rugged of stature, fearless and fervent of spirit, his place was one in that strange community like the place of no other. In youth he had drunk and fought and made common lot with the wild-

est. In maturer years he had "tuck a come through to the mourner's bench" one "big-meetin' time" and since that day he had gone on fighting with an even greater militance, but he had fought under the colors of a rough-hewn religion. His tempestuous exhortations played on the emotions of those crowds that came together for the revivals, where a hysteria of religious excitation kindled and blazed under his hot gospeling—and at other times he made long and "slavish" journeys ministering to the isolated sick.

Among inimical clan elements he walked safely as a neutral, trusted by both sides and invested with something like the character of a wilderness saint.

Now Brother Littlefield had come to Churchill Downs, a place which he regarded as an outlying province of hell, a day or two before the opening of the spring meeting. He came with scowling eyes that blistered the attachés of that evil place, as he demanded brusquely to be directed to "Leetle Tolly Cornett."

He found the boy at last talking with Colonel Parrish and insisted that he "have speech with him straightaway—an' without no one else hearkenin'."

Tolliver turned with him and led the way to the emptiness of the far turn and here under the lee of the tall outer fence he

halted and said, in the old phrases that his visitor would accept as the speech of "home-folks," "I'm hearkenin' to ye, Brother Littlefield."

The old man's eyes flashed amberlike as he surveyed the "trappin's an' fixin's of Belial" that surrounded him, but when he spoke he said nothing of them.

"Folks tells it that ye aims to punish the men that slew your pappy, Tolly. Air that right?"

"So help me God Almighty," came the instant and earnest response.

"Folks gives it out likewise, that ye're seekin' to have a new law passed that'll cause murders to be tried outside the mountings, afore an upright jedge. Air that right too?"

"As true as gospel, Brother Littlefield."

"An' what evidence have ye got to lay afore that co'te when ye goes there?"

The boy shook his head with an uneasy sense of having no answer ready.

"So far," he said, "I've been seeking to earn money, because it'll take a lavish of money. When I come of age and have the money and the knowledge of law I aim to go back home and spend my life working up the case."

The old preacher stood shaking his head in frank disapproval of that program.

"It won't do," he declared incisively. "Men dies an' fergits, an' folks that'll talk to-day falls silent to-morrow. By the time ye comes of age it'll be too tardy."

Tolliver gazed eagerly into the face of the ragged old shepherd.

"What do you counsel, then?" he asked.

"I didn't fare down here so much to offer ye counsel as to fetch ye a message," he said. "There's a man that lives on Little Greasy, where it heads up at, that could tell ye a lavish ye needs to know—an' he's a-dyin'."

"Dying?" echoed the boy. "Won't he tell you?"

"He won't tell nobody save you," went on the preacher, "an' he wouldn't suffer me to write ye no letter. I journeyed down here twic't afore this past winter, but ye was a-ridin' gamblin' hosses away off in furrin' parts, an' I had to turn my face back without seein' ye. I come again now because some one named it to me that he'd read your name in a newspaper an' it said ye was here."

"Here and hearkenin'," declared the boy.

"This man," went on the preacher, "he

was hired by Malone, an' he knows it all, an' so far Malone don't suspicion him none. Las' winter when the snow commenced to fly I fetched that poor bedeviled transgressor to the feet of the Lord A'mighty an' showed him his sin. I bruck the ice an' baptized him—an' he has the heart an' cravin' to go afore the judgment seat without black secrets layin' heavy on his mind."

"You mean he's ready to confess—and won't do it except to me?"

"I means he's done been nigh to death some siv'ral times afore now an' he's done rallied. He can't skeercely rally no more. He's got right severe smotherin' spells an' the winter's done wore him out."

Tolliver knew that in the language of the hills "smothering spells" meant advanced tuberculosis, frequent penalty of tight and windowless cabins—and he shuddered inwardly as he thought of that depleted wretch being baptized by immersion through broken ice.

"He wants to cross the river in peace with God," went on the revivalist. "What he's got to say mightn't skeercely amount to a full confession afore the law—but he can give ye the names of every man that might be persuaded to speak the truth—an' he can give ye the each an' every of the whole devilmint to layway your pap an' murder him."

There was a pause there and a change of tone to solemn warning:

"But there ain't no time to fritter away nor waste. Ye've got to make a soon start an' fare back there with me like as if ye was a-borryin' fire."

Tolliver Cornett stood, suddenly engulfed in the throes of a monstrous dilemma. There was a little more than a week before Derby day, and that time would be enough—if he could be sure of going and coming without hitch or delay. When he went into that country, though, he could take no such assurance with him. Another man might slip in and slip out unnoticed but he was stamped and branded by his diminutive stature, beyond hope of disguise or the escaping of recognition.

A giant could walk among pygmies with as much hope of going unobserved—as a pygmy among giants. Yet the whole edifice of his future was building toward an end in which such information as offered itself here was arch pin and keystone—and the time would not wait.

"Brother Littlefield," he said soberly, "you don't understand the conditions here. There are men that would give ten thousand dollars—and make money on the bargain—if they could keep me out of Louisville a week from next Saturday. There may be men up there in the mountains who know that. Are you sure this one on the headwaters of Little Greasy isn't seeking to deceive both you and me? Are you plumb, dead sure he isn't baiting a trap for another one of Malone's laywayings?"

The old preacher stiffened a little and his voice was that of hurt pride.

"I didn't 'low ye'd suspicion me, Tolly," he said; "I 'lowed every man confided me when I counseled 'em. I've done told ye this man lay nigh to death. It ain't no snare bein' set afore your feet—albeit I reckon your pap would have risked even that if need be."

Tolliver's chin snapped up.

"All right, Brother Littlefield. I'm going with you."

Alone with Parrish, the boy explained his situation, and though the turfman's face wore again the anxiety that had come over it as he listened to Breck's proposal he offered no dissuading influence.

"I don't have to be told that you'll be back here if it's possible for you to come," he said gravely, "and I know what counts above everything else in your life—but I'm gravely apprehensive, son." He paused and added, "Not only for my racing prospects, but for you."

"I'll be heedful," Tolliver assured him. "I won't go in at Hixon Town. I'll strike Pine Mountain and work back along the trails that wiggle and wingle along there—and if I have luck I'll be out again before Malone knows I've come."

But Malone knew.

The loosely articulated but effective secret service which had enabled him and Cropper to maintain their ascendancy caught up and relayed the tidings to Hixon headquarters, that Leetle Tolly Cornett had crossed Pine Mountain, afoot, traveling with Brother Littlefield and that he was "hidin' out" somewhere near Brother Littlefield's house.

There the information ended. There the trail turned cold. Even Malone made no effort to extort information from the preacher by persuasion or fear. The medieval principle of sanctuary still held as to

the evangelist's house and guests, but slowly a cordon drew around that neighborhood and set a watch on every egress from it, like a circle of unseen but ready cats watching a rat hole. By those intangible ways of the wilderness the rat had warning, but some time—and some time before Derby day in Louisville—he would have to make a run for it; would need to attempt escape. Then one or more of the cats would be ready—since it needed no declaration that the rat had come there for one purpose only and in coming had declared war.

Tolliver Cornett was in actuality keeping himself hidden in a loft over the cabin where one Mose Crosby lay dying of tuberculosis. Casual visitors talking empty things, but thinking deeply, dropped in there and left without enriching their information while the boy crouched overhead. He had finished his work and had written down and memorized the names of some eight or ten men who if approached in precisely the right way, and at precisely the right time with assurances of protection were ready to speak the truth on the witness stand—or might be. It would take months to work those threads into a net strong enough and broad enough to enmesh and snare the old wolf who ran at the head of his pack—but at least the beginnings were in hand. The trick now was to get out of that particular spot of the steep wilderness and piece together the garnered scraps of knowledge, but for all his burning fever of impatience the boy knew that he was timing a race against death now, in which a false start or a miscalculation would be fatal.

He knew, though, that he had gained one point. The enemy did not suspect that he had gone to the cabin of Mose Crosby, and out of its dark door he slipped after moonset on a night selected not because it was a specially hopeful occasion but because it was the last one that held the possibility of getting back to Louisville in time. His plan was a bold one, using the assumption that the enemy would expect him to make his try for a slipping out over Pine Mountain as he had come in, and that the enemy's strength would be concentrated along that route. So with the guidance of a bold youth who knew every foot of obscure trail and who furnished one mule which the two of them should use after the mountain fashion of "tying and riding," he started out along

the shorter and more open road to Hixon Town. Through the night they went like cautious snails and when daylight came the guide would ride ahead on the mouse-colored mule for several miles reconnoitering the way and leaving behind him signals of bent and broken twigs. Then he would dismount and hitch his "critter," going ahead on foot—and still reconnoitering. Tolliver would come up to the tethered beast and ride openly so far as the signs held assertion of safety—and because this bold strategy had not been anticipated by the enemy it held them safe for most of the journey to the town.

Sometimes the guide would scent danger and wait for his follower or go back to meet him and send him, by detours, over the wooded hills.

In that fashion Hixon was reached without mishap and through its surprised streets at sunset, just before train time, the boy walked boldly, trusting that in that publicity he might count on a brief interval of fair safety. Because he was not expected in the town itself he reached the station unharmed and swung himself aboard the train just as the conductor waved his hand to the engine cab to pull out on the northerly and westerly run.

So far he had reasoned well and his reasoning had saved his life. Back along the other way he could not have passed. It was an unbroken series of ambushades. The "laurel hells" there bristled with hidden guns. But the minds that had planned that trapping were flexible and quick-thinking minds and even while he walked the little length of the main street they were realizing their error and revising their tactics.

Tolliver took his place in the dingy smoking compartment of the single coach. Except for a man who sat heavily slouched in the stupor of drink he had the place to himself. The train rumbled out of the station and halted again at the far edge of the town, where stood the water tower.

The engine filled its boiler tanks and its whistle screeched.

Tolliver smiled as he ventured to look out of the window on the place which the twilight was taking. Then a shot cracked from a pile of stacked ties by the side of the water tower. The boy leaned forward in an attitude of one puzzled by the sound. He became aware that his shirt was moist against his chest. He pressed his hand

under his coat and in the yellow lamplight of the smoking car it came away red.

## CHAPTER XV.

The morning of Derby day brought clouded skies and a pattering of large rain-drops which thousands of racegoers prayed fervently might prove a clearing shower. Almost all night thunder-laden clouds had sluiced down deluges and the track which had yesterday been lightening fast and springy as pasteboard was a welter of mud, with the coveted path along the rail and broader patches about the turns lying fetlock deep under water.

Scores of thousands of eyes looked out gloomily through wet window panes and scores of thousands of tongues sighed or grumbled or swore each after its caste and kind.

The field of ten starters named in the overnight nominations would be reduced by the withdrawal of every colt that was not bred or built for heavy going. All save the soundest and stoutest-hearted would decline the issue of the starter's flag when the route lay through deep and holding mud. Those regulars to whom the betting shed was a Mecca and the betting instinct a stinging fever foresaw a slow-run race and the need for total revision of their calculations, and those to whom the occasion meant only a holiday saw the spirit of its gayety extinguished.

J. C. Cartley in the private car that lay on a side track, secure from the overcrowded petulance of the town, was one who neither frowned nor swore.

The special from New York to which his car had been attached had arrived at daylight and with its entering by George Breck, bearing the morning papers, had come unexpected encouragement of spirit.

"This weather is made to order for the King," announced the manager with a pleasure which he made no effort to conceal. "The form sheet catalogues our colt as a superior mudder—and the form sheet is dead right. He never lost even a two-year-old race when the slush was deep. He eats mud."

"He never met a field like this in either mud or dust, though," the owner reminded him.

"There's nothing in this field that can take any liberties with him—except Fleet-

wing," declared Breck assertively, "and as to Fleetwing there's a funny rumor going the rounds."

The well-groomed Easterner stiffened his compact shoulders with a quickened interest. "What rumor?" he demanded almost greedily.

"Parrish's boy hasn't been seen about the track since the opening here—and Parrish isn't saying where he is. I could understand the colonel's going so far as to keep him off other mounts until the big race is run—though it's crowding caution pretty far. That lad isn't popular with the other jocks and it's thoroughly believed that without him the Electron trick is a rudderless boat. Somebody might try to put him over the fence—but why in Hades should he be kept out of sight entirely?"

Cartley nodded gravely, then smiled with good humor.

"I hope Colonel Parrish doesn't think we mean to kidnap his boy after failing to entice him," he said.

"Moreover, Thetaway Cornett has always given Fleetwing his keying-up work before," went on the manager of the Cartley stud, "and during the past week Snip Button has had the leg-up in the work-outs."

"How did he handle the colt?" demanded Cartley.

"So-so." Breck shrugged his shoulders. "But Jimmy Earle is fifteen pounds better boy than Button—and all the money I've got is saying that Fleetwing, with Button up, isn't that much better colt than the King."

"What's your own idea about Cornett?"

"I'm just guessing, like the rest. One rumor is that the boy's sick and they're hoping against hope he'll be able to ride. If that's true it raises a fresh question; can a sick boy hold that double-handful of colt together and rate him and keep him straight on crowded turns?"

"I wonder," mused the millionaire. "I see here in the list of starters and probable jockeys what seems to me a significant entry: 'Fleetwing—to be ridden by Cornett or Button.'"

Breck nodded his head quickly.

"Those last two words that you read," he declared, "set the turfites sizzling this morning. Until they read it there wasn't much argument except as to what would finish second and third. Now a good fifty per cent of them are busy hedging their bets and covering up."

"This is all distinctly encouraging," smiled Cartley. "What is your precise plan of campaign—in view of these developments?"

"We are saddling King George and Starflash, as you know," the manager outlined briskly. "Jimmy Earle has the leg-up on the King and Falkes pilots Starflash. That youngster is the quickest breaker on the track to-day and he ought to get a step at the gate. He's to carry them all along at a killing pace as far as he can hold up—and he ought to have most of them drunk and staggering at the end of a mile—which is just about where he'll fade out of the foreground. Earle is to lay behind the pace and make his move to come through with the King when they're burned up. Of course if Cornett's in the pigskin—and himself—Fleetwing won't burn up easy, but if not——"

"If not we're in already," assented the owner, though with an indulgent smile for his manager's eager confidence.

"And besides that, don't forget the weather," Breck reminded his principal. "The Electron is built for endurance but there's that old quirk of temper or temperament or whatever you choose to call it about him. None of his victories has been on a muddy track—and it may stop him."

In front of the stall where the colt, that had been an odds-on favorite until this morning, stood munching his oats, Colonel Parrish in a wrinkled raincoat was pacing the tanbark and his face held a gloom that he sought vainly to disguise. Not far away, pallid and with anxious smudges under her eyes stood Shirley Creighton, who hadn't slept much the night before. Paul Creighton, too, wandered aimlessly about the place making a great show, which deceived no one, of inspecting gear and registering optimism.

Parrish went quietly over to the girl and spoke slowly: "It's no good to fire telegrams into Hixon," he said. "I know he meant to go and come over Pine Mountain and that's pure wilderness—but as soon as the race is run I'm going to start for the mountains myself."

She knew what it meant to him to mention the race so casually, and she knew, too, that it was not pretense that put it into secondary place in his anxiety.

"The crowds are pouring in," she reminded him in an anguished voice. "You

have to declare your rider—and send him into the jockey room soon. If he were alive and unhurt he'd be here—or he'd have wired."

"He may be all right," the colonel argued weakly. "He may just be cut off by a flood or—or a washout."

The rain had stopped and a patch of blue, large enough for the proverbial Dutchman's breeches, appeared overhead. The skies were clearing but as Parrish leaned on the gate of his starter's box stall that brightening found no reflection in his eyes.

Already a flood of humanity was cascading into the stands—early comers who would take their places and hold them through intervening hours and now that the menace of rain was lifting, bunting began to flash across the infield and pennants and flags to lift their notes of color to the freshened air.

Finally a taxicab swung free of the procession that moved unendingly along the cinder road and halted with a grinding of brake bands before the Parrish barn. Its door was thrown eruptively open and it was an outcry of amazed relief from the girl that brought Parrish around, pivoting on his heels, as Tolliver Cornett blundered out.

He was pale and his eyes wore the haggard look of exhaustion. He moved somewhat stiffly but he demanded with the inelegance of haste:

"I'm in time, ain't I?"

Following the boy and holding his elbow came a strange man.

"I'm Doctor Caldwell," he announced briefly. "I was called onto the train at Winchester and I brought this boy back. He was unconscious part of the way from loss of blood and shock and he's still weak, but he insisted he had to get here—and ride in the Derby."

"Can he ride?" demanded the turfman bluntly. "How did he lose blood?"

"It seems he was shot somehow as the train pulled out of Hixon Town," came the vague reply. "As to the riding, he says he can."

"That's what I came for," protested Tolliver hotly. "I know what I can do."

"What do you say, doctor?" insisted Parrish as he laid a soothing hand on the boy's excitedly trembling shoulder.

The physician eyed his inquisitor speculatively.

"Perhaps it's more a question for a horse-

man than a doctor, sir," he hazarded. "He has a cracked rib—plastered with tape now—and he's lost a good bit of strength by shock and bleeding. It might not do him any permanent damage, but you'll have a cripple on your horse."

"Tellygram for Colonel Parrish," yelled a boy and as the owner read it and passed it on to the physician, Doctor Caldwell said, "I filed that at Lexington—hours ago. My patient insisted on it. It seems to have been slower than we were."

The multitudes that strained the fences and seethed laboriously about the stands and lawns endured their herding with a touch of gayety because, after all, the sun was shining and the brilliance of the occasion was flashingly superior to creature discomfort. Roofs and telephone poles outside the great inclosure bore a heaviness of human fruit and to the branches of the few trees in the center field black figures clung. Reporters and correspondents who had not missed the running of a Derby for years calculated the numbers and shot their estimates all along the range between thirty and forty-five thousand.

Abruptly from the whole place rose a crescendo of voices that volleyed into gathering thunder and drowned out the brasses of the band stand. The jockey board had swung up on its pivot and over against number three for the Derby—which was the number that Fleetwing would wear on his saddle cloth—stood the name, "T. Cornett."

Men who had been stampeded by doubt into hedging their advance bets in the handbooks made a plunging drive for the pari mutuels, now, to hedge their hedging. Then under a negro exercisé boy the colt that had made playthings out of all last season's two year olds appeared for his warming-up gallop, and the shouts were reborn and followed him until, shining with sweat over his walnut-brown coat, he turned and disappeared into the paddock.

Perhaps in that congestion there were more men who could not see than those who could. Certainly there were thousands who dared not leave their few square inches of standing room to venture into the betting sheds and chance being submerged in a human flood out of which only a periscope would avail.

Many followed events only by sound and at last they heard the bugle fanfare and the

multiple howl which announced, "Here they come!"

Onto the sticky track where brown puddles still stood despite the unending toil of harrow and smoothing drag, came dancing the six that were left after the scratches. The pair of the Cartley entry with their blue-and-black silks came one and two—and it was Starflash who had drawn the rail in the lottery of positions at the barrier.

Now he led the parade past the judges' stand, looking the picture horse, but the stands knew that his grandeur would scorch itself to a cinder at the end of a mile in such fast company, and that the real issue lay between his less impressive-looking stable mate who wore the numeral two and the brown Fleetwing that trod sedately and unexcitedly in third place.

Even as a field parades deliberately to the post it is hard to read a jockey's face under its peaked cap, but from those who had been near the Parrish stall in the paddock a new rumor had sprung and now that rumor was running like wildfire through the thousands—or perhaps it was only the confirmation of an old fear.

It was being whispered that Thetaway Cornett had risen from a sick bed to ride this race and those who had seen him at close quarters advertised the conviction that the boy had left his bed too soon. When he had come out of the jockey room he had been ghost pale, they said, and in the stall when Parrish mounted him he had moved with a sluggish stiffness that was not conducive to hope. His eyes had been dark-ringed. They even said that his hand, as he gathered the reins, was shaking and that he had looked far-away and distrait.

Now those who pressed closest against the fence could confirm that report of pallor on the boy's face, and through his glasses Cartley marked it and nodded his head frowningly.

"The boy's in no condition to bring home a winner," he commented, "and if I win this race there'll be people who'll call it a lucky fluke."

Back of those first three came the other three, the outsiders under jockeys, riding for the bargain hunters who want long odds and shoot at the moon—horses held in contempt by the form players.

Just beyond the judges' stand the half-dozen aspirants for glory wheeled and jogged slowly back to the barrier that stretched a



quarter of a mile from the finish line. As they went the fickleness of the herd spirit sounded in the shouts, and almost equal with the yells of "Oh, you Fleetwing!" and "Attaboy, Thetaway!" rose bellowed exhortations of "Long live the King!" and "Sock it to him, Earle!"

They were at the barrier now and down those two furlongs on a breeze which was northerly floated the shouts of the starter.

"Bring 'em up even, boys—I'm not going to let you break ragged."

Behind the webbing the half dozen had wheeled into place and the boys were walking their mounts warily toward the tape, each jockeying for a shade the best of it in the coming eruption of horseflesh when the barrier should be sprung.

As they approached, almost as warily as pointers closing in on a bunched covey of quail, the practiced eye of the starter read their covetousness for first advantage and his monitory voice boomed.

"Don't try to get by me without the word. Don't try to beat the barrier. This race can't start that way!"

They were close now, the colts shuddering with explosive eagerness through their tensed muscles—close to the tape—and still even as a squadron front. Then Starflash, the quick breaker, plunged crazily from his place on the rail and dashed through the webbing, breaking the tape.

"Bring him back, Falkes," bellowed the starter, as the others began lunging with contagion of ill temper, and the assistants restretched and retied the broken band.

"One more break like that and I set you down ten days."

Starflash was peeved and when he was peeved his temper was nasty. Every time he was ridden back and wheeled it was to bolt on the turn and dash afresh at the barrier, and while Falkes wrestled conscientiously with him the others frothed out of that first quiet into a bedlam of fuming.

Thetaway Cornett with the favorite was standing stock-still third out from the rail, and quite suddenly a sense of the giant importance of the race settled overwhelmingly over him. He knew that once he heard the shout "Go on"—once that statue animal under him spread out into a streak of speed, he would forget everything else. But now, forced to stand there to a delayed start, a faintness came over him and disconcerting pains shot through his side and shoulders.

He felt giddy and for an instant a foggy cloud seemed to blur and deaden the quick accuracy that must act and react within the second. For the first time, when actually in the saddle, he lost his self-confidence and his assurance. For the first time his hair-trigger alertness lapsed into a momentary torpor.

And still they were milling, wheeling, walking back and plunging forward and still that monotonous voice just beyond the rail was howling, "You can't break that way, Falkes, take that horse back, Rolf—I tell you, you can't break that way!"

Perhaps nerve waste and shock were telling on the Parrish jockey but to the glasses trained on the turn it seemed that Thetaway Cornett was for once sitting listless over the brown shoulders. To Cornett himself the illusion seemed real that when all this futile wrangling ended it would be time to ride.

Then, with the suddenness of a flushed covey, there was a hurtling plunge forward and the barrier was up. The voice of authority was yelling, "Go on!" The red flag dipped. But from the stands came a wail like howling out of bedlam:

"He's left at the post! Fleetwing's left!"

## CHAPTER XVI.

It was Starflash who after all his vexing efforts had finally succeeded in "breaking on top." He was away with a good half length of lead and in the first half-dozen strides he had amplified it. King George had swung in behind him on the rail and was letting him forge the first speed. Fleetwing had done a thing that he had never done before. Perhaps the uncanny sympathy between horse and boy was to blame. Perhaps the colt, too, had felt that a sure instinct would warn him when the break was to be genuine. Now he was next to last and unless he swung out for the long overland route he could not pass that wall of horseflesh that lay between him and the leaders.

A stroke of mortification, almost of despair, burned like lightning through the mind of Thetaway Cornett. He had been asleep at the flag fall. It would have been better to have let Button wear the cherry and white to-day. But with that scorching flash of chagrin all sense of physical inertia and pain was cauterized away, too. The race wasn't lost yet. There was a mile and

a quarter ahead and a shade more than two minutes in which to redeem disgrace—and it was the order of the finish and not the start that counted.

The first time past the stand Starflash was streaking out ahead at a pace which would have made him mighty had it been a pace he could hold throughout a journey. Some brief-lived speed merchant which would presently curl up and wilt was running second and the King was taking it easy in third place, under wraps, while Fleetwing lay on the rail, fifth in a field of six. There was something just far enough ahead to pocket him and choke his fleetness into waste until a gap opened through which he might bore his way—or until his jockey saw fit to abandon that hope and swing him out for the overland journey—which would add something like a hundred yards to his travels.

On the first turn Thetaway was alertly ready. Should the boy ahead of him swing just a shade wide the gate would be open and the rest would be easy. But that boy knew that the thing thundering on his saddle skirts was last year's invincible and he clung like a leech to his track close to the rail.

Fleetwing was unused to this new type of punishment. He had been wont to take his commanding place at the head of the procession and to make sport of trailing inferiority. Now he was being subjected to filthy travel in slush kicked back from lesser hoofs. His even greatness of stride faltered peevishly for an instant. Huge clots of wet clay were hurled back plastering the chest and face of the colt, blinding the eyes of the boy, and those muddy castigations fell with the scorch and sting of rawhide.

It was in the back stretch that Cornett gave up hope of slipping through and took Fleetwing sharply up until he was on humiliatingly even terms with the last trailer of the field. Then he set sail on the outside, where the route was longer but the going clear.

"Now pick 'em up!" shouted the jockey to the son of Electron. "It's a slavish hard task, but you can do it," and he took hold of the head, settled a shade lower over the outstretched neck and began flinging his mount into a lengthened stride.

He was painfully conscious of a weakness in his arms that he had never felt before. Live coals seemed to burn with a hot agony

in his chest and the head of the colt hung on his hands as if it weighed a ton and had no other support. It was near the far turn that the brilliant pyrotechnics of Starflash went dead and the colt that had set a sensational speed pattern through the heavy mud threw up his tail in despair and surrendered. King George, who had been saved by his stable mate from the heartbreak of running the field groggy, was ready to move freshly into the lead now. Jimmy Earle had scores to settle with an upstart who had menaced his prestige. Now he glanced back over his shoulder and confidently picked his going. The moment of revenge had been slow in coming and it was sweet. The only horse he feared was traveling the long way and, though he was already moving into second place in a field that straggled over half a furlong, he was still a good ten lengths back. So they rounded the last turn, straightened into the stretch and bent down to ride home.

Had it been another horse then, or a lesser race, Thetaway Cornett would have spared Fleetwing the needless heartbreak of competing that finish—but it was not another horse and it was still the Kentucky Derby. The colt under him had never yet been asked to do his utmost. He had never yet been called on to make the supreme effort that seems to crack the heart and burst the lungs—the finish where the nerves must flog the muscles on to achieve the seemingly impossible. If he was great-hearted, he must show it now—and the boy must do no less.

For Tolliver's heart and lungs too seemed bursting as if under an unbearable pressure of live and scalding steam. His arms felt water weak, when they must be leather strong, but though King George was still skimming on ahead like a swallow his lead was dwindling fast. Earle was already swinging his bat in circles that brought home the lash with each stride and fell perfectly timed. Earle had wakened out of false security to a sudden realization of oncoming danger and he had gone to the rawhide and to the steel.

Fleetwing was closing with a mighty rush as the leader came back to him. His stride was sweeping in tremendous lengths. It was as if in coming from behind he had discovered a new and highly relished game. He was burning the mud under him and a sixteenth from the wire the stands broke into

a fresh bedlam as the brown nose reached the flank ahead, crept up on it, passed it, lapped on the saddle cloth then took the lead which was the brown colt's right—and that Derby was over.

It was in the chalk circle that Cornett dismounted, but they had to wait for him. Fleetwing had seemed minded to make it a two-mile race and the arms that had unreefed his reins were too weak to take him up again quickly.

The boy managed his unsaddling and managed, too, to hold his gear and lead pads for weighing out but he was glad when he could turn them over to the colored exercise boy, whose teeth were gleaming like a piano keyboard, and lean for a panting moment against the fence.

Tolliver looked up into the kiosk where a speech was being made over a silver cup and grinned deprecatingly by Fleetwing's head as the brown stood with the horseshoe of roses about his neck. He was confusedly aware that J. C. Cartley was congratulating him and if he slumped a little as he rode to the paddock on the shoulders of his partisans it was with a happiness that eclipsed the ache of his friendly manhandling.

In a dining room at the Pendennis Club that evening Colonel Parrish and John Powers, his trainer, were the honor guests of J. C. Cartley, whose car would later that night be coupled to an east-bound train. Though the trophy plate would not go with the host it stood now, filled, on his tablecloth, from which the food was being cleared away and over which cigar ends began to glow. There was a chair turned down there and empty, for the thoroughgoing sportsman who had fought out the classic and lost it had meant to have the boy who rode the race as a guest of equal honor with the man who had bred the victor and the trainer who had saddled him. Now Cartley, who wore his defeat as gracefully as he would have worn victory, rose and announced, "I am going to call on that Kentuckian whose day of triumph this is, to talk as long and as informally as he will of those traditions that his State has fostered. But particularly I'm going to ask him to respond to this toast—our empty chair. Gentlemen, Colonel Parrish of Woodford County."

The Bluegrass Kentuckian came to his feet and his eyes twinkled. "It's right dangerous, gentlemen," he admitted, "to take the bridle off and turn me loose on that

topic. I've just come from the hospital where my jockey has been put to bed—and what I say this evening is meant to go no farther. You gentlemen have been wondering where and why the boy has been kept in hiding. Now I mean to tell you."

The figures about the table bent forward but Parrish told nothing and meant to tell nothing of one feature of that visit to the hospital, because that feature had been a matter between himself and the boy. There over the cot where Tolly lay with a plaster cast over his cracked rib the turfman had said: "Son, Mr. Cartley made you an offer that few men could meet and that few boys would have refused. He can buy me and sell me many times over—and yet I'm not exactly a poor man. If I had need to I could put my name to a check for close to a million. I said nothing of my intention before, because it wasn't necessary, but the Derby stake goes to you. I'm more than satisfied with the glory."

Now the speaker paused, looking around the faces of his fellow diners and his eyes twinkled, then grew sober again.

"My boy was not in a hospital as report had it," he said. "I didn't know exactly where he was until late this morning. He was in the mountains where his father was murdered seven months ago and last night he was shot by a would-be feud assassin. Thetaway Cornett, gentlemen, had run two long races and two hard ones before I put him in the saddle this afternoon. He had run a race through the laurel and over creek-bed mountain trails, pursued by a squad of armed enemies, and after he had won that he had run another, wounded, to get here in time."

Again he paused and the men to whom the courage of competition was a gospel were leaning forward with their shirt fronts close to the table edge and their cigars held forgotten in their fingers.

"My boy came near tossing away his race to-day because he was too badly hurt to be entirely himself," went on Parrish. "That statement may come as a surprise to you but my next will surprise you more. Thetaway Cornett won the race, and has won other races, because he has set himself the task, not of earning turf fame or money for its own sake; not of going abroad to ride in ducal colors or the king's silks—but of accomplishing a quite different object. His set purpose has been, and is still, to

earn the money to hang a man, and he comes of a blood that doesn't forget a love or a hatred. His resolution will carry him farther than he has yet gone."

A murmur of astonishment came from the listeners and in plain but living words Parrish sketched the grim story of the life and death of "Old" Tolliver; of the son's vow, of the study that went between racing programs; and of the chapter that had come so near a fatal ending yesterday.

"You see now," he added in conclusion, "why I refrained from binding him by contract—and why, had he yielded to your generous offer, Mr. Cartley, I would have been bitterly disappointed. I had in mind a conception of developing the jockey with a background, a law student in the pigskin—and I begin to think I was less fantastic or notionate than one might have considered me."

Cartley nodded and, from his chair, he said simply, "Count me in as a coconspirator, colonel. Let the boy ride for you when you have a mount for him and give me second call on his services when you can spare him. Send him up to me on Long Island between meets some time—not as an employee but as a guest—and I'll give him some glimpses of life from our angle. I'll let him knock about the polo field and meet some lawyer friends of mine. A background calls for various slants on life, you know."

They toasted the owner after that and the trainer too, and they toasted the colt, standing, and then the Easterner and his party made a hurried dash for their train.

That season, beginning with Kentucky, proceeding through the metropolitan circuit on to Saratoga and ending again at Louisville, Thetaway Cornett was conceded place as premier jockey. He lost many races and in some of them he finished among the also rans but if his mount was commented on in the notes at the foot of the form sheet there was usually some such statement as "well handled" or "ridden to the last ounce."

You know, without retelling, if you follow the annals of the turf, what was the spectacular record of the brown son of Electra and how astounding offers were made for him—only to be promptly refused. You will recall how at the end of his four-year-old form, and still undefeated, save for that first runaway, Colonel Parrish retired him

to the stud—as the most famous horse in America's racing history. Since then old Billy Moseby has recognized more than one of his progeny as they first appeared in spring training.

The jockey who was unlike other jockeys because he was animated by a different purpose no longer went in winter to Mexico and Havana. These seasons now belonged to his studies and to preparation for new undertakings.

The statutory amendment had become law and before long Tolliver would stand in joint-session room in the Louisville courthouse and be sworn in as a member of the bar. The judge who administered the oath would inquire with perfunctory courtesy, "Any motions, Mr. Cornett?" and he would reply with equal gravity, "No motions, your honor," and the room would twitter as it always twitters over this first official utterance of a fledgling attorney.

But the case must be prepared before the altered law could advance him toward the achievement for which he had been so long building and it was as yet unready. He might ignore the perils of going back into the hills but the men from whom he sought aid would not ignore the danger of being seen to traffic with him in confidence, and he had been baffled to the edge of despair.

Yet in those hills changes were working their slow way upward and outward. Some old alliances had curdled into enmities and Tom Malone, who had moved away from the town and built himself a house on Staghorn, rode the highways now only with an escort of armed men.

Asa Cropper, his partner in power, had died with his boots on; drowned in the swirl of a mountain torrent that had changed the bed of a fording, but men whispered that had he not gone that way old enmities would have taken him with as great a violence and almost as soon. Though Malone faced his world with the high chin, and the smiling eyes of one who still feels his strength, there was an acknowledgment, in that escort of rifle bearers, that his confidence was no longer sound at its core. There was another indication too. Across the back of his new house, and between it and the forest-cloaked mountain that went up there, loomed an eight-foot stockade of hardwood logs.

The house was for that country something

of a mansion, fresh with the trim of new paint and bright with flower beds. From its front where the road twisted shadily and the creek whispered one saw these tranquil features; the martin boxes and the bee gums, and, in spring, the foam of a blossoming orchard. But at the back was that bullet-proof screen, and back of it the dark scowl of thickets where peril might always lurk. In going from his house to his barn it was Tom Malone's custom to walk in the lee of that bulwark and not to expose his head or chest to any inimical eye that might be looking down unseen. Perhaps he remembered men who had fallen and the patience with which mountain vengeance can bide its time without losing its intensity of purpose. Perhaps he saw the changes creeping on at last that he had so long held in abeyance and knew that, in their rising tide, his own power of intimidation began to strain at its moorings.

Over there some eight or ten miles away the new school founded by bluegrass women was rearing its little hamlet of houses like a fortress of peace, and children were going over there and absorbing views that foretold a generation of new thought. Malone had done what he could to balk the coming of the school with its "new-fangled" teachings, but for once he had not been fighting men whose hearts and hatreds he understood. He had been opposing women from down below who met his rebuffs with a gentle but invincible stubbornness. He did not precisely know how to fight them and he had been wise enough to fight them not at all except in unseen and devious ways. Instead he had built his stockade and ridden with an escort.

Over to that new school, hardly two years old, yet already turning away eager pupils, were coming not only children but also applicants who were gray haired, and who sought before they died to learn reading and writing.

They were finding a new and different sort of teacher here from those they had known in the old "blab schools" where the master knew little more than his charges and where he lived as a sort of charity patient precariously "boarded" from cabin to cabin. Here were women animated by an enthusiasm that had brought them out of civilization and whose mental equipment was balanced. Here were girls from the colleges of the East, working without sal-

ary—and others who had never been to college but who were none the less competent—and one of these was Shirley Creighton. She had been drafted by her keen sympathies into this little coterie of unselfish workers but in her own mind was a purpose which she had not confessed even to her colleagues: a purpose which she could not hope to accomplish until she had learned more of this life: its approaches and its prejudices.

That secret design which had more than half brought her was the intent to do the work which Tolliver himself found so baffling; the gathering, from reticent lips, of those scraps and shreds of evidence which should ultimately twist together into a cable for binding Tom Malone fast with the proof of his guilt.

Now Shirley looked up the mountainside to the tiny hospital which had been founded there; a hospital as white and clean as enamel, to which at times surgeons came from Lexington to hold clinics. At her side stood a crude but patriarchal old man who had given his farm as his contribution to the cause—and who for perhaps the twentieth time was pouring out his enthusiasm to her ears.

"I want to tell ye my reasons," he began, after his regular formula, "why I wanted a school here on this mountain. There is so many of our young folk growing up here not even taught up as to morality. It grieved me to think that parents would raise their children under such rulings. I see no chance to better it without we teach the young generation that they can't never prosper while they follow the old ones' example."

There, reflected the girl, as she nodded her agreement, was the patient philosophy that Tolliver's father had failed to grasp. There was the answer, and she was helping in her small way to accomplish what he had died for and died vainly.

Old Uncle Jimmy went on in a voice that years had made tremulous: "I've been thinking about this some thirty years or more. It's lack of knowledge and science that's caused the trouble and with good teaching seems like they would be greatly bettered. I've put all I have into the building of the new school and I don't begrudge nary a dollar I put into it."

"You've been wonderfully generous, Uncle Jimmy," she assured him and he wagged his head in delight, as he continued:

"I hope our good friends will come forward and do all they can to help our wild mountain people that has been raised up here in ignorance and regardless of law. Their foreparents has laid a pattern to them of drinkin's, killin's and abominations in the sight of God. It's rough to say but it's the truth and I think it ought to be said."

"And acted on, Uncle Jimmy," she added.

Already she was seeing avenues opening before her toward that other and major purpose. When Tolliver had become a lawyer she would have material gathered to place in his hands—and meanwhile that little hospital was treating the crippled.

## CHAPTER XVII.

The hills were delicately aflame with the rhododendron and down along the shaly shores of the creek the great magnolia-like flower of the cucumber tree was spreading its white petals. The steep slopes were in their glory of spring and the last of the apple blossoms in Tom Malone's orchard were floating down in a warm snow on the grass.

Malone himself was preparing to ride into town and his bodyguard was saddling in the stable.

As the old baron waited he saw a figure on muleback coming along the road and recognized Bert Heaton.

Malone scowled. Bert had been fretting of late with anxiety lest his aging chief's power might not remain strong enough to protect him.

Doubtless he was coming now, as he had come before, to growl out his pessimistic fears and to be reassured with fair words and liquor.

Well, there were still fair words to speak and there was still white whisky in the jug. As for the rest, reflected Malone, a majority of the old fighting stock still stood at his back.

Bert slid down from his mule and flung its bridle rein over a post at the stile. He came whistling moodily across the yard and paused to shout, "It's Bert Heaton—an' I'm a-comin' in." Then he opened the door and entered the house.

"Does ye know what's goin' for'ard?" he demanded sullenly of Malone. "Somebody's farin' through the mountains gettin' together evidence for leetle Tolliver Cornett. They're fixin' to drag us all down below an' hang the kit an' caboodle of us."

"What gives ye the idea they can do it, Bert?" smiled the old pack leader. "I reckon I've got means of knowin' what's bein' talked abroad even if it's only whispered—an' ye don't see me frettin' myself, do ye?"

"I had speech with a man yesterday," averred the informant, "an' he 'lowed that old Jase Mockton has done gone out West."

"That's all right, i reckon," admitted Tom. "I knew he aimed to go. I loaned him money for travelin'."

"But this feller told me too that Jase aimed to stop off at Lexin'ton an' tell all he knowed—and he knows a hell-fired lavish."

"Oh, pshaw," laughed the elder and wiser man. "I reckon you can confidence Jase. I do. Have a drink, Bert."

Bert accepted but he was not convinced, and as he wiped his lips on the back of his hand a member of the bodyguard appeared, swinging his rifle.

"The ridin' critters are saddled, Tom," he announced and the three men went out through the back door, Tom cautiously keeping in the lee of the stockade as he made his way toward the stable.

But Bert halted halfway between house and barn and laid a hand on the arm of the former county judge.

"It won't do to belittle this here danger, Tom," he urged and as he talked earnestly he moved a little to one side and in the direction of the road. Every vigilance has its moment of carelessness, and Malone, bent on tranquilizing the fears of his henchman, did not realize that his own slight shift of position had brought his head and shoulders into view above the edge of the stockade. For some two minutes perhaps he stood facing Bert Heaton, talking seriously, and while he did so the masked side of the mountain barked twice and twice darted out thin-tongued flashes of rifle fire.

For an instant Tom Malone stood upright as his face turned slowly toward the tangle, with the injured expression of one betrayed in his eyes. Then his knees crumpled under him and he gave way, not with quick collapse but as a tree falls, swaying first then going down slowly.

"They've—got me," said Tom Malone as his right hand gripped his pierced chest, and at the same moment three rifles from the yard and the stable door roared angrily at the laureled hillside. They might as well have spurted and bellowed at the moon.

It was to the miniature hospital at the school, which he had frowned upon, that Tom Malone was borne as the guttering flame of his life rose and fell in fitful flickering. His going was as picturesque and as tinged with medievalism as his life had been, for he made that journey across a mountain ridge and down creek-bed ways, borne on a stretcher swung from the shoulders of four men on foot, while two horsemen rode ahead with rifles balanced across their pommels and two similarly armed protected the rear.

Tom Malone had been struck down and, though that gave fatal proof that he had enemies, he still had friends as well. No call was needed to those who remained loyal. The thing itself was a call and old guns were greased. From creek heads and far coves a human drift set toward the school and that drift was a mobilization. The hills about the place were quiet and the children went hushed about their tasks and their play because a man lay, perhaps dying, in the little white house on the hill, but back in the tangles, at night, owls hooted and whippoorwills called, and some of them were human.

Before he died the man in there would have a message to send out to his clan and that command would be obeyed. Wrath was festering in the breasts of those henchmen. The chief himself had taken refuge in the school of the "fotched-on wimmen folks" but his followers were ready, at a word, to stand to their old principles and reopen a war of vengeance. They were ready to wash out, in blood, the infamy of that shot from the laurel—in the old way that would submerge these new beginnings.

Tom Malone was the last of the strong leaders. With his death might have come peace—but now it was manifest to all whose eyes were open that it was the reverse which threatened. And as he lay there, when he was conscious at all, the smolder in his eyes spoke nothing of peace.

He scowled at the nurse who silently tended him and he scowled at the immaculately white walls of the room where he lay. He rarely spoke, but once he did and it was to say, imperiously: "Send for leetle Tolly Cornett."

Tolliver was at Saratoga and he might not come in time. If he did come in time he must ride in through the unseen lines that were circling the place and ride out through

them again to go away. What word Tom Malone had to speak to him Shirley Creighton could not guess, but she knew her lover and knew that he would want to settle that question for himself. With the telegram of summons she sent one of her own.

Malone's men are gathering. They have word to let you in. I don't know about going out again.

The girl had stood at the door of the small operating room as the surgeon in that armor of white gown, gauze-covered face and rubber gloves, which she had never seen before, had probed and cut for the buried lead. At her side had stood a surly mountain man whose eyes had blazed and who brought to that threshold and held in his hand a rifle which he refused to lay aside.

At last the physician finished and from under the fumes of the ether cone Tom Malone came gropingly back to consciousness. The doctor was no longer in that garb which looked like the regalia of some sinister brotherhood, but he stood by the cot to which his patient had been removed.

"I've done what I could," he said, "but it's not enough. You have faced death before now, Malone, and I take it you want straight talk. If you have any matters to settle you had better attend to them."

Tom Malone looked up from his pillow and the old bland smile did not come to his face. It was grim now and sphinxlike.

"I ain't ready to say anything just yet," was his curt reply. "How long have I got?"

The surgeon shook his head. "A few days, perhaps—hardly more."

"Mebby they'll be enough," answered Malone and turned his face toward the wall.

He lingered three days and it was on the third that Thetaway Cornett pushed his way through the hill roads from Hixon Town. He rode with his eyes before him and with a heavy heart. His enemy was escaping him unpunished by the shame of the gallows. His enemy had sent for him and such a deathbed summons could not be ignored—yet it was quite within the possibilities that even in this last gesture was the setting of a trap.

As he drew near the school he saw solitary sentinels now and then looking down from steeply sloping cornfields, and each of them nursed a rifle cradled across his forearm. More than once in the final miles a figure stood out suddenly from the laurel into the road, holding a cocked rifle at the

ready and—glaring silently at him—waved him on. He knew that all this ceremony was to impress him with a recognition of how tight the lines had been drawn and how ready they were to strangle him. He never acknowledged any of these unfriendly salutations. Instead he rode past them with a scornfully straight-gazed look to the front and at length he slid from his saddle at the school and found Shirley in his arms.

"I'd almost built the case solid," she whispered breathlessly. "I'd ridden back into the hills and talked to people and gotten their promises—and then this happened."

"Perhaps," he said slowly. "it may serve the same purpose."

"Not if the war breaks out afresh," gasped the girl. "He's lying up there hatching all sorts of things—and his crowd is just waiting. I'm afraid—I'm horribly afraid"—she broke off and clung to him—"that you can't go out safe if—if he sends out a battle call!"

The boy, who was now a man, gently took her hands from his shoulders. "I must go in to him, now, dear," he said. "Or it may be too late."

Shirley led him into the room and now two rifle-armed men stood there by the bed. Tolliver's guide went out and closed the door, leaving only the man in the bed, his pair of henchmen, the nurse—and Tolliver.

Slowly the dying man looked up and his gaze met that of the boy who had come a long way to hear him speak. In neither pair of eyes was there any sign of faltering.

"I've been waitin' for you," said Malone in a low voice that came painfully. "I've done kep' myself alive two days—just waitin'."

"I came like as if I was travelin' with borrowed fire," answered young Cornett, quite unconscious that he fell here, after all this time, into the phrases of the wilderness. "I couldn't come any faster."

A blaze shot into the eyes on the pillow. "Ye don't get to hang me after all," came the defiant announcement.

"No," came the equally defiant retort, "but it took death to cheat me."

"Out there," went on Tom Malone, "I've still got friends. They're waitin' for some word from me. Moreover, they're ready to heed it. I won't be dead long before they'll

be about whatever work I leave for my bequest."

"I know that—and in spite of knowing it I came when you sent for me."

Very slightly the head on the pillow inclined itself.

"God made these hills," gasped Malone, "and I reckon he didn't make them for a back yard to hell. I've had time to think as I laid—here. I had your pap kilt. The men I hired were just servants. Bert Heaton fired the gun—an' he betrayed me too—he'll be dead to-night."

The voice subjected to so much strain and excitement broke in a sort of strangle and the boy at the side of the bed stiffened as his features twitched, then tautened. The color went out of his cheeks but he said nothing. Malone braced himself and his voice came again audible but faint.

"I'm goin' to face judgment now—where I ain't got no undue power." He forced out the words. "Leave the rest to God, son."

Tolliver bent forward:

"What message do you send out there—to them?" he demanded fiercely.

"Yes," answered Malone. "I've got to send it soon—I ain't got long now." Again he broke off and lay breathing hard as if gathering his shreds of strength. Then suddenly he half rose on an elbow and turned his face toward his henchman. In a final spurt his voice shot upward into something like the ring of command. "Boys, tell 'em to quit it!" He gave the imperious order. "Tell 'em that's my last word—damn it all—quit it!"

It was spring again and the blue-grass country was freshly green where two young people stood watching the framework of a house rising in a grove of walnut and oak.

"It looks like it would be a pretty fair sort of house," said the young man. "I wonder if you'll let me come in the door without asking what I want?"

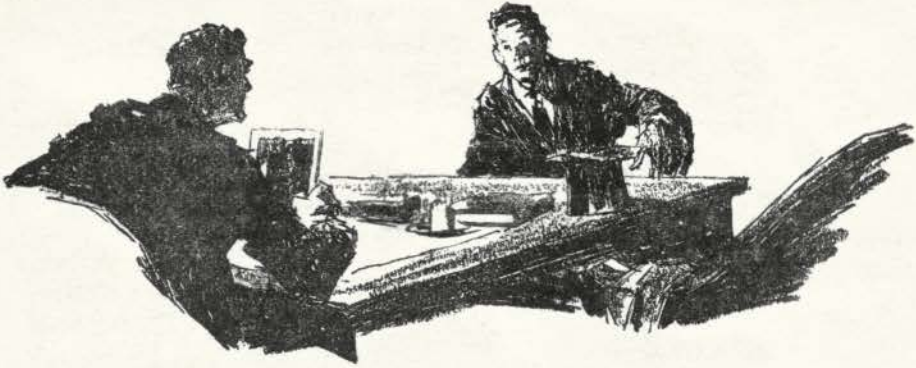
"I hope I'll know," laughed the girl. "I hope I'll know you want me."

He looked into her eyes, not down into them, for he was still no giant, but also not up, for neither was she.

"Let's go over to the colonel's," he suggested. "He phoned this morning that Lady Creighton has a foal at her side—a son of Fleetwing that's eligible for the Futurity."

■ *The complete novel in the next issue is "The Amethyst Scarab," by L. Adams Beck.*





# At a Critical Juncture

By William Hamilton Osborne

Author of "What's Afoot?" "Too Much Efficiency," Etc.

Here is a story we are very glad to offer readers of THE POPULAR. It tells the humble epic of a humble father and his far-from-extraordinary son. It deals with the commonplace problems that are familiar to everybody, and particularly with the problem of making both ends meet—with something left over. The author has taken for his theme the life of the average American family and spun this apparently dull material out into a thread of the finest dramatic gold. The qualities that make this story good are the things that make the average life worth while.—THE EDITOR.

ON a dull Sunday afternoon in the dull month of November, in a dull house on a dull street in the city of Green Falls, a strange thing happened, an unusual event occurred. It happened to a dull boy, Dicky Riddle. Life, so far, for Dicky Riddle, had been just one darned thing after another. Monotony had consistently assailed him from all sides, would continue to insult him to the end. He was a gentleman without a past, and unquestionably without a future. But this thing jolted him almost out of his senses. It smote him in the solar plexus. It left him breathless. It hit him where he lived.

Upon that afternoon Dicky Riddle walked home with a woman. Miss Georgiana Stringer was the woman. He knew her as Miss Georgie. Miss Georgie constituted one of the very few bright spots in Dicky's drab existence. He knew Miss Georgie well. Miss Georgie knew him well. It was a mere detail that she was over forty and he a scant sixteen. He regarded

her as a knowing personage who was full of punch and pep. She talked his language. She made him feel at home. He saw a whole lot of her, too. She was a teacher in the Green Falls High. She was the leader of the boys' Bible class at the Dutch Reformed. Miss Georgiana Stringer liked all boys. She liked ministers. She liked male principals. She had no time for women. The women vigorously reciprocated. But Miss Georgie concentrated upon Dicky Riddle—and upon one other male person of Dicky's close acquaintanceship. There was a reason. She had been concentrating now, upon these two, for some years past. And while she concentrated upon Dicky, she turned him inside out and upside down, and all without his knowing it. She tapped him on the shoulder as they reached her home.

"In two years, Dicky," she assured him, "you will be a business man."

For Dicky Riddle the future held no glitter. "Pushin' a pen," he nodded, grinning.

Miss Georgie playfully pushed him. "You go along," she said. Then she pulled him back. Her speech became important. "You tell your father, Dicky," she explained, "that I'm troubled by a letter in regards to the estate."

"I'll send him down this afternoon," said Dicky.

"Attaboy!" Miss Georgie said.

When Dicky Riddle entered the front door of his home his father was just descending jauntily from the second floor to the first. He was whistling as he came. Dicky's father was Daniel Riddle, a lawyer of Green Falls. An ordinary lawyer with a dull practice. He was a lean, wiry little man, very well groomed, active and jerky in his movements, very light upon his feet. A sort of fusser in his way.

"Miss Georgie—" began Dicky.

"Yes, yes, I know—she wrote me," hastily responded his father.

He and Dicky sidled into the parlor at one and the same time. Dicky's Aunt Sis sat by the window conning local items in the local Sunday paper. She was a hum-drum personage, competent, efficient and dissatisfied.

"You just coming in?" she said to Dicky.

"You going out?" she said to Dicky's father.

There was a sort of scared, new look in Dicky's father's eyes—something that Dicky hadn't seen before. His father's face was very red. His father cleared his throat noisily and bent his glance on Dicky.

"A new complication," explained Dicky's father, "about old man Stringer's estate. Miss Georgie sent for me."

All of which was ritual and routine. Dicky merely grinned. Aunt Sis sniffed knowingly, not to say apprehensively. Aunt Sis glanced sharply at Dicky's father. "She'll be wondering," said Aunt Sis vaguely. "I suppose she reads the papers."

"Everybody reads the papers," nodded Dicky's father, indulging in glittering generality. Dicky cast himself bodily upon the lounge, his head toward the foot, his feet hung idly over the headpiece at the top. In this attitude, as Dicky oft explained, more blood could flow into his brain and he would have more things to think about. Then, too, he could emphasize and point his speech by expressive gesticulations with his feet. From his vantage point Dicky watched his father idly, curiously. His

ther carried in his hand a high silk hat. Over his arm was slung an overcoat. He laid the overcoat upon a chair. With the aid of his elbow he smoothed the high silk hat until it shone like patent leather. Then he placed it on his head, cocking it just a trifle over one eye. He seized his overcoat. This he inspected critically at all points. He caught up one limp sleeve of the overcoat and with the sleeve he brushed the velvet collar. All set. With one wide, circling sweep he donned the overcoat. From a corner of the room he caught up a cane. At no time during this performance had he looked at Aunt Sis. But now he looked at Dicky once again.

"I'll see you when I get here," said Dicky Riddle's father.

"You be back to supper?" cried Aunt Sis. But she went on reading as before.

"Unless," returned Daniel Riddle from the security of the hall, "the interview should last too long."

The front door slammed lightly. He was gone. Aunt Sis struggled to her feet, drew back the window curtains, watched her brother as he swung past the house. Dicky Riddle joined her. There was a new interest in Dicky's eyes as his glance followed his father's trim figure.

"Pa always looks so nice," said Dicky Riddle.

Aunt Sis nodded. "He's the best dresser that there is in town," she commented. "He knows cloth and he knows cut. He's a born dresser, that man. Dicky," cried Aunt Sis sharply, "he should have been a tailor. By rights your pa should have been a tailor."

Dullness settled down upon Dicky. He resumed his place upon the lounge, and waved his feet expressively in air. "As his father was before him," yawned Dicky. He knew what was coming. It was just as well to get it over with.

His Aunt Sis jerked her head toward a crayon portrait on the wall.

"You see the lines in your grandpop's face," she nodded.

"There aren't any," said Dicky. Which was true.

"We could have been millionaires," sighed Aunt Sis.

"All my mother's fault," said Dicky. He knew the thing by heart. His mother's picture hung upon the wall. She was young, almost as young as Dicky was himself. Twenty years old when she had given birth

to Dicky. Twenty years old when she had died.

Aunt Sis nodded soberly. "Just because she didn't like our business," said Aunt Sis. "And your grandpop—it killed him. He never got over it to his dying day."

"Eighty when he died," mused Dicky, waving feet in air.

"Eighty-three," corrected Aunt Sis.

"After pa killed him," calculated Dicky, "he must have lingered for a while."

Aunt Sis blew her nose indignantly. "And now," she cried, "this other nonsense—this other foolishness."

"Expatiate," said Dicky. He was willing that Aunt Sis should thoroughly enjoy herself.

"You know what's going to happen just as well as I do," cried Aunt Sis. "Don't seem so innocent."

"I'm not innocent," returned Dicky.

"Well, then, don't act so," said his aunt. "It makes my blood boil. A man of your father's age and standing here! He's going to marry Georgie Stringer—that's what he's going to do. Estate, nothing! Georgie Stringer's father was a drunken old bum. Estate! He didn't leave—not even debts. Nobody'd trust him. Every Sunday for two years. And something's going to happen now. I know your father's tricks and manners. I know the silly way he acts. You'll have Georgie Stringer for your mother."

Dicky let the blood flow from his elevated feet into his cranium. He allowed his thoughts full sway. "Well," he said at length, "I don't know why not. I'm pretty chummy with her. And she's full of spice. There'll be a lot more going on inside this house. It looks good to me, it does."

"Oh, yes," returned his aunt. "there'll be a whole lot going on inside this house. But not with me. I'll be going off outside this house. That's just as sure as sure."

Dicky sat up very straight. "No!" cried Dicky Riddle.

"Yes!" exclaimed Aunt Sis.

"It'll be your fault, then," returned Dicky Riddle. "Why can't we all get along in this house together? Miss Georgie, pa and you and I. Why not?"

"Why not?" cried Aunt Sis. "Because she won't have it, that's why not. I've known Georgie Stringer since she was a baby. You don't suppose she'd live with any other woman in the house? What's to become of us?"

"Shucks!" cried Dicky. "She can get along with anybody. She can get along with me."

"You'll change your tune as soon as she sets foot inside this house—you watch out and see." Aunt Sis rattled her newspaper wrathfully.

"I'm strong for her," said Dicky calmly. "I'd like to have her for a mother just as much as pa would like to have her for a wife."

His aunt snickered loudly. "What'll she say when she reads the paper?" cried his aunt.

Dicky didn't answer. He had gone to sleep, snoring comfortably, with his feet where his head ought to be. How long he slept he didn't know. He was wakened suddenly by the emphatic banging of the front door. He sat up and rubbed his eyes. His father crept into the room, his face flushed, his eyes unnaturally bright.

"Goodness!" cried Aunt Sis in tones of genuine amazement. "What's this mean? You *did* come back to supper after all."

His father never looked at Aunt Sis. He bent his glance on Dicky. "Dicky!" cried his father sharply.

His tone meant business. "Yep," responded Dicky. He leaped to his feet—rubbed the cobwebs out of his eyes and stared.

"Up in my den," went on his father; "I want to talk to you."

Dicky winked grotesquely at Aunt Sis. He saw it now. The good news about Miss Georgie was about to be divulged. He preceded his father into his father's little den on the second floor. His father shut and locked the door. His father placed his high silk hat tenderly upon the top of his desk. He threw his overcoat, satin lining outward, over a near-by chair. He sank down at his desk and he did a funny thing. He covered his face with both hands; he remained that way, silent, for a moment. When he took his hands away he looked, somehow, like an old man.

Upon the desk, facing them both, was a photograph of Dicky Riddle's mother. Daniel Riddle picked it up, held it in a better light, regarded it steadfastly.

"Like a little girl," he said tenderly. He set it back in place.

From his breast pocket he drew forth a portion of the Sunday paper. He unfolded it and handed it to Dicky. In the middle

of the page there was a line surrounded by blue pencil. His father pointed to it.

"Dicky," he said, "I want you to read that line."

Dicky read it:

Riddle, Daniel to Mut. Trust Co. E. side Malvern 35x100—\$5,000.

"I'm reading it," said Dicky.

"Know what it means?" queried his father. But Dicky didn't. It was probably information of some kind, so Dicky yawned a bit. "I'll tell you," went on his father. "Every Sunday the *Gazette* here publishes a list of all the deeds and mortgages that are recorded through the week. This is the mortgage column that I've showed you. Know what it means?"

It was too easy. "Something about a mortgage," nodded Dicky, yawning once again.

"Dicky," went on his father, "you may as well know what everybody in Green Falls knows; you may as well know that I've done something that I said I'd never do. Dicky, I've put a mortgage of five thousand dollars on this house we live in. Understand?"

"I understand," said Dicky. He smoothed the glossy satin lining of his father's overcoat. Then, suddenly he started. "What did you do it for?" he asked.

Something a little harder crept into his father's tone. "Dicky," queried his father, "did you notice anything about Miss Georgiana Stringer when you saw her this afternoon?"

"She was dead anxious to see you," chuckled Dicky.

"There was a particular reason," said his father in a strangely even voice. "She was unusually anxious to see me this afternoon because she wanted to know what that line in the *Gazette* might mean. I hadn't explained anything to her beforehand. She could hardly wait to find out what it meant. She was sore because I hadn't told her, Dicky. And when I told her, she was extremely sore."

"What was she sore at?" queried Dicky.

Something flared up in his father's eyes. "Sore," he cried, "because she's a self-centered woman. Sore because she wants everything she can get her hands on, for herself."

"Pa," cried Dicky in distress, "something's happened to you."

"A good deal has happened," said his father. "I thought this afternoon that I was going to marry Miss Georgiana Stringer. I find out this evening that I'm not."

"She didn't throw you down?" exclaimed the boy.

"She did and she didn't," returned his father. "She threw me down unless I would accede to her conditions. And I wouldn't. And that's all."

"What were the conditions?" demanded Dicky. This was getting interesting.

"The conditions," said his father, "had to do with you."

"With me?" faltered Dicky.

"Ah," nodded his father, "the lady wants it all."

"I don't quite understand," said Dicky.

His father tapped the picture of his mother. "Dicky," he said, "there was a little girl—we loved each other like anything. We were young and new—"

"Well, anyhow, in the short time that we had left to talk about you we settled everything. You were to be some kind of a great man, Dicky. You were to have every chance. She did her part, Dicky. And now, ding it, I don't care what other people say. I'm going to do my part."

"What's the mortgage got to do with it?" asked Dicky.

"Everything," returned his father. "It's the mortgage that Miss Georgiana Stringer takes exception to. The mortgage is for you, Dicky. It's for you, and not for her."

"For me!" cried Dicky.

His father drew from his pocket a fresh, clean, crisp bank book. He handed it to Dicky. There was a single entry in it, evidencing a deposit of five thousand dollars in the bank.

"Dicky," said his father, "I didn't dare to wait. I thought maybe I'd get married. I thought maybe I might even die. I've put that money that I raised on mortgage—I've put it out of my hands, Dicky, by an instrument of trust. The bank has got that money and you've got the book. The bank knows what to do with all that money. No matter what happens the bank will see to it that you get an education."

"I've got my education," returned Dicky.

"She wanted you to take a job in the freight house here in town," said his father.

"Who did?" demanded Dicky.

"Miss Georgiana Stringer," said his father. "She said so. And I saw it all. She

didn't want me, Dicky. She wanted everything I had. My eyes were opened. It happened just in time. She set herself against you, Dicky. And I wouldn't stand for that. Going to put you in a freight house——"

"To push a pen," said Dicky.

"No matter what happened to me," went on his father swiftly, "no matter if I died or got married or went broke. All Green Falls knows now that I've put a mortgage on my house. Something that I said I'd never do. But I've done it and there are only two or three people that know why I've done it. Miss Georgiana Stringer, she's one of them. I'm one of them. And now you're one of them."

"But why *have* you done it?" demanded Dicky.

"To send you to a university," returned his father.

Dicky's face paled. He was aghast, appalled. He was bowled over. Here was a bolt from the blue. Here was the sensation of sensations.

"Satterthwaite!" cried Dicky.

"Satterthwaite," nodded his father, "or anywhere. Anywhere your friends may go."

"There isn't any other place but Satterthwaite," cried Dicky. "It's the only place there is."

"You're to have the chance," nodded his father. "I never had the chance, myself. But I promised your mother and I promised myself. You're to be a great man, Dicky. I can tell you that."

Dicky became a great man then and there. "I can tell you," returned Dicky, talking as one who writes an essay, "I can tell you that I have never had anything so fine happen to me in my life. Five thousand dollars. And you've mortgaged your house for me. And Miss Georgiana Stringer——"

"She's out of it. Forget her," said his father sharply.

But Dicky still had much to say. "And I can tell you," went on Dicky earnestly, "that I'll pay back this five thousand dollars to you out of the first moneys that I earn."

It was a rash promise—one calculated to give him a lot of trouble throughout the years to come.

At Satterthwaite, in his sophomore year, Dicky ran pell-mell into George King, Jr. George King, Jr., was an opulent young man who hailed from River City. He had all

kinds of money to throw around but he yearned to get him more. He was selling suits and overcoats on the side. George King, Jr., was a good publicity man, a tremendous advertising agent—his public flocked to his sample room. They flocked—just once. They walked right in and turned around and walked right out again.

Dicky needed a new suit of clothes. He knew George King, Jr. So he trailed along.

"No trouble to show goods," said George King, Jr. Here, felt George, was a lad who was like to listen to a line of talk. Dicky Riddle listened to the line of talk. While he listened he looked over everything in stock. In addition to listening and looking he exercised his other senses. He felt, he smelled, he even tasted everything on hand. Disdainfully he shook his head.

"What's the matter with 'em?" queried George King, Jr., anxiously. As a matter of fact he really wanted to know.

"They're punk," said Dicky Riddle frankly.

"Look at the goods," protested George King, Jr.

"Punk," repeated Dicky Riddle.

"But look at the cut," persisted George.

"Awful punk," reiterated Dicky Riddle.

"These are George King clothes," insisted George King, Jr.

"Who," asked Dicky, "is George King?"

George was plainly flabbergasted. "Didn't you ever hear of George King clothes?" he cried. "That's my father's plant in River City."

"Where's River City?" demanded Dicky.

"Where do you come from?" asked George.

"I come from Green Falls," said Dicky.

"Where's Green Falls?" asked George.

"What does anybody from Green Falls know about River City clothes?"

"I know a whole lot about any kind of clothes," said Dicky Riddle.

"More than I do?" queried George.

Dicky chuckled. "A whole lot more than you do," he replied. "I've been hearing about them all my life."

"Your father a Green Falls clothier?" queried George.

"My father's a Green Falls lawyer," nodded Dicky.

"You're one of these know-it-alls—the son of a lawyer," returned George King, Jr.

"My grandfather," nodded Dicky, "was a tailor."

"What's the matter with this stock I've got?" queried George King, Jr.

"Why waste time?" returned Dicky. "You come over to my diggin's and I'll show you."

George King, Jr., went. Dicky Riddle lifted up a big blotter pad and drew forth a sketch. "All the clothes they wear at Satterthwaite look punk," said Dicky. "I can't keep my eyes off 'em. They're rotten." He handed the sketch to George King, Jr.

"There's a coat," said Dicky Riddle.

George King, Jr., looked it over. It was like a Norfolk jacket and yet not like it. There were no plaits.

"You see the broad, full back," said Dicky.

"Where did you get this?" demanded George King, Jr.

"Inference and observation," chuckled Dickie. "The thing is my design."

"Your design—no!"

"Yes," said Dicky Riddle.

George King, Jr., caught him by the arm. "Come on, boy," he said, "we'll go to River City. We'll show this to the chief."

In due course they went to River City. George King, Sr., was the chief. George King, Sr., was a pudgy little man with a bald head. But he didn't know what clothes to wear nor how to wear them. Dicky Riddle thought of his own father's trim, neat, natty figure—the fine grain, the fine cut that dressed him out. George King, Sr., was a clothes butcher. He ran a clothing store on Market Street but his store was only a part of his business. He was engaged in the wholesale manufacture of goods—standard makes and sizes for the trade.

He welcomed his son George with open arms. He shook hands with Dicky Riddle. He winked at Dicky.

"This boy of mine," said the River City clothier; "chip off the old block. I got an eye on the college trade. He knows it. He knows that if we get the college trade, all the shoe clerks in the end will buy our stock. Yes, sir. He puts George King clothes in Satterthwaite. Thin edge of the wedge. Inside of five years—Yale, Princeton, Harvard. He's a business man, this lad. George," he queried, his eyes twinkling, "how did that line sell?"

George King, Jr., shrugged his shoulders. "We had to have a fire to make 'em go," he said.

His father stared at him aghast. "What for?" demanded he.

"There aren't any longshoremen in Satterthwaite," returned his son.

"What's the matter with that line?" insisted the chief.

"The line's not right," said George.

"It's all right," returned his father.

"It's all wrong," persisted George.

"Show me," said his father.

"Dicky'll show you," nodded George.

"Who in Halifax is Dicky?" cried his father.

"I just introduced you to him," said George. "He's sitting on that chair."

"What do you know about it?" demanded George King, Sr., of Dicky Riddle.

Dicky smiled feebly. "I was dragged into this," he answered. "I was told to come along to show you—this."

He produced a few of his designs. The chief looked them over. A startled expression crossed his countenance. He gave no other sign. He studied the sketches for a full five minutes.

"Where did you get these?" he demanded.

"I designed 'em," nodded Dicky Riddle tremulously.

"Tell that to the marines," said the River City man.

"Did you ever see anything just like 'em?" queried George King, Jr.

"Well," spluttered his father, "well——"

"Well, no, you didn't," insisted his son and heir.

Dicky Riddle drew a long breath. "There's a name that goes with those," he said.

"What name?" queried the chief.

"That's the Prince George cut," said Dicky.

"Who's Prince George?" demanded the clothier.

"He's the Prince of Wales," said Dicky.

"Does he wear this cut?" queried George King, Sr.

Dicky shook his head. "But it wouldn't hurt him if he did," said Dicky.

The chief held up his hand. "Wait a bit—wait a bit. I've got it!" he exclaimed. "Listen, boys: The George King Prince George Cut!"

"Yes," said Dicky. "that's why I called 'em Prince George, don't you see?"

"Oh," said the chief, a bit crestfallen. "You thought that out, yourself."

"Yes, I did," said Dicky, "and one of

these days you'll have to change it. It'll be the George King King George Cut. But of course, you thought of that."

George King, Sr., slapped his thigh. "You boys go back to Satterthwaite," he said. "You sit tight till you hear from me."

Inside of three weeks he sent for them again. He had his samples finished.

"Boys," he said, "this is going to be a winner. This is a cut that even a cripple can wear to advantage. It makes a thin man look stout, a stout man look thin, a short man look tall, and makes a tall man look the best of all. This is absolutely figure proof. This makes the man. This Prince George cut is going to stick. It's going to go. You boys go back to Satterthwaite. When you clean up there you both come back to me."

Dicky Riddle cleaned up at Satterthwaite. He cleaned up, wearing the George King Prince George Cut. He cleaned up amid a multitude of confrères, most of them wearing the George King Prince George Cut. He stepped out of the ivy-covered halls of learning into the red-brick manufacturing plant of George King at River City at the princely salary of fifty dollars a week.

Dicky Riddle's father was appalled. "At your age," said Dicky Riddle's father, "I was getting seven."

Dicky worked like mad at King's River City factory. He had something that George King, Sr., didn't have. Dicky Riddle was a born tailor. George King, Sr., was merely a born business man, a dull, safe, sane business man with a dull, safe, sane product in his hands. Dicky Riddle revised, reshaped, touched up and pointed up this product until it was something that could be talked about, and what was more, something that could be photographed.

By the time Dicky Riddle's salary was raised to eighty dollars a week Dicky found himself all tangled up with Sally Roper. Sally Roper was the youngest of the Roper girls, of the famous Roper family of River City. Sally Roper was a young woman who wanted to marry just the kind of a man that Dicky Riddle was. She preferred a live one. She had no money of her own but she had plenty of ambition. And she was sure that she and Dicky could make things hum. Sally helped. There was no doubt about that. She taught Dicky the way to promotion and pay. She didn't stop

there. She fulfilled her destiny. One year after they were married Sally presented her spirited young husband with a pair of likely twins.

On the day the twins were born George King, Sr., took Dicky into his private office.

"Now, Dicky," said the chief, "I'm going to raise you at one clip to five thousand a year. But don't ask me for another raise for—well, three years anyhow. Five thousand is real money in these times."

Five thousand! Dicky Riddle was possibly worth more. But it was not that that gave Dicky pause. The figures startled him. Five thousand dollars. His father had put up five thousand dollars for Dicky's education. His father had mortgaged his house for five thousand dollars—something he had never done before. That five thousand had given Dicky Riddle four years of entertaining existence. It had made for him all the friends he had. It had graduated him from Satterthwaite. It had brought him into contact with George King, Jr. It had linked him up with George King, Sr. It had bound him up with life. Everything he had, everything he really treasured, had come to him, was his, because of the five thousand dollars that his father had raised on bond and mortgage, something he had never done before.

Five thousand dollars—the savings of a lifetime for his father. One year's salary for Dicky Riddle! And he had a promise—he had an oath in heaven. He had sworn that he would pay it back out of the first moneys that he earned. And he had been earning moneys right along.

And yet he couldn't pay it back. In due course hundreds of thousands of dollars would come pouring into Dicky's coffers just because of the five thousand that his father had put up. And yet he couldn't pay it back.

There was no doubt about it. He was confronted with a condition, not a theory. There were Sally and the twins. There was himself. Five thousand spread itself very thinly over the cost of living. They had no luxuries. He and Sally constantly reminded themselves that they had no luxuries. They had bare necessities, nothing beyond that. Just enough to live on, clothe, warm, feed themselves. They didn't save, of course. Nobody could save on five thousand a year.

"We really ought to put aside something for the twins," said Sally.

"We've got to," nodded Dicky.

They struggled along as best they might on five thousand dollars a year for three long years. Then Dicky Riddle asked for and got eight thousand. He got it. He was worth it. And the business undoubtedly justified it.

And so Dicky Riddle built a house, a house that did them credit. It was colonial, on a square plot a hundred by a hundred; white, with green blinds, something new and something very chic. The mortgage was of the very latest pattern and design.

"Now we ought to save something for the twins," said Dicky Riddle.

"We really must," said Sally.

In the midst of modest week-end entertaining Sally thought, suddenly and contritely, of Dicky's people. Sally knew Dicky's people. She and Dicky had made flying trips to Green Falls. But that was before the twins had entered the arena of events. Sally didn't know just what to make of Dicky's people.

"They are so intellectual," Sally told her friends.

"And now," said Sally finally, after opining that they really ought to save something for the twins, "now we've got to have your father and Aunt Sis spend a week here. They've got to see our new place, Dicky. You've got to make them come."

Dicky shuddered. He didn't want his father to see his new house—not in the face of that promise he had made on that eventful Sunday afternoon.

"They won't come," said Dicky. "They don't go anywhere."

"I'll make 'em come," said Sally.

Only partially did she succeed. Aunt Sis declined the invitation. Aunt Sis had no clothes and didn't want any, and preferred to sleep in her own bed, and advanced other sound reasons for her general disinclination to be moved. Dicky's father came—a little, natty man. Dicky's heart sank as he saw him. Dicky shivered as he thought of the dull monotony of his father's bare existence in that dank, dark house in Malvern Street, Green Falls. He couldn't explain things to his father. He couldn't tell his father that an eight-thousand-dollar man in River City, with a wife like Sally and a pair of twins like Sally's, could just manage to exist and nothing more.

Dicky and Sally met him at the station. When they swung into their driveway Dicky's father rubbed his eyes.

"This—your place?" he faltered.

Sally was tickled to death. Dicky groaned inaudibly.

"Isn't it a cozy little place," said Sally.

"Cozy—little!" cried the Green Falls man. "To me it's like a Prince George palace."

"Cost less than you think," said Dicky.

"Father," said Sally as she ushered him into the daintiest guest room that ever came down the pike, "you just make yourself at home."

Daniel Riddle didn't make himself at home. He couldn't. Dicky could see that. He was like a fish out of water; like a cat in a strange garret. Dicky's Tuxedo bewildered him, though he had brought on an old dress suit of his own. From the very moment that Daniel Riddle set foot within the house his face wore an anxious, worried, harried look. It was not only that he was ill at ease. There was something, so it seemed to Dicky, that rankled. This anxiety increased day by day. It took the twins to make him really smile. From the very start he walked into the twins. Up his sleeve he had half a dozen old-fashioned tricks that couldn't be bought with money in the stores. He had all the devices of a boy who had manufactured his own amusement out of nothing. He could make things out of sticks; could do things with a hole in the ground; he kept them busy all day long. But not for many days. On the fourth day of his ten-day stay he announced that the time of his departure was at hand.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Sally. "We've got all sorts of things planned for you. We can't let you go."

"Now, I know pa," said Dicky, "and if pa wants to go he wants to go. Pa, do you *really* want to go?"

"Well," said pa, "I'm homesick. I really want to go."

That worried, anxious look settled down upon him once more. Dicky took him into Dicky's little den—which wasn't little and wasn't a den.

"Pa," said Dicky, "you come across. There's something on your mind."

Pa was startled. He hesitated. Then he shook his head. He smiled.

"I suppose," he said, "this brings it home



to me. A man should be married all his life, I guess."

"He surely should," said Dicky.

"And I'm homesick, too," said pa. "And I guess I'm better off at home."

The anxious look was still there when they put him on the train. A week later Dicky got a letter from him:

DICKY: I guess you wondered, maybe, why I came on to River City. I'm not much of a hand to make a visit. You know that, yourself. But I made this visit with an object and somehow I failed to eventuate. My real reason for coming on to see you was to get a little money. I thought I'd never have to ask anybody at any time for money. But I guess the hour has struck. I don't need a lot of money, Dick, but I do need something steady. If I could have ten dollars a week from you from now on it would be all I'd want, and if you can let me have that much, so I can depend on it from week to week, why, I imagine I can do the rest. I feel like the dickens asking you, but there's nobody else but you that I can ask. If you can't do it—but I guess you can.

YOUR POP.

Dicky shuddered when he read that letter. To think that he had waited until his father had asked him—asked him, not for five thousand, but for ten dollars a week. He showed the letter to Sally. He told Sally of his promise.

"I wish I could make you see this thing," he said to Sally.

"I see it," said Sally.

"I know," said Dickey, "but it isn't just his situation. That five thousand that I got—that was part of the old man's lifeblood. See? In all his life that man has been married just one year. If he hadn't handed me this five he could have married some one else. He hasn't lived his life, that's all. That five thousand got me you. It got me the twins. It got me everything. I've got to pay him back."

"You're going to pay him back," said Sally. "You're going to do just what he asks. Only don't be a piker, Dicky. He wants five hundred dollars a year. Dicky, you've got to do better. What is five hundred a year? You've got to pay him a thousand dollars a year—that at the very least. Of course."

"Of course," echoed Dicky. "But—how are we going to do it?"

"Ninny," said Sally, "it's only twenty dollars a week. What's twenty dollars a week?"

Twenty dollars a week was twenty dollars a week. It was no more than that. But

it was all of that, too. From then on they sent Dicky's father a thousand dollars a year. It was like pulling teeth to do it.

The time came when it seemed not only proper but almost imperative that Sally should accompany her husband on one of his European business trips.

"But," protested Dicky, "what'll we do with the kids?"

Sally had it all arranged. "We'll send them to your father and Aunt Sis," she said.

The memory of endless monotony beat in upon her husband's consciousness.

"There's not enough to do," he said. "There's not near enough to do."

The twins listened in. There was a whimsicality about their grandfather that gave promise; he had exhibited to them certain resources which suggested possibilities.

"Let's," said the twins. "Send us to the old gent's," they said.

They went accordingly. Arrived, the old gent took them out into the rear of the house.

"What have you got a fence for?" they demanded.

"This is a back yard," explained the old gent. "All back yards have fences."

"We haven't any fence," the twins returned.

"But you haven't any back yard," nodded their grandpop. "This is a genuine back yard."

It was. It was crowded with vegetation. Not an inch that wasn't under cultivation. It was a jungle of foliage.

"What," demanded the twins, "are those vines growing up into those trees?"

"Those trees," said the old gent, "are pear trees. Those vines are squash vines."

"What are those green things hanging down?" queried the twins.

"Those," said the old gent, "are squashes. These are the only squash-bearing pear trees in the Western Hemisphere. Come fall, those squashes will hang down by the dozen, very large and very yellow, ready for a hundred pumpkin pies." The old gent smacked his lips.

"Can we see 'em?" asked the twins.

"You can sit tight and watch 'em grow," nodded their grandpop.

He had a grape arbor covered with a close network of grapevine. He produced a fork and spade. He led the kids to a spot where

he had set a little marker in the ground. "Angelina," said the marker.

"Are these Angelina grapes?" demanded the twins.

"They will be," nodded the old gent. He set them to cultivating and then slipped into the house. He didn't stay there long. Inside of ten minutes they were upon him. The twins had moving-picture faces—moving-picture eyes.

"There's a murder been committed," they assured him.

They dragged him out to the spot marked with the cross. Gingerly, with their toes, they moved a suspicious-looking object.

"It's somebody's skull," they said.

"It's Angelina's skull," nodded their grandpop sadly. "She was a stray cat, Angelina was. When cats get too stray around here we pop them with a trusty air rifle. Then we inter them where they will do the most good." Grandpop smacked his lips. "We'll have luscious grapes this summer," he opined.

He picked up Angelina's skull, gave it a bath in hot water mixed with washing soda, brought it forth almost as white as snow. He glued the jawbones firmly in their sockets. Eventually he gave it a coat of colorless shellac.

"There," said grandpop. "An ornament for any lady's dressing table."

All this took time. When he had finished he led them to another marker at the other end of the grape arbor.

"Here lies Tomassino," he explained.

He left them to deal with Tomassino as they might be best advised. Accordingly, they dealt. Tabitha they found ensconced snugly near the lilac bush. Treasures were about them everywhere. Days passed in this happy hunting ground. Then the old gent led them to a dingy room on the top floor. It was a very dingy room.

"This will be your private office," he informed the twins. "What do you think about it, eh?"

"It's—punk!" the twins agreed.

"It surely is," said grandpop, "and for a starter, what's the matter with the windows?"

"They're busted," said the twins.

"You come with me," said grandpop.

He led them to a hardware store. He purchased panes of glass. He purchased canvas gloves for them to wear. They carried the panes of glass back to the room.

The old gent took the windows out, for safety's sake, and laid them on the floor. The twins took out the old panes and fitted in the new. This is not so simple as it sounds. And it isn't putty that holds in windowpanes. It's little triangles of zinc. The whole affair constituted a ticklish but triumphant job.

"What's the matter with this room?" demanded the old gent, once more.

"Say what," exclaimed the twins.

"It needs painting," nodded their grandpop, "and it needs papering mighty bad."

"Let's," said the twins.

They selected wall paper that would put your eye out. Aunt Sis couldn't look at it steadily for two seconds at a time. Slowly, carefully, even professionally, they painted that room; slowly, carefully and professionally they papered it. In due course they made that room a nine days' wonder. When they had finished it the twins stepped into Aunt Sis' boudoir and scanned it critically.

"What's the matter with this room?" queried one twin of the other, with an evil eye upon the ceiling and the walls.

"No, you don't," said Aunt Sis firmly. Thereafter she kept her bedroom door locked tight.

It was a satisfactory sort of summer. When the twins got back to River City they scarcely responded to the frantic caresses of their newly arrived parents. They cast lustful eyes upon the living room.

"This room is punk—what's the matter with this room?" the twins demanded. "Don't tell us anything about Europe," they implored their parents. "Listen, have you got any old chairs to mend? That's the important point—some chairs to mend."

By this Dick Riddle was pulling down twelve thousand five hundred dollars per annum. He regarded himself as a very valuable man. His wife Sally regarded him as a very valuable man. And so he was. Old George King regarded him as a man worth what he was being paid—and not much more. But Dick Riddle had a mortgage on his house and a more or less expensive wife—that is, if any wife can be expensive on twelve-five a year, which Sally vigorously denied. And he had a pair of growing children. Twelve-five wasn't anywhere near enough. That stood to reason. Dick Riddle spent his spare time—and some of it that wasn't spare—devising ways and means to get another raise.

"We've got to save something for the kids," he anxiously told Sally.

"We'll put the next raise that you get," said Sally, "in the savings bank. You ought to get a raise right soon."

He didn't. In the first place, old George King, who was his particular friend and crony, died. This left George King, Jr., with the reins in hand. And George King, Jr., was a tightwad. He had no children and he had no wife. And he couldn't spend the money that he made; he didn't even try to. Dick Riddle approached him gingerly, for he was afraid of George.

"Not on your life," said George King, Jr. "You're getting gilt-edged money as it is."

"I put the Prince George into your business," returned Dick Riddle.

"Why don't you keep on putting things into it?" quoth his chief frankly. "Where's the old bean? You're getting stale. Perk up a little, Dicky. Why don't you try to earn your salary just once? Twelve-five is real money. Don't you think it isn't, boy."

"Tillinghast," said Dick, "will pay me fifteen."

"You go to Tillinghast, if you want to," said George.

He went to Tillinghast. Tillinghast stood ready to welcome him with open arms. Tillinghast offered a neat little three-year contract at eight thousand a year. Dicky went elsewhere. Eight thousand was the limit. He couldn't take a job at eight. He couldn't take a job at nine. Nor ten, nor eleven, nor even twelve. He had to have twelve-five. And he needed fifteen. So he hung on with George King, Jr., without enthusiasm, doing a bit sulkily twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of work for just half that pay.

The inevitable happened. Sally announced truthfully that she could manage for herself on anything—on anything at all. But when it came to the boys she had to take a stand. And take some kind of stand she did. Concentrating on her offsprings' need she cast longing eyes on that thousand a year that went to Dicky's father.

"It's the boys," said Sally, "and after all he only asked for five hundred a year."

"He needs the thousand," protested her husband. "But it's more than that. I can never pay him back—"

"The boys," said Sally firmly, "have got to go to college. They've got to start

in to get ready now. They've got to have all the money we can scrape together."

"Let's cut down," said Dicky.

"I'm willing," nodded Sally.

They were both willing. Only, there wasn't anything that they could cut. They saw that mighty soon.

"The beginning point," said Sally, "is cutting five hundred off the thousand that you pay your father." She was really desperate. She was desperate and she was sore. Sore at Dicky and herself because they hadn't saved a dollar for the twins. They had some words about it.

"Oh," cried Dicky, "I'll go to Green Falls if you say so, and cut the old man's throat."

He went down to cut the old man's throat. But he didn't cut it. He started in to make a clean breast of the whole matter but he got only as far as the mention of his salary. That took his father's breath away.

"Twelve-five," cried the old man, his eyes dancing. "Why, you're a great man, Dicky. Listen, Dick. My father never made over eighteen hundred net in all his life. He told me so. There was one year that I made four thousand net. That was my banner year. Twelve-five. Why, you're on easy street."

Easy street! Dicky Riddle was a slave and Dicky Riddle knew it.

But he didn't ask for any reduction of the yearly thousand that he was paying to the old gentleman. He couldn't, after that. How could he make it clear to a man who thought in hundreds—how could he make it clear that twelve thousand five hundred meant simply not enough? Dejectedly he made his way back to River City. He shrugged his shoulders. He stood defeated before Sally.

"Well, of course," said Sally, "if you've no consideration for the boys—"

"We'll sell the house," said Dicky.

Sally was aghast. "Sell the house," she cried, "and have no place, no decent place, for the boys to bring their friends to?"

"I had no decent place for me to bring my friends to," returned Dicky, "and I haven't turned out so very bad in spite of all that."

"I'd like to throttle that George King," said Sally.

This went on from week to week. And from week to week the boys kept growing older. And in the midst of one of the hottest arguments that they'd ever had their

doorbell rang and Dicky Riddle's father entered the arena of events.

Sally welcomed him a bit perfunctorily. The old gentleman sank down into the depths of an overstuffed piece of furniture. "I feel," smiled the old gentleman, "as though I were being entertained by royalty. Where are the boys?"

The boys were summoned. They welcomed the old gent with affectionate enthusiasm.

"How's little ole Green Falls?" they asked.

The old gent nodded. "I had to build me a new areaway," he told them. "Look here—did you ever try to lay a brick? Look here," said the old gent suddenly, "I brought you boys a little present. See what you think of these."

From an inside pocket he produced two clumsy paper bundles wound carefully about with cotton string. Neckties, thought Sally—neckties à la Aunt Sis. Something that the boys couldn't possibly wear. The old gentleman handed one package to each of the boys.

"See what you think of 'em, boys," he nodded. "They've come all the way from little ole Green Falls."

The boys had the same idea about the old gent's presents that their mother did. They knew him to be a better companion than a benefactor. Gingerly they opened the little bundles. One of them fumbled his. Its contents spilled out upon the floor.

"Money!" cried this twin.

The other tore open his package in a jiffy. "Money!" he exclaimed.

"Ah," chuckled the old gent, "you count it, boys."

They marathoned the counting, feverishly. Their eyes bulged.

"Five thousand dollars!" cried the first to finish.

The old gent nodded. "That's one of 'em," chuckled the old gent. "Now, how about the other."

"Five thousand here!" exclaimed the other twin.

Sally's face now became a moving-picture face. "Ten thousand dollars!" she exclaimed.

The old gent tossed her a savings-bank book. "There's the rest of it, and interest," he said. He turned back to the boys. "You boys ever see ten thousand dollars all together at one time?" he queried.

"Ten thousand dollars—never," they returned.

"Ah," nodded the old gentleman, "and you never will again. I thought you'd like to look at it just once so I fetched it down in bills."

"Whose is it?" they demanded.

"Yours," roared the old gent, "all yours. Your pop and mom have saved it up for you. They didn't mean to, but they did. I fixed it so they could."

"You kids get out of here," said Dick:

When the kids had removed themselves as far as the other side of the door Dicky looked his father in the face.

"You didn't use a cent," said Dicky.

"Why should I?" returned his father. "I've got a right tidy little practice, Dicky. I didn't need this money. Why should I use a cent?"

"But," protested Dick, "you——"

"Oh, dear me, yes," said the old man. "I lied. Of course I lied."

"It's more than that," said Dick. "That visit that you made us. You were worried—you were anxious——"

"Why, yes, I was," nodded the old man.

"What about?" queried Dicky.

"There's only one thing in life that I'd ever worry about. You ought to know that, Dicky. I was worried about you."

"Worried about me?" demanded Dick.

"Of course," nodded the old man. "Haven't you been worrying about yourself? Well, I started in worrying some years ago, so I could keep you from worrying when you got to the place where I knew that you would worry."

"I won't take this money," exclaimed Dicky firmly.

"Dicky," cried Sally.

"I don't care—I promised him," said Dick.

"Tut, tut," said the old man. "Listen, Dicky. I paid off that mortgage years ago."

"How did you pay it off?" cried Dick.

"Out of my earnings—how would I pay it off," returned the old man. "How does any man pay off a mortgage? Eh? And now you try to insult the old man—try to insult him. It's an outrage."

"I'm not insulting you," said Dicky.

"Yes you are," said the old man. "Yes you are. All these years you've been insulting me. You've assumed that I would take pay for what I did for my only son. Dicky, you've got your father wrong.

You've got all the fathers in the world all wrong. Why, you're a father yourself, Dicky. Do you mean to say that your boys should pay you back for anything you do for them?"

"I never thought of that," said Dick.

"We're not doing anything for them," said Sally; "we've never done anything for them. It's you."

"Tut, tut," said Daniel Riddle. "It's your money, isn't it? And you earned it, didn't you? And I stuck it in a bank for you. And there you are—'nough said."

"But," wailed Dicky, "pa, I've never done a thing for you. I've never done a blessed thing."

"Haven't you?" cried his father. "Listen, Dicky. If I had only treated my old father as well as you've treated me—listen, Dicky. The old man had put his lifeblood into a business—a business that he meant for me. He was a tailor. He saw what I couldn't see. What I saw was slavery. What he saw was that he and Sis and I could have made our everlasting fortune out of that business at some time. I said no. And he died. He died years earlier than he would have died if he could have had his way instead of me having my way. That's the way I treated my pop, Dicky. And do you know how you've treated yours? You think you know, but you don't. Listen, Dicky. I wanted you to have every advantage I could give you, Dicky, but I was hop-

ing against hope, and Aunt Sis, she was hoping against hope, that you'd make up to your grandfather for what I didn't do. Dicky, if the old man could have lived to see that Prince George coat of yours—"

Sally gathered up the bills gratefully and humbly. She told the old man what a little beast she'd been. She tossed him back the bank book. She laughed hysterically.

"You don't mind our keeping up our twenty-dollar-a-week contribution to your support, I hope?" she cried.

"If it's—for grandchildren, I do not," chuckled the old man.

"Your grandchildren?" asked Sally.

"Yours." returned Dicky's father. "Nobody's children are ever any good. It's only grandchildren that count."

Dick Riddle shut himself up into a room that night. Next day he stepped into the presence of George King, Jr. He handed him a new design.

"George," said Dick Riddle, "do you think Tillinghast has got anything that'll touch that, to put out for his winter styles?"

George King, Jr., glanced at the sketch. He examined it carefully. His eyes glistened.

"Gorry," he cried, "what's come into you, Dick? That's the very liveliest King George coat that anybody ever saw. You're coming back, old man."

Dicky laughed soberly. "I've got a family tradition to maintain," he said.

*Other stories by Mr. Osborne in future issues.*

## BUREAUCRACY TRIUMPHANT

**I**F it be true that misery loves company, then there may be some modicum of comfort for sundry of our disabled war veterans in the reflection that America is not the only "grateful nation" whose gratitude occasionally finds weird interpreters in the persons of the governmental bureaucrats who administer its visible manifestations.

For instance there is the story of the British veteran who was receiving a disability pension in part compensation for a badly mangled foot, the work of a German shell in Flanders fields. The foot was in such bad shape that the veteran was obliged to have it treated and dressed daily. But the treatment failed to bring any improvement and an operation was finally prescribed. The operation, far from restoring the injured member, only made matters worse. Infection set in and the foot was amputated.

The veteran was rather gratified than otherwise. The foot had been of no use to him, and now that it had become a total loss he foresaw the possibility of an increased pension. He applied for the increase.

The official answer to his application informed him that inasmuch as his foot had been amputated by a civilian doctor the government could not be held responsible for its loss. But that was not the worst. A few days later he received word that his original disability pension had been stopped in consideration of the fact that the disability, to wit one shell-torn foot, had been removed.



# The Unusual Adventures of the Texan Wasp

By James Francis Dwyer

*Author of "The Cup of the Magyars," "The Gold Traffickers of Montmartre," Etc.*

## III. THE JEWELLED IKON OF THE CZAR.

Again Mr. Robert Henry Blane, alias The Texan Wasp, meets Europe's greatest man hunter, No. 37. And again The Wasp punctures the vanity of the detective whose anonymous designation is a word of awe and terror to every lawbreaker from Land's End to Archangel. This time the adventurer from Houston, Texas, chooses north Africa as the scene of his exploits. And Betty Allerton, of Boston, looks on.

**M**ANY, many months had elapsed since the strange affair at Aynhoe Road, Hammersmith, when Robert Henry Blane, known as The Texan Wasp, had been instrumental in returning to the daughter of the Magyar lord the strange goblet that her father had staked and lost. In those months The Texan Wasp had wandered up and down and had met with many adventures. Curious and colorful adventures. There was an incident on the Edinburgh Express that had puzzled the police force of England, and of which Robert Henry Blane alone knew the true solution. There was the matter of "The Green Man of Brighton," a weird affair that had made headlines for the Continental press, the inside history of which was known to The Wasp and one other. And these happenings were not all. Dame Adventure had a special liking for the tall and handsome Texan and she chose him as a standard bearer on many occasions.

Curiously, in all the adventurous weeks that had passed since the Hammersmith

affair The Texan Wasp had not met his archenemy, the man hunter, No. 37, whose working alias was known from one end of Europe to the other. That the great detective was alive and active was well known to Mr. Blane. In the news agencies of the underworld there were recorded from time to time quick throws of the lariat of the Law, sudden yankings of big criminals into the cold reception rooms of Justice, the carefully compiled evidence and the swift convictions that stamped the work as that of the master sleuth. The round-ups may have happened in Naples, Stockholm, Madrid or any other place, but the shrewd criminals who knew the handiwork of No. 37 listened to the details, nodded their heads and glanced around uneasily.

Robert Henry Blane heard these reports and smiled carelessly. He was absolutely fearless and he had such a firm belief in his own star that his nerve was not shaken by the tales told of the uncanny chaser of criminals who had sent Pierre Chabannier to the nickel mines of New Caledonia, rounded up

the head of "The Eighteen Devils" and supplied many a free passage for famous criminals to the penal settlement at Cayenne. He heard the stories with a perverse delight. "The Red Apache," who had once tried to garrote The Wasp at Lucerne, had been sentenced to twenty years' imprisonment; Monsieur Ponsonnard, the gold trafficker, had also retired to a quiet prison at Toulouse; the strange adventuress, Valerie Caselli, that Mr. Blane had become acquainted with at Venice, received a term at Budapest. No. 37 made no false boast when he had remarked to the murderer, Nicholas Grahn, that he, Grahn, was one of the few outstanding cases on his list.

Robert Henry Blane moved southward with the coming of winter. He voyaged de luxe. From Paris to Marseilles he had ridden on the "Blue and Gold Special," the embodiment of railroad comfort, and he was whiling away a few hours in Marseilles before taking a steamer to Africa when a miracle happened. A most extraordinary miracle.

The Texan Wasp had strolled down the *Cannebière*—that wonderful street that American sailors dub "The Can o' Beer"—and he had halted for a few moments on the *Vieux-Port* to watch the tourists bargain with the owners of the little motor boats that carry the inquisitive to the dungeons of *Château d'If* that Dumas told of in "The Count of Monte Cristo." It was a morning for miracles. The water of the port sparkled bravely in the sunshine, the huge transporter bridge across the basin was transformed from an ugly monstrosity into a thing of beauty, and the enormous figure of *Notre Dame de la Garde*, under whose special care are the sailors of the Mediterranean, glowed like a mass of molten gold. It was one of those mornings that sometimes come to this tired old planet and bring with them strange memories that make us think such days were plentiful in the time when the world was young.

Robert Henry Blane had no premonition of the miraculous happening. It had occurred with a suddenness that startled him. An old-time horse carriage, the type to which the good folk of Marseilles cling persistently, pulled up on the cobbled water front and from the carriage sprang a girl who ran hurriedly toward one of the little motor boats tied to the sea wall.

The self-possession of The Texan Wasp

was swept away. The girl became a magnet that held his eyes. The sight of her unloosed a flood of memories that rolled through his brain, momentarily stunning him. They were the stored memories of golden days; a splendid tidal wave that surged out of a long-dead past. In a single flashing instant he was made cognizant of days that were sweet and wonderful. Days in the Maine woods in lazy summer and dreamy fall; magic evenings in Boston—evenings of fun and laughter when all the world seemed a playground and troubles were unknown.

In the human *mélange* of the port the girl looked so thoroughly American that Robert Henry Blane experienced a curious pain as he noted the filth of the water-front loafers that stood near her. She was so clean and wholesome, so gloriously beautiful in the golden sunshine. Her sweet face, her dress, her little *toque*, her shapely shoes brought agony to him. Involuntarily he had taken a step forward, then halted. A voice within his brain had screamed out a warning. "Fool!" it cried. "You cannot speak to her! She is not of your world now! The way of the transgressor is hard and you must pay!"

As The Wasp, breathless and stunned, stood and watched the girl Fate played another little trick. The girl placed a leather satchel on the top of one of the iron snubbing posts while she opened her pocket-book, and a hawk-eyed gorilla of the port swooped upon it.

The thief made a rush for the narrow and filthy lanes leading up from the *Quai du Port*, but his rush was interrupted. A tall and athletic Texan hurled himself upon him and flung him backward upon the cobblestones. It was her satchel! It had been touched a thousand times by her little fingers! It was a sacred thing!

The fury of the attack surprised the crook and he lay for an instant without moving, his vicious, snakelike eyes upon Robert Henry Blane. Only for an instant though. He lifted himself from the stones with that swift, catlike spring used by the Parisian apache and hurled himself with lightning suddenness at the throat of The Texan Wasp.

Robert Henry Blane tried to avoid the rush but failed. Hands that were made to choke weak victims gripped the Texan's throat and the thug endeavored to admin-

ister the quick and terrible squeeze that is so fearfully effective.

The Texan Wasp sensed the power of the strangler's fingers and acted with amazing suddenness. A left fist was driven forward with all the concentrated power that can be put into a six-inch drive from the hip. It was a punch that would have carried away the fender of a street car. The thug crumpled, the sinewy fingers lost their throttling power, the fellow dropped upon his knees, then, with a tremendous effort, pulled himself together, rolled drunkenly across the street and dived into the network of little streets that make the old town.

Robert Henry Blane found that the girl was at his side. Some one had picked up the leather satchel dropped by the thief and handed it to her. The eyes of the man and the maid met. Blane's eyes were no more the inscrutable, cold eyes that baffled antagonists; they were moist and dim as they looked down into hers.

The girl spoke but Blane could not catch the little murmured words she uttered. Then, in the silence that followed the two found that they were the attraction of a hundred eyes. The quick struggle had drawn together all the loafers of the port and into the circle came the majesty of the law as represented by a French policeman with his eternal notebook and his capacity to ask a million questions in the shortest possible period of time.

What had happened? Mademoiselle had lost her pocketbook? Who had stolen it? Where was he? Why was he not held by monsieur? And the name of mademoiselle? Ah, Mademoiselle Betty Allerton, Grand Hôtel du Louvre, Rue Noailles! *Americaine*, of course?

"And the name of monsieur?"

The Texan Wasp took from his pocket-book the little identification card that the French police insist must be carried by all foreigners who remain more than two months in France. He did not wish to speak his name aloud. He hoped the fool policeman would not attempt to pronounce it as he copied it laboriously. On the night when he had met Betty Allerton in the grounds of the Casino at Monte Carlo he had denied that he was the Robert Henry Blane that she knew in Boston town in the days of long ago.

The policeman made a final entry and banged his book shut. Monsieur and

mademoiselle would have to come to the nearest police station and prefer a charge against the unknown.

"Not now?" protested Robert Henry Blane.

"Yes, monsieur, now!"

The Texan Wasp looked at the girl, and a strange little smile spread over her face. "Oh, I cannot go!" she cried. "I ran away from the hotel where my auntie is staying. I wanted to make a visit to the Château d'If to see where the Count of Monte Cristo was imprisoned. I must go! Please make him put it off! Please!"

Robert Henry Blane turned upon the small policeman. In cold, dignified French the Texan explained that the father of mademoiselle, a distinguished American, had been taken suddenly ill at the Château d'If and that mademoiselle had been summoned in great haste. In the afternoon they would visit the prefecture, but not now. Monsieur, who was surely intelligent, could see that an immediate visit was impossible.

The policeman wavered. In some mysterious manner a twenty-franc bill found its way into the palm of his right hand. He wheeled and chased away the pop-eyed spectators, leaving Betty Allerton and Robert Henry Blane alone.

The Texan Wasp hardly knew what he said in those first few minutes that they were together. Later he tried to recall what the girl had said, but he failed. Little sections of the chatter were remembered but the greater part of the girl's talk had been transformed into a sweet ripple of inarticulate sound that flowed through his brain and soothed him immensely in the hours following their parting.

The little scraps that he remembered exactly were important exchanges. Said Betty Allerton:

"I sent you a note when I saw you at Lucerne thanking you for what you did at Monte Carlo. Did you get the note? I thought to see you again but I didn't although I—I was on the Schweizerhof Quay every day."

Stammered The Texan Wasp: "I was called away hurriedly. Yes, yes, I got your note. What I did at Monte Carlo was nothing."

He recalled with a little jab of remorse his flight up the lake after outwitting No. 37 and the chief of "The Eighteen Devils."



What right had he to talk to the girl at his side?

Then again the sweet voice of the girl: "That was good of you to tell that little fib to the policeman. I had to see *Château d'If* this morning. *Monte Cristo* is my favorite character and we leave this afternoon. Auntie said it was too rough to go down the harbor so I sneaked away from the hotel. Do you think it is too rough?"

He saw the desire to see the romantic prison in her eyes and he shook his head.

"And the visit to the prefecture?" she murmured.

"Forget about it," said Blane.

"But you might be worried after I leave?" she cried.

"I'm leaving too," laughed The Wasp.

"Immediately?"

"Yes; I go to Algiers by a boat leaving this afternoon."

Later he recalled how she had appeared to be a little startled when he told her of his destination. She had flushed, looked for a moment as if she intended to speak, then walked back to the spot where she had stood talking to the motor-boat owner at the moment the thief attempted to steal her satchel.

Robert Henry Blane followed her. He wondered if he had offended her. He had said that he was leaving for Algiers, and she had become strangely quiet. What was wrong with his statement?

An old weather-beaten sailor took the little hand of Miss Betty Allerton and helped her into the boat. She smiled up at Robert Henry Blane. "I cannot thank you enough for what you did in getting my satchel back," she said softly. "My passport and all my little bank drafts were in it. I would have been stranded completely if I had lost it."

The engine started and she waved her hand. "Good-by!" shouted The Wasp.

"Good-by! And thanks again!" cried the girl.

The motor boat shot off in the direction of the famous island where Mirabeau and Louis-Philippe-Egalité were imprisoned, and Robert Henry Blane, feeling a little sad, turned and walked swiftly up the *Cannebière*.

Opposite the Bourse a street urchin slipped a note into the Texan's hand and dived into the crowd. Blane unrolled the scrap of paper and read the message it car-

ried. It was in French, and a rough translation would read:

Dogs should not bite dogs. Big thieves and little thieves are only thieves. One day soon the band to which I belong might repay you for your interference.

Robert Henry Blane tore the note into little scraps. It had evidently come from the strangler whose plans he had foiled on the water front and it was evident that the strangler or some of his friends knew Robert Henry Blane.

The Texan Wasp repeated the first sentence of the message. "Dogs should not bite dogs," he growled. "Well, he's right. Dogs shouldn't bite dogs!" Then after a long pause he added: "And they shouldn't speak to angels either!"

A nice old gentleman into whose ear Mr. Blane had hissed the concluding remark turned and politely asked if Mr. Blane had made an inquiry. The big American stammered an apology and walked swiftly toward his hotel. He was very angry with himself and yet he felt curiously pleased as he recalled the honeyed voice of Betty Allerton.

Out from the Quai Joliette swung the *Timgad* carrying The Texan Wasp to the countries of the sun. She swung by the lighthouse and bucked a nor'easter that was sweeping the Gulf of the Lion. Robert Henry Blane, clinging to a stanchion on the sheltered side of the upper deck, thought of Betty Allerton as he watched the old Mediterranean lash itself into a fury.

Mr. Blane was a little puzzled. Since he had parted from Miss Allerton some three hours before he had wondered over the expression that came upon her face when he had told her that he was going to Algiers. He had tried to analyze it. Again and again he had asked himself what there was in his simple statement to startle her. Why had her face flushed? Why did she appear disturbed by the news?

"It isn't possible," growled Robert Henry Blane, "that she and her aunt had planned to cross into Africa and that my——"

The half-uttered remark was never finished. Out from a passageway leading to the cabins de luxe stepped a trim figure in a traveling dress of blue gabardine, and The Texan Wasp stared in amazement.

Miss Betty Allerton was the less upset of the two. "When you told me that you were going to Algiers I didn't like to tell

you that auntie and I had reserved cabins," she said sweetly. "I—I thought it was one of those statements that might make you change your mind. You—you understand? I didn't know what to say, so I said nothing."

Robert Henry Blane was beside her now. He even steadied her slightly as the *Timgad* met a thrust from a pig-snouted roller that had an ambition to capsize the boat. The world, to the tall and handsome Texan, had been suddenly transformed into a rose-and-purple wonderland in which everything was sweet and glorious. He was on a boat with the girl he had loved in the long ago! The girl who had told him that the world was his to conquer!

He shook himself, thinking it might be a dream. He recalled the evening at Monte Carlo when he had denied his name to her. She had said that he resembled some one she knew in Boston town, "some one whose name was Bob." He, Blane, had told her that his name was not "Bob." What must the girl have thought of him! He recalled the care he had taken at the Vieux-Port to prevent her from seeing the name on his identification card, the name that she had known him by. And then, to add to the mental suffering that was his, there came to his mind the jeer in the note that had been thrust into his hand on the *Cannebière*: "Dogs should not bite dogs!"

The voice of honey dragged him out of the half stupor that remorse brought upon him. "Is it going to be rough?" asked the girl. "I mean very rough?"

He stammered out comforting assurances. There was always a little wind in the Gulf of the Lion but after that the passage would be perfectly quiet.

He brought her a chair and arranged it in the cosiest corner. He hung over her, listening to her chatter. Her auntie was a bad sailor. Very bad. But auntie had a desire for the sun and Algiers appealed. Besides auntie had many friends there. At Mustapha Supérieur, the aristocratic quartier of Algiers, lived many people that auntie knew. She mentioned their names. Robert Henry Blane was amazed. The Grand Duke and Grand Duchess Andrew were intimate friends of auntie. They had begged her and Miss Betty to come across and visit them.

An hour fled with amazing swiftness. Miss Allerton went back to the cabin leav-

ing Robert Henry Blane to think over what she had said. He walked the deck and jeered at his own impertinence. He was an adventurer, a criminal adventurer as he had told Valerie Caselli at Venice, yet he had dared to think of a sweet and wonderful girl who had known him in the days when the trumpet of shame had not connected his name with deeds that were startling.

His remorse increased. He fled to the smoking room, fearful that she would see him again. He cursed the smallness of the boat. All the strange and extraordinary affairs with which his name had been associated paraded in his mind. What would "auntie," who was the friend of grand duchesses, think of the sensational stories that were told of one Robert Henry Blane of Houston, Texas, known to the underworld of Europe as The Texan Wasp? What a story could be poured into her ear by the king of man hunters, No. 37? What would she think of his doings at the Roost of the Ladrones; of his tactics at the Castle of the Black Rocks, of the extraordinary part he played in the matter of "The Green Man of Brighton" that had made headlines for the press of Europe?

The storm of self-reproach increased. The verses that he had written to Betty Allerton came and mocked him. He writhed in agony as he recalled the little words that she had babbled softly into his ear when pinning a rosette on his breast one day at Philadelphia when he had broken three records before the cheering crowds that lined the track.

He rose with the intention of seeking his cabin. The crossing was a matter of twenty-six hours; he would keep out of the way. The little harrows of contrition were raking the soul of Robert Henry Blane.

Near the door of the smoking room a big man with a large, hawklike nose, who was bragging loudly to three friends lurched against The Wasp and vouchsafed no immediate apology for his action. His deliberate rudeness was evident. As Robert Henry Blane steadied himself after the collision the fellow muttered a remark about persons who were not used to ships and who did not know where they were going.

It was an unlucky remark to make to The Texan Wasp considering the mood he was in. The gray eyes flashed; the slight scar on the right jaw that was hardly noticeable at other times, showed white and

livid. His right hand went out, gripped the coat sleeve of the big man, twisted it swiftly so that it became a handle to the fellow's person, then with a deft movement The Wasp sent him spinning across the room.

The *Timgad* plunged at the moment. The Wasp swayed to the dive; the man on the floor tried unavailingly to get to his feet. He cursed fluently as he reached for the leg of one of the fixed armchairs.

He dragged himself up after a great effort and stood for a moment regarding the tall Texan. A shrewd fellow in his way. Upon the floor he had contemplated the murder of Robert Henry Blane; on his feet he thought differently. The face of The Wasp was one that bit into false courage like acid into soft metal. The cold gray eyes would have halted *The Cid*.

"I'll remember monsieur at some other time," he stammered. "I will——"

"Apologize at once!" cried The Wasp.

The fellow paused for a moment then jerked out the necessary words as if frightened at the delay. "I apologize to monsieur," he gasped. "There was no harm intended."

Robert Henry Blane went to his cabin and he remained there till the *Timgad* docked. All the first-class passengers had left the ship before he went down the gangplank and he wondered what the girl had thought of his conduct. It was reasonable to think that he would have presented himself and offered his services in the matter of helping with the luggage.

Strangely enough he had a reminder of the meeting at the Vieux-Port as he mixed with the second and third-class passengers who were held back till the cabin occupants had landed. He thought he saw the hawk-faced gorilla who had attempted to steal the satchel of Miss Betty Allerton. Just for an instant he imagined that he saw the vicious, snakelike eyes of the sneak thief in the crowd, then the swarm of luggage-burdened folk swallowed him up.

The *Echo d'Alger* and the *Dépêche Algérienne* told Robert Henry Blane much during the first hour of his arrival. Both papers recorded the arrival of the Comtesse de Chambon and her niece, Miss Betty Allerton of Boston, U. S. A., and the news was added that the comtesse and Miss Betty were to be the guests of the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess Andrew at the

Villa Kairouan during their stay in the White City beloved by the poets of El Djezaïr.

The Texan Wasp whistled softly as he digested the information. He read and re-read the paragraphs. "Auntie" was a comtesse! Miss Betty was the guest of a grand duke! Robert Henry Blane thought of routes out of town. The railway led to Tunis and Fez. He considered whether he would go east or west. He wondered what mad idea had brought him to Algiers. His sang-froid had deserted him. He was stampeded at the prospect of meeting the girl again.

The newspapers were filled with items regarding the grand duke. A clever chap. He had invested his funds in French securities long before the ruble took its wild rush into the financial garbage can and now with his great wealth he was resurrecting the days of the caliphs in the big villa at Mustapha Supérieur. The local papers were delighted with him. They told how he had been the boon companion of the dead czar; how he had received from the unlucky Nicholas a jeweled ikon whose beauty and worth were unequalled in all the earth; how his presence in Algiers would bring to the city the very flower and cream of the fashionable world.

The Texan Wasp wondered a little about the worth of the jeweled ikon. It seemed attractive. He thought it silly of the Romanoff duke to parade the fact that he had the treasure in his villa.

Mr. Blane read on. The grand duke and grand duchess were giving a masked ball that was to be the greatest event in the White City since the days of the beys. Decorators had been brought down from Paris; strange dancers had been fetched by caravan from mysterious desert encampments—dancers that were said to eclipse the famous Ouled-Naïl; all that a Russian mind, barbaric and untrained, could think of to stir the palates of jaded guests would be on view at the Villa Kairouan. Even the jeweled ikon was to play its part. The grand duchess was to exhibit the wonderful creation of the court jewelers of Petrograd during the evening.

Robert Henry Blane flung down the paper and reached for a time-table of the line to Tunis. He felt depressed. Fate had played him a scurvy trick. It had flung up before him the penalty for wrongdoing; he

had been told in a forceful way that laws and conventions could not be outraged.

He rang for the porter to carry his baggage to the near-by station, then he descended to the office. At the counter was a young Arab in a smart white uniform who was busy describing in broken English the person who was to receive an unaddressed letter he carried.

The French clerk was irritable. "How am I to know the man?" he demanded.

The Arab waved the letter and endeavored to explain himself. "I have not the gentleman's name," he said, "but he must be here. I have made questions at the other hotels. He is an American and he is very tall."

The clerk glanced at The Texan Wasp, and the Arab, with a grin of delight, rushed at Robert Henry Blane.

"My lady did not know your name," he cried. "I am sure that it is for you. It is from the Villa Kairouan."

Robert Henry Blane tore open the envelope and hurriedly read the note inside. It ran:

I feel somehow that I have spoiled your trip. I looked for you before we disembarked, but I could not find you. It is difficult for me to come down to the city because auntie is afraid of the natives and will not go out of the grounds, yet I want to see you. I must see you. Once I told you that you resembled a man whom I shall always think of as fine and splendid, and, curiously, my belief in that man grows greater every day. There is a masked ball to-morrow evening. Come! Please do! I shall look for you.

BETTY ALLERTON.

The Arab watched the face of The Texan Wasp as he read the message and he grinned delightedly. He knew that he had found his man.

"Is there an answer, sah?" he inquired.

For an instant Robert Henry Blane remained silent, then he waved the porter back up the stairs. "I am going to stay," he said. To the grinning Arab he remarked: "There is no answer."

An African night of sapphire blue was given by the gods for the masked ball at the Villa Kairouan. An arch of sky, tinted with that subtle shade of indigo that only the African sky can attain, sprang up from the heights of Mustapha Supérieur, reared itself up to the little startled stars and vaulted out across the Mediterranean toward Europe. It was a night for dancing,

a night for revelry, a night in which the magic of Islam could soak into the soul of the young and romantic.

Ten thousand lights illuminated the great villa of the grand duke. Motor cars and carriages made an endless procession up the Rue Michelet. Bagdad lived again on the slopes above the city of Yousuf Zeri. Guests in gorgeous costumes passed through the great Moorish gates of the villa—guests in the costumes of Arab sheiks and Kabyle warriors, jugglers, snake charmers, dancing girls, and desert dwellers of all types.

On the wide terrace outside the ballroom, a tall, splendidly built cowboy, whose costume proved that he knew well what a real cowboy should wear, glanced inquiringly at a veiled Scheherezade whose bright eyes shone from behind the gossamer silk of the *adjar* that completely covered her face. The veiled beauty returned the glance of inquiry, and the cowboy, emboldened by the look, whistled softly a little rhyme that he had composed in the long ago. It was a rhyme of Boston town and it ran:

Oh, mother, if the sun don't shine,  
And if the moon is moony,  
There's some one down on Tremont Street  
Who won't let me go loony.  
Her name it goes from lip to lip—

The veiled Scheherezade laughed softly and the cowboy stopped whistling. "I was certain that it was you," said the girl, speaking in a soft whisper. "I have seen a thousand Europeans dressed as cowboys but you are the first man I have seen in Europe dressed as a cowboy who looked as if he had ever seen a cow. Tell me, how did you get such a dandy costume in Algiers?"

"I borrowed it," answered The Texan Wasp.

"From whom?"

Robert Henry Blane laughed. "The owner would be pleased to know of your interest in it," he said. "He's a real cowboy from the Panhandle. I found him yesterday in the Kasbah and we forgathered. He was riding for an American circus that stranded at Naples, and now he's working his way back to Tampico on an oil tanker. This was his circus costume and I borrowed it for to-night."

"It is splendid!" cried Miss Betty Allerton. "Doesn't it—doesn't it make you—make you want to go home?"

"It does," said The Wasp. "It brought all sorts of thoughts to me. It's curious.

I went aboard the tanker to get the rig and this chap showed me his saddle and bridle and I felt inclined to cry. He cried—the cowboy, I mean. He had brought a Texan pony over with the circus and when the outfit failed at Naples the authorities took the pony with the rest of the equipment in payment for the debt. I think something happened to the fool sheriff or whatever the Italian debt collector is called. I didn't ask any questions but I think some one who was leading the pony away got hurt. That's why my friend left hurriedly on the tanker. The things he says about Italy are unpublishable."

"I think it was dreadful to take his horse," murmured the girl.

A little silence fell upon the two. A Zouave band played softly. Little winds from far-off places—winds that carried the whispers of the hot sands of the desert beyond Laghouat came to the man and the maid.

"Will you dance?" asked Robert Henry Blane.

"Yes," breathed the girl.

In the crowded room there was no pair that possessed the grace and charm of Robert Henry Blane and Betty Allerton. The Texan was tall and superbly built, the girl from old Boston had a sweet charm that was indescribable.

They were curiously silent as they danced. To The Texan Wasp the fact that he was dancing with Betty Allerton was something that choked back speech and made small talk impossible. The girl found that the witchery and charm of the night brought a pleasant languor and a dislike to conversation. She was intensely happy.

They danced a second dance and a third. They were forgetful of everything and every one. A marshal of France sat with the grand duke and the grand duchess on a festooned dais at one end of the room, but his presence or that of a thousand other notables mattered little to Robert Henry Blane and Betty Allerton. The ball was theirs, the night was theirs, the city of the beys and all the wonder seas of sand that swept away toward the magic oases of the south were theirs.

Robert Henry Blane thought over the tact of the girl. She had not mentioned his name. He had denied his name to her at Monte Carlo and she had accepted the denial. As in Lucerne she had described him

to the messenger who had brought the note to his hotel. He wondered over the strangeness of their meetings.

It was during the third dance that Robert Henry Blane was suddenly dragged back to the cold realities of life. The gold-and-purple veil that the night had drawn over a past filled with adventure was rent with a haste that startled him. At the end of the dais a group had gathered to view the jeweled ikon which the grand duchess was exhibiting, and from this group the two Americans had danced down the length of the room toward the great windows that looked out over the bay of Algiers to Cape Matifou.

Near the windows they had bumped ever so slightly a pair of dancers, the man costumed as a juggler, the lady in all the glory of a confection modeled on what was supposed to have been the court dress of Dido, Queen of Carthage. Possibly something in the build of the juggler made Robert Henry Blane seek the eyes that looked out from the black mask, and the glance of inquiry brought a shock to the American. The eyes that looked back to him were cold and merciless. They were the eyes of a human bloodhound; eyes that were like frozen hailstones from which pity and warmth had been relentlessly expelled. They flung the mind of The Texan Wasp back to far-off places. Before his eyes there flashed a picture of the hall of a house in Sulgrave Road, Hammersmith, where he watched the arrest of Nicholas Grahn. He saw again for a darting instant a packed music hall in Paris where he had looked across rows and rows of heads at a stern figure seated on the stage. He saw again the dark cellar of the Palazzo Falieri at Venice when some one had interrupted his search for the golden ducats of the unlucky doge. The eyes that looked at him from the slits in the juggler's mask were the eyes of Number 37, the man hunter without a peer in all Europe!

The juggler and Queen Dido were swallowed up in a little knot of dancers who had torn themselves away from the jeweled ikon, and The Texan Wasp guided Miss Betty Allerton through the big windows onto the terrace. Before them was the cool sweep of the great lawn running down to the high wall that separated it from the boulevard. It was dotted here and there

with clumps of palm trees under which nestled seats.

Robert Henry Blane was startled but not unnerved. For a moment after he had looked into the eyes of the great detective he wondered if he could have made a mistake in supposing that the juggler was Number 37, but as the minutes passed he told himself that there was no pair of eyes in all the world that possessed the strange hardness of those owned by the sleuth. He knew them. He had looked into those eyes at moments when danger had made mental negatives that could never be obliterated, and now, as he compared those prints of former meetings with the impression of the quick glance in the ballroom, he knew that there could be no mistake. The juggler was Number 37 without a doubt!

Blane, while still conversing with the girl at his side, tried to guess at the business that had brought the distinguished man hunter to the Villa Kairouan. Of course the sleuth might turn up anywhere, as a number of famous criminals had found to their sorrow, but the heights of Mustapha Supérieur, the aristocratic quarter of Algiers seemed a little off the beat. Why was he there?

A word sprang into the mind of The Texan Wasp and danced around in the space that he had cleared for an answer to his own query. The word was "ikon."

Mr. Blane smiled softly as the word pirouetted before his mental eyes. He had been so intensely occupied with thoughts of Miss Betty Allerton that he had forgotten the great treasure that was housed for the moment at the Villa Kairouan. He remembered what the local papers had said about the ikon. They had spoken of it as one of the most remarkable treasures in the world and had told that experts who had seen it were unable to put a money value upon it.

Then Number 37 was in Algiers on account of the ikon. The strange piece that had soothed the dead czar was an attraction that might bring clever thieves to the heights above the white city of dreams and the great man hunter had arranged things so that he should be close to the tempting bait.

Miss Betty Allerton and Robert Henry Blane drifted off down the lawn. They found a seat beneath a cluster of date palms and The Wasp thrust the matter of the de-

tective from his mind as the girl talked. What did he care for sleuths, no matter how famous they were? What did he care for ikons? He was Robert Henry Blane of Houston, Texas, and the night was his.

The girl spoke of America, of Boston, of home. There was a trace of wistfulness in the sweet flow of words.

"Always I am a little sad when I am away," she murmured. "Even when everything seems very beautiful and splendid as it does to-night. All this is wonderful and glorious but—but I would give anything I possess to be walking across Boston Common right now. Do you—do you have desires like that?"

"Often," admitted The Wasp. "It is more than seven years since I have seen America yet I have moments when I wish I could take the Atlantic at a single spring and land down in places that I knew. Mine are queer places—I mean the spots that I have a longing to see suddenly."

"How do you mean?" questioned the girl. "I mean how are they queer?"

"Well," stammered The Wasp, "they are just ordinary places. I never have a desire to hop right into the Metropolitan Museum or the Smithsonian Institute or any place like that, but I have an awful desire at times to see little places. Little places where something happened. There's a Harvey eating room at Albuquerque that I would like to see, that's one. And there's a little ranch on the Pecos that attracts me at times. And then—then there are other spots. There's a—there's a lake in Maine that comes to me in my sleep——"

He stopped abruptly. He thought that a little choked sob had come from the girl at his side. A silence fell upon them. A casuarina tree near the road sang softly as its leaves were rustled by the night wind.

After a long interval the girl spoke. She put a question in a whisper. "Then why don't you go back?" she asked softly. "If—if you have great longings to see places in your own country why do you not go home?"

There was another interval of silence before the man answered her question. "There are people who doubt me and I don't blame them," he said. "I went away because something happened and I don't think I will ever go back."

"The doubters are everywhere," said the girl softly, "but there are always some who

believe. Some whose belief is so great that the doubts of a million are nothing in comparison to it. I am sure—I am sure that there are some—that there is at least one—one whose belief would make you feel that the silly chatter of the mob was nothing.”

A soft silence fell upon the two after the girl had spoken. The African night held them in its soft, slow-breathing embrace. They looked out across the sea, the moonlit sea over which the hordes of Algerian pirates raced time and time again till an American admiral, one Stephen Decatur of Maryland, helped the French and British to put the cutthroats out of business. Robert Henry Blane was wondering if it were possible to go back. “Back where?” asked an accusing voice within his brain. “Where would you go? To Houston? Hardly! To Boston? No! Then where? Would you tell the good folk that you met how the underworld of Europe knew you as The Texan Wasp, the American dare-devil who had no knowledge of fear? Would you tell them of your escapades? Of the little war that existed between you and a great man hunter who was known as No. 37?”

Thoughts of the detective roused The Wasp. The famous sleuth was quite close to him as he sat dreaming of the great land beyond the ocean. Possibly the man hunter had recognized him in that swift glance in the ballroom, and, instead of a sight of the little ranch on the Pecos, he might, if he did not take care, have a glimpse of the penal settlements of Cayenne.

The girl sensed his uneasiness and rose to her feet. “Shall we go back to the ballroom?” she murmured.

The Texan Wasp acquiesced with a bow.

In silence they walked up the sloping lawn to the terrace. Robert Henry Blane felt that the echoes of her words still lingered in the mimosa-scented air. The night winds refused to let them die, and again and again he felt certain that he heard her say: “I am sure that there are some—that there is at least one—one whose belief would make you feel that the silly chatter of the mob was nothing.”

They had reached one of the great French windows opening on the terrace when the Zouave band stopped with a crash in the middle of a waltz. An order was hurled from the dais at the end of the room and the hum of conversation and laughter ceased

instantly. Miss Betty Allerton paused at the window and as she stood looking into the suddenly hushed room her soft fingers fell upon the arm of Robert Henry Blane. Curiously The Wasp thought that there was something protective in the manner in which she touched his sleeve.

Some one upon the dais was speaking excitedly in French. In the intense stillness that had fallen upon the ballroom the words came clear to the ears of Robert Henry Blane and Betty Allerton. They were rather startling words. They told of a bold and sensational theft. The grand duchess had retired for a moment to her chamber, leaving the jeweled ikon in its box upon the dais. She had been absent less than five minutes but on her return she found that the priceless treasure had been stolen!

For an instant the calmness that seldom deserted The Texan Wasp left him completely. He was filled with bitter recriminations. He had come to the ball without an invitation! He had walked in with all his cool impudence, and servants had bowed before him. Now there would be questions and a general checking up. The long finger of suspicion would weave in and out among the guests searching for a person it could rest upon. Blane pictured the immediate events that would follow the announcement, and in that picture he saw Betty Allerton—Betty of the pure face and the glorious eyes watching in fear and trembling lest the weaving finger should rest upon the shoulder of the man she had known in the long ago in old Boston town. The heart of Robert Henry Blane became sick with foreboding.

The girl stepped back from the window and stood beside the tall Texan. Within the room a little hubbub of excited chatter followed the announcement. The usual number of amateur detectives were putting forward plans showing how the thief could be detected. Some one announced that the grand duchess had collapsed and had been carried to her bedroom.

Robert Henry Blane wondered what the juggler with the cold, pitiless eyes was doing? Where was No. 37? He glanced into the big room in an effort to locate him. The dancers had formed themselves into little groups and Blane thought that they looked curiously startled, curiously terrified. He smiled as he thought of that fixed belief that innocent people do not show guilt upon

their faces. For just a second he glanced over the faces of the men close to the big window and he felt certain that any one of them would be chosen as the guilty person by an amateur detective.

"Possibly they all had an idea in their minds concerning the ikon," thought The Wasp. "They thought of theft but they lacked the nerve and now that some one has gone and pulled off the trick the guilty thought shows upon their faces."

Again the soft fingers of Betty Allerton touched his sleeve and brought to his mind the necessity for immediate action. The police would come in great droves from Algiers—the prying French police with their ridiculous hunger for papers and identifications. They would grill every guest. They would question the big Texan and they would have the assistance of the distinguished detective who would be willing to supply any information that the masquerading cowboy held back.

"Time to go, Bob," whispered a warning voice in the brain of The Texan Wasp. "Hit the trail, old-timer!"

Robert Henry Blane turned to the girl at his side. "I came here without an invitation," he said, "and I think my position would appear ridiculous if there was an inquiry. I think I had better go."

"Yes," murmured the girl.

"I am sorry," continued Blane. "Awfully sorry that the ikon has been stolen. It muddles up what was to me a wonderful evening."

Betty Allerton turned her head toward the lawn and spoke in a low voice. "I am sorry that I asked you to come," she said. "If—if you are annoyed I—I will never forgive myself."

The Texan Wasp laughed and the laugh contained all the contempt for danger that his adventurous soul possessed. "I will not be annoyed by any one," he said. "I seldom am annoyed. It is of you that I am thinking. You will probably be asked if you knew me and that will be disagreeable. They will ask my name."

"I do not know your—your name," whispered Betty Allerton. "You—you never told it to me. I—I only know you as a man who resembles some one I knew—some one in whom I had great faith."

She put out her hand. Robert Henry Blane lifted her soft, cool fingers to his lips, kissed them lightly, then stepped quickly

from the terrace to the lawn. The girl turned and entered the ballroom.

The Texan Wasp, on leaving Betty Allerton, had planned to cross the lawn in the shadow of the big trees, climb the front wall that separated the villa grounds from the boulevard and then make his way by unfrequented routes down the hillside to the town. For a moment he had conceived a hatred for the bold thief who had annexed the jeweled ikon but as he hurried across the lawn this hate fled. He told himself that the impudent unknown had served him a good turn. He admitted to himself that he had been treading on dangerous ground. The nearness of the girl of his dreams, the witchery of the African night, the scented winds, the soft music and all the sentiment-breeding charm of the land of Islam might have tempted him to make a fool of himself.

He considered the danger of sentiment. It was a quicksand that engulfed one's mental legs. "What is the use of me thinking I can ever go back?" he growled savagely as he hurried across the lawn. "I'm a social outlaw and I might just as well keep out of the way of decent people."

He was close to the boundary wall of the villa when the full realization of his danger came to him. If No. 37 had recognized him in the swift glance that they exchanged in the ballroom he, Blane, was certain that the master detective, who had a fine belief in the nerve of The Texan Wasp, would look no farther for the perpetrator of the theft. If the man hunter had not recognized him the danger of being apprehended was equally great as the efforts of the local police would surely be directed by him.

And the local police were thrust unpleasantly under the notice of The Texan Wasp at that moment. Up the hill came two roaring automobiles whose indecent headlights lit up the boulevard before the Villa Kairouan so that the tropical vegetation seemed startled as the fierce white light fell upon it. The Wasp, on the inner side of the wall, ducked smartly. The police had arrived with a swiftness that spoke well for the intelligence of the person who had telephoned a report of the theft. The Wasp thought of No. 37. It was surely the man hunter who had communicated the details that had brought the two packed automobiles charging up from the romantic city of El Djezair.



Orders were shouted by a commissioner in charge as the snorting machines halted. The villa was to be surrounded. No one was to enter or leave the place without the permission of the commissioner. Robert Henry Blane heard the thudding of heavy shoes as the police ran to take up their positions. The ikon of the dead czar had stirred the city that Stephen Decatur had once attacked.

The Texan Wasp, finding escape by the front wall dangerous, turned and crept toward the right. He reached the wall that divided the Villa Kairouan from a neighboring palace built in the Moorish style.

It was a high wall made of soft, crumbling stone, but at every ten feet or so there had been made gaps in the stone and in these spaces eucalyptus trees, imported from Australia, had been planted with the idea of forming a shelter against the hot sirocco that blows from the desert in the summertime. The smooth white trunk of a big eucalyptus attracted the Texan. He hurriedly climbed it and he had barely reached the heavy foliage when the squad of police detailed off to guard that side of the villa passed beneath him. The night that had been filled with music and laughter was suddenly turned into a bedlam of shouted orders, with the clashing of steel, the tramp of heavy feet and the startled cries of women.

Mr. Blane, resting for a moment on the lowest limb of the tree, felt inclined to curse his own dilatoriness. He told himself that he should have fled with winged heels the moment he heard the announcement of the theft. He was in a ridiculous position. Although he had visited the villa without a thought of annexing the ikon he would surely be accused of the robbery if he was captured and brought face to face with No. 37.

Blane considered the chances of reaching the rear of the villa by means of the line of trees. They grew so close together that it was easy for him to swing himself from the limbs of one tree to the limbs of another, taking pains to see that there was no watchful patrol beneath him. The front of the villa was too well guarded and the bare and treeless lawn of the adjoining place could not be crossed with safety. The Wasp reasoned that there might be a possibility of escaping through the neighboring property if he could reach the outhouses of the Moorish palace, which, at the middle of

the wall, came quite close to the dividing fence.

Very cautiously The Texan Wasp moved along the highway of the air. He was an athlete of more than ordinary skill. He possessed muscles of steel that served him well as he climbed out along the slippery limbs of the big trees and sprang from one to the other, gauging his movements with a nicety that would have done credit to the most accomplished chimpanzee. He tried to thrust all thoughts of Betty Allerton from his mind. His one consuming desire was to get away from the danger area that had been produced by the theft of the ikon.

With much care he reached a point where the small buildings connected with the Moorish palace came close to the wall. Mr. Blane examined them carefully and was on the point of dropping into the grounds adjoining the Villa Kairouan when there came an interruption. A rather strange interruption. From a tree immediately ahead came the rustling of leaves, the soft whimper of rubbing boughs, the very faint rustle of clothes that suggested the presence of another climber!

The Wasp crouched in a comfortable fork and waited. The unknown was moving slowly toward him, following the same high route as the American, but going in a different direction!

The Wasp wondered as to the fellow's identity. His first thought was of No. 37. He reasoned that the great man hunter, with his uncanny sense of location, had left the guarding of the villa to the local police and was hunting for a certain tall Texan in the treetops.

The thought did not improve the temper of The Wasp. The theft of the ikon had made him angry. He thought it an unkind interruption of an evening's pleasure. Fate had maliciously chased him from the presence of Betty Allerton by permitting a thief to annex the wonderful ikon that had once been the property of the czar. Robert Henry Blane's face showed the queer fighting look that brought out the whiteness of the scar on the right jaw. There was an amazing story connected with that scar, a story of the Rio Grande that will never be forgotten.

The sounds made by the unseen climber became more distinct. The Wasp was now certain that it was the sleuth. There flashed into his brain the words of the little chemist

who had asserted that No. 37 possessed the smelling faculties of a dog. A wave of hate for the detective swept over the Texan. He, Blane, had not stolen the ikon! Why should he be pursued? Why had the happening robbed him of the few hours of golden pleasure that were akin to the hours he had spent with Betty in the long ago?

Along a limb that led directly to the fork in which the Texan crouched came the unknown. Cautiously, carefully, and with the very minimum of noise he approached. The Wasp could hear his labored breathing. He could hear the noises made by dry twigs broken off by his passing. The moon had been temporarily hidden by a heavy cloud and it was dark in the center of the tree.

Then with a suddenness that was startling to both the unknown broke through a screen of leaves and came face to face with Robert Henry Blane!

In that first second The Texan Wasp knew that his guess regarding the identity of the tree climber was wrong. The unknown was masked but the costume was not that of the native juggler in which the American had seen No. 37. The man on the tree wore the Arab *gandoura*, the white wool gown worn beneath the burnoose. He had probably stripped off the outer garment so that he could have his limbs free.

The unknown was evidently under the belief that he had few friends at Mustapha Supérieur. With amazing swiftness he struck at the head of the cowboy and it was only the alertness of The Wasp that saved him from a stunning blow. A blackjack, strapped to the wrist of the other missed the head of Robert Henry Blane by such a narrow margin that the Texan's anger, simmering up to that moment, became white hot.

The Wasp forgot the proximity of the police and the great sleuth. Clinging to the tree with his left hand he unloosed a right uppercut that possessed the speed and force of a flying shell. It landed on the chin of the unknown, and as he lurched forward his hands lost their grip on the slippery limb. He fell against Blane, rolled from the limb, then, just as he slipped, his groping arms found the right leg of the Texan and clung to it with a tenacity that was remarkable.

The Wasp was jerked from the fork of the tree as the unknown attached himself. Mr. Blane's anger was multiplied a thousandfold by the happening. He tried manfully to disengage himself from the clutch

of the other but his efforts were unavailing. The unknown, half unconscious from the blow on the chin, had still in his numbed brain an idea concerning the distance he was from the ground, and no octopus ever clung to a victim more tightly than he clung to the adventurous person from Houston.

The Texan Wasp was in a desperate position. The weight of the other was too great to withstand. He glanced downward. There was a drop of fifteen feet and if he fell he would in all probability strike the top of the stone wall and roll into the grounds adjoining the Villa Kairouan.

Mr. Blane made a little prayer to the black cat mascot in his pocket and let go his grip on the limb. With the fellow still clinging to his leg he dropped with amazing speed. The two hit the sloping side of the wall and caromed from it into a mass of tropical shrubs.

Luckily for The Wasp the unknown had acted as a sort of cushion and the fact that he had acted in this capacity did not improve the condition brought about by the uppercut to the jaw. He was unconscious as the Texan, kneeling beside him, tore away the mask that half concealed his face.

Robert Henry Blane received a little surprise as he looked at the face. The stunned man was the fellow with the large, hawk-like nose that had started the rumpus in the smoking room of the *Timgad* during the passage from Marseilles!

For a moment The Wasp stared at him then he hurriedly untied the silk scarf that bound the white *gandoura* to the fellow's waist. The American had an idea that made his muscular fingers move quickly. Fate had surely brought to him the man who had spoiled his evening. He pulled the woolen garment aside, grasped something that was tied securely to the body of the fellow, tore it from its fastenings and held it up to the rays of the moon that had just emerged from the cloud wrack as if called to illuminate the beauty of the object!

The jeweled ikon of the czar sparkled in the soft light. A thousand precious stones set in burnished gold winked at the old moon. The glorious beauty of the piece made Robert Henry Blane forget for a moment the curious events of the evening. He stared at it like a person hypnotized. He moved it gently so that the rays of the moon fell upon the facets of the stones—glorious

stones that ate the moonbeams and magnified them a thousand times within their transparent depths.

The Texan Wasp roused himself from the little stupor brought by the sight of the ikon. The thief was recovering from the effects of the blow and the sudden drop from the tree. He attempted to sit up but Mr. Blane thrust him backward. The Texan was debating as to what he should do and the efforts of the other to get to his feet did not please him.

"Hold your mules!" ordered The Wasp. "Rest where you are for a moment."

The man on the ground glared at the American with wicked eyes. He recognized Blane as the person who had tossed him across the smoking room of the Marseilles boat and the memory of this incident, coupled with the fact that the ikon was in the hands of the man who held him, brought a queer frenzy upon him. He mouthed curses and bit savagely at the hands of The Wasp as he was thrust backward.

"Very well," murmured Mr. Blane. "If you won't stay quiet I will have to truss you up. And, sensible fellow that you are, you have a rope handy for the purpose."

And the rope was really there. The thief, perfect in his Arab get-up, had worn around the *haick*, or headdress, the long length of plaited camel hair that every true Arab winds some twenty times around his head covering to keep it securely in place. The Wasp quickly and dexterously tied the arms and legs of the fellow, the thief cursing vigorously during the operation.

"Now, now, no threats!" said the Texan. "Little boys like you should not threaten their betters."

The other cursed more copiously, then he surprised The Wasp by a statement. "You infernal crook," he cried, "this is the second time within a week that you have interfered! We cautioned you! We told you that dogs shouldn't bite dogs."

"Ah," murmured The Wasp, "I remember those words. Was it your delightful bunch that sent me the warning?"

The other continued to struggle and curse. "We told you that we'd get even!" he gasped. "We'll kill you——"

The blasé Texan shut off further talk by tearing a strip from the woolen gauze that made the *haick* and with it constructing a very effectual gag. They were too close to

the Villa Kairouan to allow the fellow free speech. From the other side of the wall came an occasional shouted inquiry and answer.

Once again the Texan considered the ikon. It was an extraordinary work of art. It thrilled him. In spite of the nearness of danger the charm of the thing brought new and wonderful feelings to him. Its beauty protested against the fate that would befall it if it fell into the hands of a "fence." It possessed a medieval charm that seemed to come out from it. It had been touched by the fingers of the great; it had gathered to itself a history that made one forget that it was only a thing of gold and precious stones.

Robert Henry Blane stood up and looked around. He remembered her words—the words of the girl with the voice of honey. He heard them again. The sweet night breezes brought them to his ears. She had said: "Why do you not go home?"

The open door of a small outhouse attracted The Wasp as the words of Betty Allerton swept through his brain. On this business he was going to do nothing to shake the belief in him that she had expressed. Without a visible effort he stooped, picked up the thief in his strong arms and carried him into the little shed that had evidently been used as a storehouse for gardening implements.

He placed the fellow on the ground, hitching him to a staple so that he could not roll around, then he cleared a space on the dirty floor, folded a piece of canvas, laid the canvas down upon the cleared space, and upon it he placed gently the wonderful jeweled ikon of the czar.

"I am going to leave you here," he said, addressing the gagged thief. "I suppose they'll find you in an hour or so. If there is one trait that annoys me it is impudence and I think you had the impertinence of a movie star to think you could get away with a thing like that. Why, big historic treasures of that kind have bells on them that ring when a thief grabs them! Do you understand? This thing has lived! It breathes! It is something sacred and wonderful that has taken to itself some peculiar sort of life. You're impertinent! Over in America we have a saying that runs, 'Don't bite off more than you can chew.' It's a wise motto. Remember it when you think of me. Good night."

The Texan Wasp stepped from the shed, shut the door, carefully adjusted the iron bolt that secured it and turned toward the rear of the house. Her belief in him had done something. There came to him a sudden belief that he might go home. Some day! Some day he might see again the little ranch on the Pecos and the lake in Maine that came to him in his dreams.

The Wasp turned the corner of the house and came to an abrupt halt. Something hard had been thrust against his ribs; a voice, harsh, cold, and absolutely devoid of pity, gave an order.

"Throw your hands up! Don't move now! So, keep steady!"

Robert Henry Blane did as he was ordered. The cold command tossed the dream of home into the outer darkness. The gun of No. 37 was pressed against his ribs; the eyes of the man hunter—who still wore the costume of a native juggler—were boring into him.

No. 37 stepped back, still keeping the Texan covered. He spoke softly as if communing with himself. "I thought it was you, but I wasn't sure," he murmured. "I mean when you bumped against me in the dance. I looked for you then but you had got into a corner, then when I heard the treasure had been swiped I was convinced that a smart gentleman from the United States had got busy. You've fooled me a few times but I've got you now. I'm sort of annoyed about you. That note you left for me in London made——"

The man hunter broke off abruptly. The cool gray eyes of Robert Henry Blane were upon his face. Blane's gaze was concentrated on the features of the great sleuth. Something had gone wrong. The detective seemed to be passing through some sudden attack. The effort to control himself showed upon the lipless line that made the mouth, upon the nose bred of battles, upon the chin that had thrown peace to the winds.

Then, with crashing suddenness, The Texan Wasp knew what was going to happen. He knew what the sleuth was trying to avoid. No. 37 was going to sneeze!

In the fraction of a second The Wasp noted the vain attempt made by the man hunter to control the sneeze. The thin costume of a juggler, coupled with the cold night air that swept up from the south had brought a chill to the sleuth. He had to sneeze!

The sudden convulsion produced by the sneeze threw the revolver of the detective downward, and as the barrel was deflected The Wasp sprang. The fates had been kind to him. Possibly the prayer of Betty Allerton was responsible for the unexpected streak of luck.

The recovery of the man hunter was almost instantaneous. The revolver was knocked from his hand by the spring of the muscular Texan, but in that first moment Blane told himself that the detective was no mean opponent. The loose costume covered steel muscles that were immediately brought into play to foil the attack.

The Wasp was surprised. He broke from a clinch with the idea of smashing a few terrific blows into the face of the sleuth, but the other foiled him. He covered with the speed of a dancing master, clinched again and nearly succeeded in getting a strangle hold on the American. Blane had the advantage in height and in years but he told himself as they struggled that the man who had spent his life in cornering criminals had learned quite a number of tricks during the years.

The Wasp resorted to strategy. A blow landed on his chin and he staggered back. The detective came after him, a little elated, a little open in his fighting as victory seemed so near.

That was the end. Robert Henry Blane straightened himself and drove a crashing straight right at the sleuth's chin. No. 37 was rushing in as it landed. His legs gave way and he dropped to his knees, rolled over and remained motionless on the gravel.

The Texan Wasp stooped, gripped the great detective by the collar of his coat and dragged him hurriedly to the little shed. He unbarred the door, pulled the sleuth inside, then, taking particular care not to disturb the ikon on its canvas bed, he placed No. 37 beside the trussed-up thief! This done he hurried out again, closed and bolted the door, then darted along the shadowy path that skirted the rear of the house. From the direction of the Villa Kairouan came sounds of voices that suggested a movement of searchers in the direction of the Moorish palace.

The Texan Wasp climbed up the gangplank of the oil tanker *Chihuahua* to find the ship in a state of excitement. A long, lean individual, absolutely unseamanlike in

clothes and bearing, greeted Robert Henry Blane with cordiality and explained the commotion.

"Say now," he drawled, "I just guessed I was a-goin' to lose that costoom of mine that I loaned you. The boss wrangler of this outfit has had a cable from the owners of this old sea cow tellin' him to hit the trail, an' the boys are just groomin' her up before she bucks the big waters. I just thought folk didn't get home from these society dances till sunup or worse so I guessed the costoom was lost for keeps."

"When are you pulling out?" asked The Wasp.

"Right now," answered the lean cowboy. "They're just puttin' a cinch on her before she starts buckin'! We're goin' home, boy. At least we're goin' in that direction. First we stop at a camp called Tangier——"

"Tangier?" questioned The Wasp. "You stop there?"

"So the boss wrangler tells me. Why?"

"I wouldn't mind going as far as Tangier," answered Robert Henry Blane. "I'm tired of this place."

"I can fix it," said the cowboy. "The boss of this circus is a Galveston lad an' he'll do anything for me. I'll go right now an' fix it up."

Robert Henry Blane sprang for the gangway. "I've got to telephone some one," he said. "I'll be back in two minutes."

"Don't miss us," cautioned the cowboy. "She's just a-rearin' to go."

The Texan Wasp rushed down the long

wharf. He had a wild desire to hear again the voice of Betty Allerton. In the watchman's shack he found a telephone and breathlessly called up the Villa Kairouan.

A servant answered and The Wasp asked for Miss Allerton. There was a long delay then the voice of the girl came softly to the ears of the adventurous Texan.

"I—I just wished to beg your pardon," he stammered. "I am a fool! I'm sorry! You—you were not troubled in anyway, were you? I mean through—through speaking to me."

"No, no, no!" came her soft denials. "They found the ikon. They found the thief and another man tied up in a little shed next door and the ikon was between them on the floor."

"I'm glad," said The Wasp. "I'm very glad. I—I am going away and I wished to beg your pardon and say good-by."

"Good-by," came the whispered farewell from afar.

"Good-by," said The Wasp.

He clung to the receiver hoping that she would speak again. And his hopes were realized. From far-off Mustapha Superieur came a honeyed whisper, so faint that in the hours that followed The Texan Wasp wondered if he had really heard the words or if his brain had just imagined them. They thrilled him greatly. They made him very happy. Betty Allerton on the heights had whispered: "Think of what I said about going home. Good-by! Good-by, Bob."

*Another adventure of The Texan Wasp in the next number.*



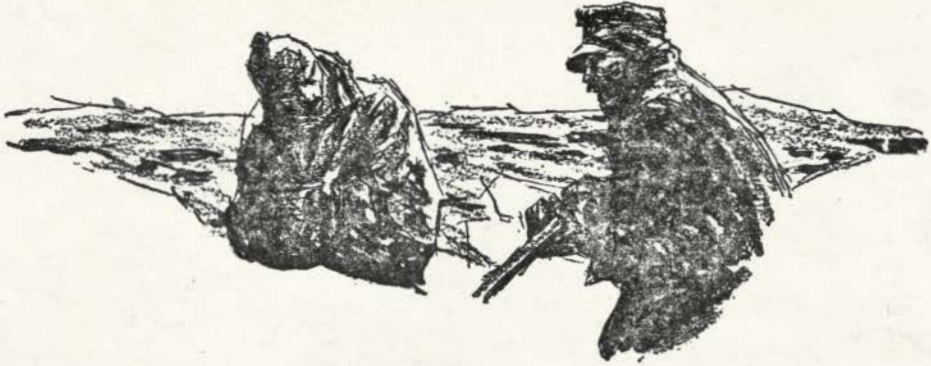
## A SENATOR'S FADS

**S**MITH W. BROOKHART, United State senator from Iowa, has two fads, the raising of Jersey Duroc hogs and the improvement of marksmanship in the United States army. He is also a profound student. Last fall he calculated that out of every dollar which the laborer spends for his food, the farmer who produced the food gets only thirty-seven cents, and that out of each dollar which the farmer spends for manufactured products the laborer who put his work into them receives only thirty-five cents.



## PRODUCE AND SELL!

**E**VERY successful man is a successful merchant. It is as much your business to learn to market your talent as to develop it. If the world does not pay you, you are offering it worthless work or you are a poor salesman; and in either case you are a failure until you correct the defect.



# The Haunted Gun

By Theodore Seixas Solomons

*Author of "Caverns of Night," "The Sacred Right of Bean Peddling," Etc.*

**A rifle that you can't keep, and you can't lose  
either, is something of a novelty, even in Alaska.**

**Y**OU better let 'em be," said the Old Road-house Man warningly.

I had taken a long walk that afternoon, crossing the haunches of the crouching lion that forms the headland of Cape Deceit and swinging down the long curving beach of the arctic shore. Over our pipes, in the cool of the August evening, I had been telling the Old Road-house Man of some curious finds I had made on a mound of sand—odd objects, some of them mighty useful to a man going mining, as I was, such as a perfectly good kettle and a butcher knife. But some were curious and strange.

I was about to ask him the meaning of his warning but I was afraid to spoil the story that was lighting up his keen old eyes. I knew the look. Said the Old Road-house Man:

I could tell you in a word just why it's good sense to leave them things alone. But you'll get the idee good and plenty when I tell you something about Cale Thumston, the same that has taken out the second-biggest pile of dust on Candle Creek, if the assay feller over there has got his figgers right. That ain't got anything to do with this immediate yarn, though.

Gold is where you find it, and they talk about Swede's luck. Both remarks are per-

tinent enough if you take 'em to mean—as probably they do—that placer-mining success, in the first stages at least, falls to the downright ignorant as a rule. That's Cale Thumston—with bells!

First time I saw him—which this story is about—I judged him to be the biggest, hairiest, growlingest, most mystified and generally maddest specimen I ever seen out of Missouri or Arkansaw—whichever he hailed from. Must 'a' been one or the other, I'll say.

The first year it was, up here—though I was ahead of him by long enough to run up this here shack of sod and driftwood I call my road house. It was late in the spring, the snow all gone from the tundra, and the belated birds that was flockin' to Candle had took to the Good Hope River after gettin' over the arctic divide from Nome, and follered the course of that river, which is more twisty than a snake with the belly ache, to the Kotzebue Sound here, and then come along the beach, which was still froze. From this point on, capes and bluffs head you right into the sea, so they took to the shore ice, for the ice lays in the sound—as you saw last spring, mebbe—till long toward July.

This feller pulls in from shore with three mangy-lookin' dogs—though they was fair enough, I should judge, when he started to

put 'em through from Nome. Their feet was sore, they was thin and ragged, his outfit was shot to pieces, and still *wet!* I got that right away when I come out to help him unlash. He was so mad he wouldn't speak, hardly, and as he was—and is—one of the most murderous-lookin' cusses you ever see outside of a State pen, why, I naturally held my gab and minded my business, which was givin' him shelter and grub—if he needed the grub.

He needed it, all right. What little he had left was soaked and as he was one of them old-timers that don't cotton to canned goods none, water was as mortal an enemy of the food he lugged as fire or poison.

"I wouldn't care a damn," he says, after supper—and it's one of the first remarks he makes—"if 'twa'n't for my gun."

And, would you believe me, right here he looks around my place—which is just like you see it now and by no means scarin' to man nor beast—with a queer, frightened look in his wide, dirty face, like he expected to see some weapon of mine jump off'n the pins on the wall and rare around endways at him.

"It was this way, pardner," he says, sorrowful. "Y'see, I been fightin' the thaw on the Good Hope—which the map calls it—for four days, up till last night. She's mean and treacherous as a cur dawg. You can't tell an overflow from a patch of open water, 'specially nights—and I mostly traveled nights for to get the good crust. A kind of scum makes you think the goin' is good when it ain't. I twisted and turned and took to the tundra till I most drug the hearts out of m' team; and at that, the last day I goes in, neck and crop, plumb to m' gizzard. If so be I hadn't got three true dawgs I might have been in that river for keeps m'se'f. But we scabbled out, some-ways—all but m' rifle."

I should judge his scare—whatever it was—was drowned this time in grief, for he just buries his big, tousled head in his hands; and by hookey if he doesn't actually wipe his eye with the sleeve of his faded yaller Mackinaw a minute later.

"I had her slipped under a lash rope. Just one, you understand," he explains to me, "'cause I'm a-reckonin' on seein' a bunch of ptarmigan any time, and I cal'lates to shoot the head off'n one, like I did on the divide back yonder. So I don't lash it tight and in the fracas in the water it jes'

naturally slips out, and when I peers into the pool which is clear of ice now—for the churned-up scum has floated down—b' Gawd I seen it, layin' there peacful—yes, and as safe from me as from any one of my dawgs. I have a reckless notion of tryin' to retrieve her, but the way the river was it's sure death and I goes on. I'm tellin' you about seeing that there shootin' iron—which I have used ever since I hit this north country—for a purpose. If you can figger it, pardner, I'll say you got *some* head.

"There's some driftwood on the beach when I hit the beach after a long hard portage, with me and my dawgs shiverin'. And we make a fire and dry out some. I know I'm near road houses now and I don't try to dry the load—just m'se'f and m' bed, and we eats a little cold co'n bread, which is soaked, o' course; and the dawgs still has dried fish. And then, befo' mornin' we puts in a hard mush along the shore, snow and sand in about equal patches, and the goin' hard but safe. I never seen this coast country before and I'd 'a' took to the ice but I seen it was full of pools and lakes and cracks, and being that I had fared so 'bad on the river I aimed to play safe from now till Candle. So I'm wendin' along the beach when suddenly I see somethin' that takes my eye up at the high edge of the sand, just under the froze tundra. It's a heap, you might say—sand, mostly, for I goes to take a peep at it. And on this heap, with a few other things I don't mind much about, is my *rifle!*"

"Hell you say," I remarks perlite'ly.

"Some scuffed, as if the feller that got it might of drug it across sharp gravel in takin' it out but I smooths that off right away. It's some rusty, too, though a few hours is all the time it's had to get that a way. But it's my Winchester .30-.30, all right, even to the dents where I clubbed a hard-skulled bear on the upper Tanana four years ago. Co'se I'm ready to drap with s'prise. Nothin' like that ever happened to me before. It sure did look like a case of a ha'nt bein' mixed up with the thing. But I ain't superstitious, none, spite of bein' brought up hearin' all kinds of tales of ha'nts. I just takes the good old shootin' iron, for pardner, I shorely has got need of one; and they tell me you can't buy much up. Candle way 'ceptin' grub and such like. I feels like kissin' her; but I'm plumb tuckered out, and the sun makin'

high. So, after going just a mile or two— and bein' fo'ced out onto the ice by cliffs—we stops, the dawgs and me, and calls it camp. I'm in my blankets and dead to the world in about four minutes.

"When the sun is real warm it wakes me, which I figger on, because I want to get up here to Cape Decoit to-day. I rub my eyes, look at the dogs, and the wet stuff spread around, and sudden I remembers my rifle. I had left it standing up against the rear stanchion of my sled and it ain't there. Nor fallen down. Nor nowheres. There's no tracks around, though on that wet glare ice tracks was hard to see. But the coast is Gawd-forsaken, I being the last musher through, I reckon. And besides, there's my old Colt's .44 and my watch and pocketbook and poke, none of them being on me, and nothing touched. I allow if 'twas robbery the varmint wouldn't of left them things.

"Pardner, I holds my head in m' hands for a spell, plumb beat. If it ain't a ha'nt, what be it? My gun's sure been jiggered some ways. I says to myself, 'If it's a thief, which I doubt, I'll shorely kill him!' for hosses and guns is sacred in frontier lands, and hosses being not much good in Alasky makes guns more val'able. Besides, as I been tellin' you, I got a call for a gun on Candle. My claim's been jumped that an old pardner of mine staked for me by power of attorney last fall in the stampede up there; and they tell me the ground had ought to be good. Now what am I a-goin' to do without no weapon?"

And this big fierce-lookin' Southern gent fits his jowl into his palm and sits starin' mournful at my teakettle. Once in a while, furtive, he eyes my gun on the wall, and I says to myself I'll keep a lookout on that wall in the morning. But it ain't necessary. The guy is honest enough. Ask any man in Candle.

While he's been spinning me this lugubrious tale I'm first hot and then cold, as you might say, having a theory about his findin' his gun again on the shore, but losing that theory pronto when he gets to the camp on the ice and the gun disappearin' again. I'm half disposed to regard my guest as some loosed, mebber, with his long fight through—glare ice and glare snow and b'ilin', treacherous pot holes in the rivers, and such unedifyin' experiences. Men have reached here half nutty, many's the time. But I got to say somethin'. He expects it,

for he's lookin' at me out of the tail of his eye between his fits of sadness.

"Well," says I, "puttin' one and one together, I guess you got a haunted gun, all right. But I wouldn't be downcast about it. A gun like that is sure to show up again. 'Tain't a bad-hearted gun, I'd say. Only fond of teasin' you. Mostlike before you get to Candle it'll tuck itself under your load lashin' and mebber if you don't pay no attention to it, don't kiss it or anything, it'll stay right with you till you need it on them jumpers."

He gives me a kind of quizzical look, like he don't know whether to laugh or fetch me one under the point of the jaw. Suddenly an idee comes into the place he calls his head.

"Any Eskimos round here?"

"Very few," says I. "And most of them gone down the coast sealin'. There's Kugruk Charley and his family, and a few kin folks. That's about all."

"Any chance to trade 'em out of a good gun?"

"'Fraid not," I returns, lettin' him down easy. "I think Charley or his boy may have a shotgun; nothin' more. They're pretty poor, these fellers. In a bunch of them there's generally one with a good rifle and he's the seal shooter for the rest. Their ambition is to own good huntin' equipment. But that's one ambition they don't usually get to satisfy. They're a communal people, so to speak. What one has all has."

I didn't figger on his gettin' that communal idee, and he didn't.

"I'd give 'em good money—gold dust or chechahco money, either."

"Can't sell if they ain't got," I reminds him and he slumps out dejected and spends some time turning his canvas and spreadin' out rice and apricots to dry. He aims to save what grub he can, that way, and then beat it to Candle.

I'm watchin' the ice all next mornin'. It's been pretty rotten for a week and now the water between shore and the floating ice—there's always a margin of water that time o' year—is rippin' with a little offshore breeze. I'm a newcomer, too, but I seen one thaw on Northern waters and I know how the ice rots into floes between the widenin' cracks and gets elbow room to float around before it goes completely out and away, especially when there's a little air a-movin' to help it drift. I tells Thumston he better



not be too particular to dry out every bean he's got. If he's aimin' to get to Candle by sled he'd better be moseyin' pronto.

"Oh, I ben out on it and it's all right," he says, indifferent. "The cracks is awkward but jes' so yer sled spans 'em you kin shoot her over. My sled's a long baby."

"There's some offshore wind," I suggests, not meanin' to be insistent. He's one of those fellers you half expects to turn on you and bawl your head off if you try too much undue influence.

"I'm goin' to-night," he says. "But it's because I want to get there quick. If there *should* happen to be a gun that some man might trade I want to beat any other feller to it. Then out I goes to number seven above Discovery and talk gentle to them jumpers."

Pardner, if I had that man's arms I don't believe I'd bother to get me a gun just to handle a few jumpers. But he seemed used to gun fightin' and I'm a peaceable road-house man, keepin' an unperforated skin largely by the art of mindin' my own business. I shrugs and goes about my chores.

When I bring in a load of willers—for the shore driftwood is still pretty well froze in—it's late afternoon and Thumston is getting his load together and preparin' to vamoose. He mutters about that frisky Winchester of his continuous. He borrows a few sled bolts from me and makes a repair job on his sled shoes, which are sprung free from the oak runners, and after supper he hitches his dogs and I goes on with him back a piece toward the cape, where we see a chance to get out to the ice direct from shore. He breaks through a little and if I hadn't put on my high seal water boots I'd have been soaked to my gun'ales. I leaves him squashin' in the mush, heavin' his sled on to the solid ice; and wavin' my hand to him perceeds back to my road house.

When I'm pretty near home—it's been only mebbe four or five hundred yards we went along the shore—I'm lookin' at the ice. I rubs my eyes and looks again. Might have been an optical delusion, it occurs to me at the start. But I stands and looks and as I look I'm getting sure. If the margin of clear water hasn't doubled in width since an hour or so before I'll lap it all up, and it's pizen salt! The breeze is quite fresh by now and the whole expanse of ice is surely movin' out!

There is Cale Thumston mushin' his dogs

leisurely along, doubling back in the direction of up the coast, which movement is bringing him opposite the road house.

I yells to him and he stops. He's two hundred yards out, mebbe, and not far from the ice edge of the water. I'm wondering if he don't see that the ice is movin' out with him. But as near as I can figger from his face he's just tryin' to make out what I'm hollerin' about.

I run to the road house and come plumb into Kugrukchuk—that's Kugruk Charley—and his big boy and his wife and his brother-in-law and his brother-in-law's baby girl. I hadn't seen Charley for a week. Must have been away somewheres.

"Him goo!" he says, meanin' "go," pointing to the white man and his team.

"I'll say him go!" I replied, vehement. "How far, you think?"

"Maybe Point Hope, maybe Sibeer"—that's Siberia. "Maybe no stop. Maybe wind change—come back."

"Those first maybes is kind o' serious," I mutters to myself. It means a man as good as lost out in the Arctic Ocean. Personally I had the idee the wind was bound to drift the big floe back—some time before it all melted. I know now that the chances was about even. I didn't know nothin' then except that we better do something for Cale Thumston if we could.

"What do?" I asked the Eskimo.

And he says, kind of interrogative, "Me go get him?"

"How?" I asks.

And he replied, "Kizhaak." That's the way they pronounce "kayak," their skin canoe.

"Sure!" I exclaims, remembering how they work in the fall and spring. "Where catch 'em?"

He spoke some words to his brother-in-law, Ak-chuk, and that slim guy beats it across the sand spit to the lagoon, where some days before one of them has taken down the canoe from the high cache and smeared taller in the seams, gettin' it ready for summer's use. Kugrukchuk is driving his five curs down to the water's edge and taking out what little gear he's got in his sled, aimin' to strip it naked, of course. And as he jerks out the canvas and stuff the first thing my eye lights on is a .30-.30 Winchester rifle.

I picks it up and examines it attentive. It's got scuffin's smoothed out recent! It's

got some big dents—where Cale clubbed his bear, I presumed. And as there ain't no rifle in Kugruk Charley's camp—I know that for sure—the evidence is conclusive, as the lawyer says, that that rifle is Cale Thumston's.

"Better leave that ashore," I makes the native understand. For while I'm not aimin' to aid or abet no man, white or Eskimo, in stealin', I'm figgerin' that the main thing at present is to keep the big Missourian from taking a trip to the north pole without no ticket. Mebbe I can arbitrate the matter without bloodshed later on.

Ak-chuk is back by now, skiddin' the kayak across the dry sand, and Kugruk Charley has unfastened the toggle that attaches his dogs to the sled, which is empty. I'm holdin' the rifle. But Charley takes it from my hand, sayin', "Maybe seal come." He thrusts up his hand, meaning to imitate the way the critters stick their heads out of ice holes for a good whiff of sea air. He don't want to miss a chance for fresh meat and blubber.

I pointed to Cale, who, by now, is staring with big eyes at the fast widening strip of glintin' water. He's wise to the fact that he's a-float and goin' and he's ready to stay right where he is and watch us.

"That man," says I, "lose gun. Somebody steal him gun. He speak, 'Me kill him man steal me gun!'"

"No kill me," says the native incredulously. "Maybe see 'em seal. Me kill seal."

There I was in a pickle, I'll say. I sure didn't know what to do. I couldn't argue with the cuss. First place, there *ain't* no arguin' with a native. I'd found that out already. And I don't believe he'd stay ashore, even if I asked him to, for these critters, they're so used to having one of their kin folk or friends get caught on movin' ice, it's customary to take 'em off if they don't happen to have both sled and kayak with 'em. It's more'n customary, I guess. It's religion—'bout all they have of religion, too. And as I couldn't get him to leave the gun or hide it, and as it was a case of all off with Cale if he didn't go fetch him, I decided that I better shut up and let nature take its course.

Kugrukchuk sticks the gun in the man-hole in the canoe and shoves the canoe out in the water, Ak-chuk sets the sled crosswise in front of his brother-in-law on the

canoe, and Charley takes his double-end paddle and starts off lickety-split for the slowly moving ice. He overtakes that ice field in about four minutes, turns sidewise, grabs the edge with his gripper—it's a stick with polar-bear claws lashed to its end—and heaves himself on to the floe. He pulls up the sled, then the canoe, sets the canoe on top of the sled, pushes the sled across a fifty-foot ice cake, and has to use the canoe again across a narrow strip of water before he's on the main floe where Cale is ready for him, with his dogs turned loose.

Me, I'm prayin' that no seal shows up, so that Kugrukchuk won't have no excuse to pull out the gun, which is concealed under the decked-over canoe, you understand, and no chance for Cale to get a squint at it.

The Missourian argues to get his dogs in first. I'm right glad to see that. He's as fond of them, I judge, as he is of this skylarkin' rifle of his. They're arguin' it out, with the handicap of mighty poor language between 'em. I see Cale pullin' out his wad from a hip pocket and I figger he's tellin' the native not to be in a hurry—he'll pay him good. Anyhow, they pile Cale's dogs on the sled in front of the native, who starts back across the small rift, and across the ice, and then into the shore water and so to the beach, where the dogs leap out and frisk around, and then whine for Cale, out there on the ice.

Back pikes the Eskimo, with his sled and canoe, and after a few transfers, which mebbe take half an hour, he's got Cale and his outfit ashore. The last trip of the three was a long one, for the wind is freshenin' all the time, and if we'd been an hour later it might have been an all-night job to get Cale alone—sayin' he'd come alone, which I doubt.

Then what do you suppose? That fool native starts, right there in Cale's presence, to load up his sled again, and of course the first thing he does is to jerk out the rifle from the kayak.

Cale eyes it hungrily and his hand goes back into his pocket for money.

"Kopsenik?" he asks. That's "How much?" which every one trading with Eskimos on this coast knows if he don't know another word of their pesky lingo. Then he gets a good slant at the gun, grabs it and looks it over with the glare of a hungry wolf.

"By the piper that played before Moses!"

he gasps. "My gun!" Like a flash he plants the gun underfoot and reaches for the native with his long, gaunt, powerful arms. He's got a strangle hold on Kugrukchuk before you could say Jack Robinson.

Now this Kugruk Charley has chored for me during the winter and he's a first-rate Siwash whose word is as good as his bond. I'm hatin' to find him a thief; but I don't know this Missourian, or whatever he is; and his tale's been lurid, as you might say; and for the time bein' I'm all for peace and the Eskimo.

I happen to have a little blue automatic in my jeans and I'm just goin' to pull it on my ex-guest when, with a groan, he lets the native go.

"He just brung us off the ice—me and my dawgs," he wails, "and I can't kill him. Not, anyhow, without payin' his family handsome," he amends, a gleam of hope in his fierce eyes. With that he grabs up the gun again and looks it over more careful. "It's the one I found on the sand," he mutters, squintin' at me, "and—and—and *my* gun, sure."

He turns to the Eskimo, who is standin' quiet—they're always quiet. You couldn't excite a Eskimo not if you was to soak him in kerosene and touch a match to his big toes! But his eye is beyond Cale to his brother-in-law, whose bony knuckles is set taut around the handle of a long skinning knife that's in a sheath at his belt.

"Wait," says I to Cale, who is pulling at this old pocketbook of his, still figgerin', I suppose, on payin' the little brown, fat dame who he is expectin' to make a widder of. I'm so sure this Eskimo is honest I says, "Ask him where he got the gun. Maybe it's a case of two guns—or three, or something." I'm kind of bewiided myself, you understand.

"Where catch 'em?" asked Cale, holdin' the gun and frowning hard and mean at Kugrukchuk.

The native points down the coast—where Cale has come from the day before, and says: "You sleep ice. I come, take 'em gun!"

*Can you beat it? Im-agine it!* Even for a Siwash I figger he's the darnedest fool you could find in the whole North country, Call Cale crazy from ice glare if you like. But this native has got him lashed to the mast for pure, unadulterated loony.

"What for you steal my gun, you——"

And Cale spits forth the longest, reekin'est string of razor-edged cuss words that I ever heard come from a human throat. But the native's store of profanity in our lingo is limited to a few harmless indecencies, he not having known white men long enough to be educated proper; and he lets Cale finish without turnin' a hair. Then he says, answering the question:

"This not your gun."

"Hell it ain't," yells back Thumston hotly. But, right off, he seems to remember certain queer things about that rifle and he checks himself and inquires, cautious, "You gun?" He tapped the barrel of it canily. "You say you gun?"

The native shook his head, his eyes far. "Nobody gun," he says quietly.

Cale Thumston handed the haunted thing to me. "You take it, Road-house Man, till we get this yere thing set to rights." He wiped his forehead. "The Siwash saved our lives, I reckon. Mebbe I had ought to go slow." His eyes was filled with the look of voodoo magic. You could see that. And he seemed to feel that the ornery thing had perhaps got the Eskimo, too, and made him unaccountable, you might say. I broke the silence.

"See here, Mr. Thumston," I says to him, kind of placating, "le'me handle this bird. I know him pretty well. He's square as a die." And I begun asking Kugrukchuk questions, some in his language, what little of it I knew, and mixin' it, of course, with American. But I couldn't get much more out of him. They give you a direct answer, best they can, these natives. And you got to let it go at that. The gun didn't belong to Cale Thumston—or any white man. He was positive of that. Also it didn't belong to him—or any other native. And—*it didn't belong to any man!* It must of been an air gun—accordin' to him: just wove out of the blue and lookin' for all the world like somethin' it wasn't!

"What you cal'late to do with it, pardner?" asked Cale of the Eskimo, being so disturbed he talked to him that way. I put the question to the man in the right kind of lingo and he looks like he'd been waitin' for that and says, lookin' down the coast and then pointin' to his family, standin' like wooden injuns near him, "Me go hunt, fish, Cape Espenberg. Me take gun, put 'em back. You come. Me show!"

"I don't get him, I'll allow," I told Cale

after I saw he understood this speech. "But one thing you can bet on—if I'm wrong you can use my head for a football. The Siwash is all right."

"I'll go," says Thumston, kind of surly. "But get this, Road-house Man. It's only because the gun's sure ha'nted, after seven years of actin' straight like any other gun. It t'wa'n't for that I'd go to the mat with this feller over the prop'sition. I'd have the gun or he'd have to kill me. I can't kill him 'cause he saved our lives. Let's get goin' and see that ha'nt business through."

Have you seen men like Cale Thumston? Ignorant, superstitious, but too big and hairy to let a ghost get the best of 'em? For my part I didn't want this newcomer at Candle to spread around a report that I was lettin' a thief work for me. And besides, if Charley had a right to the rifle I wanted him to have it, for he sure needed one. Yet curiosity alone would have made me follow both men clear to the hot place. I took a handlebar of Cale's sled, after throwing on my sleepin' bag; and the gang of us follers Kugruk Charley's dogs over the cape—just about the route you took to-day, young feller.

It was a long mush and a silent one. There wasn't any use talkin', even if the sand and mud, and takin' to the tundra for a spell, and then out on stranded cakes of ice for better goin' hadn't made sociability hard to keep up. The midnight sun had made its quick dip into the arctic and was risin' again for another day when Kugrukchuk, leaving the ice, which had been good goin' for a spell, takes to landward and grits along the wet sand for mebber a hundred or two yards.

"There's the old camp—pots and things," says Cale to me in a whisper. "Is he headin' for that, do you suppose?"

"That's just what I do suppose," I comes back. For I had been along the coast myself many times and a vague idea of the whole thing had hit me when Cale first blurted out his story. But not bein' sure, I had kept my tongue.

The native halted some twenty yards away from the mound, and gatherin' his family walked solemn and sober toward it, beckoning us to foller him. He halts a few feet away from the little heap on which is half exposed, half buried by drift sand, the pots Cale had spoke of, and wooden

things—an old, long pipe of Russian-trader days, a broken spear, one or two whale-bone runners, old tools of bone and iron and flint, a few thongs, and something like a child's mukluk—some decayed, but the beads all there, sewed on tight with dry sinew.

"Me papa stop," said Kugrukchuk simply. He held out the gun to us. "*This, him gun!*"

He withdrew a few yards and calmlike sits down on the sand, takes a file out of his pocket and proceeds to file in nicks and scratches on the stock.

"What's the idee?" asks Cale, his mouth makin' funny shapes. He only half gets it.

"It's his father's grave," I told him.

"I've seen Eskimo graves," he answered me, kind of skeptical. "Passed 'em on the tundra coming over—several places. They're allus up on high posts."

"That's where the natives can get the posts—spruce from the interior; cottonwood, sometimes; even crooked willow. They can't bury bodies, for the earth is frozen, and they don't sabe thawin' and ain't got no shovels. But here on the coast there ain't no poles to be had, and they don't need 'em anyhow, because the sea-shore sand is thawed and they can bury their dead. On caches or in the ground, it's all the same, though, about the things the man owned—things that last a long while. They always put them with the dead."

"I get you, pardner," says Cale, scratching his head, sheepish. "You think the gun ain't mine?"

"A .30-.30 Winchester is just like another one, ain't it? Any gun gets dented. Mebbe the old chief clubbed bears, too—or walrus!"

"How you catch 'em?" asked Cale of the native, busy with his file.

Kugrukchuk explained to me and I told Thumston. "He had been down with the rest of the Cape Deceit natives at Espenberg, saw some signs of walrus and was coming home to get his family. He saw your tracks, followed them to the grave and missed the rifle. He dogged you out over the ice, found you asleep, didn't want to disturb your deep slumbers—they're as per-lite as a dog in a meat shop—so he took the gun without explainin' to you. He says he was comin' down to my place to-day to let you know what he had done—and why—when he saw you out on the ice.

headed for the open polar sea. I told you he was on the square."

Cale had to have some kind of growlin' word about it. Them big, forceful men die hard.

"But what's he doin' with the file?" he asks.

"Didn't you say you smoothed out the scratches where—as you thought—the rocks in the river had dented the gun when it was taken out—or took itself out!"

"I did, yes."

"Well, he remembers every nick and dent and scratch in his old father's gun. He loves 'em all and he's puttin' 'em all back again."

Cale strides up to the busy, quiet Eskimo and reaches down and grabs him by the paw.

"Shake, old hoss," he says. "I had a dad once m'se'f. And, by the way—*Kopsenik?* I'll give you twice what she's worth, you bein' a good scout and not likin' to spile the old man's grave."

"No sell," replies the native, closing his eyes as he shakes his head.

"And him with nothin' but a shotgun; and wantin' to put a darned good rifle—if I know one—back on that there heap of sand!"

Cale takes off his cap reverentlike. "I guess I got to fight them jumpers with my bare hands," he says, and I tells him he's able.

We turns to go back but the Eskimo, finishing his job by now, lays the gun carefully on the grave and says, "You come."

"What for?" I asks. But Cale, being free from "haunts" is so tickled he's willing to try anything.

"If that guy says come, it's come, pardner," he exclaims, with his old fierceness.

*Look for more stories by Mr. Solomons in future issues.*

And I shrugs my shoulders and says, "Let her flicker."

Pretty soon the native hits the tundra on a cut-off to the river. The goin' is fine for there's lakes and sloughs which us white men didn't know about. We're at the Good Hope in not more than an hour; and Charley heads right for the place where Cale Thumston nearly got his! The shore ice and what little snow is left on the bank is all churned up; and any one could see there'd been some kind of an accident. But, would you believe it, that native, follering Cale down the river, must of peered into the water and seen the rifle. For now, without a word, he takes his long walrus spear, and thrustin' it into the water, hooks the trigger guard of the rifle with the barb of his spearhead and fetches the thing out and hands it over to its gasping owner, as good as ever.

I just want to add that Cale Thumston got his claim without no bloodshed; and he took out close to forty-three thousand dollars before snow flew. On the first boat he sends to the States for flowers—some kind of a jigamaree like a wreath. They was faded some, though brought up on ice and moss and the like. But he takes a boat—himself—and goes down the coast and puts 'em on the sandy mound where slept Kugruk Charley's "papa." I guess, if he wasn't too ossified, the old chief must of turned in his grave twice.

"But I saw no rifle on that grave. I suppose it's the same grave?" I questioned.

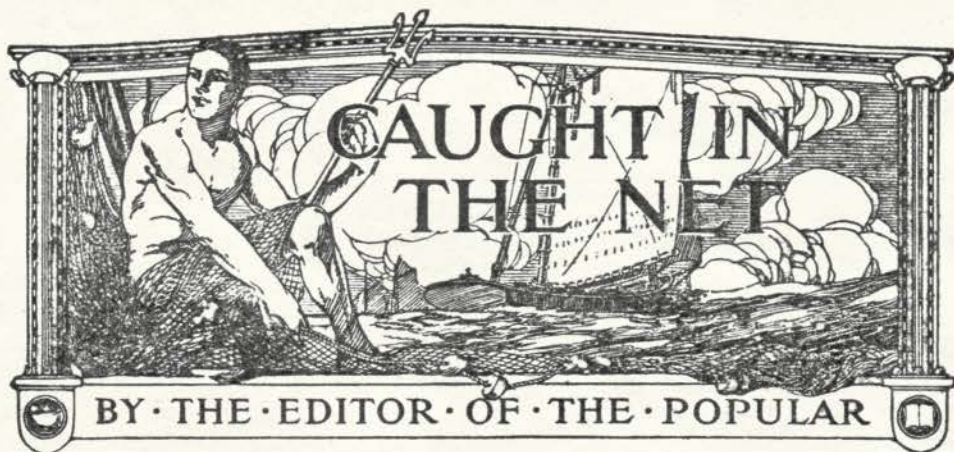
"That was years ago," replied the Old Road-house Man sadly. "The white men know those graves by the sea. There's many of them. But you won't find any Winchester rifles on them now!"



## SEEING THROUGH THE DISGUISE

**P**RESIDENT HARDING was talking to Senator Frelinghuysen of New Jersey about the insincerities of politics.

"The pretender or the liar in politics," he said, "is always found out. All you've got to do is to associate with him long enough to let him show his true self. And it doesn't take very long. I once asked a little girl if she knew what a gentleman was. 'Yes, sir,' she said without the slightest hesitation; 'a gentleman is a man you don't know very well.' Being acquainted with her father, I saw the point. It's the same way with the pretender in politics. He defeats himself soon enough."



## GET ATTENTION AT ANY COST

**A**MONG the commandments of success there is one that is given first place by many orders of men, and some of them go to extreme lengths to achieve it, especially those in the advertising and theatrical worlds.

"Get attention at any cost."

But we wonder if it is always profitable? Publicity is a mighty power and is a most necessary element in a crowded, fiercely competitive arena, but just because it is essential and lends itself to a thousand uses it suffers from a multitude of abuses.

The billboard is a familiar example of misdirected proclamation on the part of the advertiser. True, the best style in present-day billboards is highly artistic when compared with the crude smears of a generation ago, but the general public is no longer enthusiastic about these excrescences upon the landscape. A recent newspaper quiz which asked what was the worst public nuisance brought an unlooked-for number of complaints against the billboard.

"Besides being an ugly intrusion on the scene, it is an anachronism," said one critic. "To-day, with our thousands of newspapers and magazines and multiplied means of quick intercommunication the billboard has been long superseded as a medium for appeal to the public."

There are advertising men who will argue that the national habit of motoring has vastly increased the potentialities of the billboard, and that may be so, but the movement in self-respecting towns to curb and control such advertising is a sign that there is a widespread feeling that natural scenery is meant to be something besides a background for commercial exploitation.

Of course, the question of electrically illuminated signs, in the main confined to the cities, is an altogether different one, and the effect on the mind of these lively lights produces an exhilaration quite apart from the advertiser's intent.

Lately the advertiser has taken to the air in smoke writing by means of the airplane. New and startling as this is, and tempting to the copy-writer imagination, it is already meeting with rebuff at the hands of the public, again indicating that attention must not be obtained at any cost. Apropos of airplane smoke writing, a bill was brought into the English House of Lords to regulate unsightly methods of advertising, and it was especially aimed at this commercial invasion of the sky. The bill passed, 80 to 32.

Speaking of the heights of heaven as an advertising background reminds the writer of the depths of the sea in a similar rôle. Looking through a glass-bottomed boat at tropic submarine life our eye caught this sign in waterproof script:

"FOR FINE FISH DINNERS GO TO ZEEZ."

## THE NEEDLE OF DIOGENES

**I**F old Diogenes going his hopeless rounds with a lantern in search of an honest man could only have seen a few centuries into the future he might have spared himself his pains and left the quest of veracity to his modern successors who track the elusive figment of veracity to its lair with no such clumsy device as a smoky lantern, but rather with a convenient pocket syringe and a glittering needle.

At least, that is what some scientist whose name doesn't matter says he can do. Scopolamin, the drug of the erstwhile-sensational "twilight sleep," is the thing that does the trick Diogenes spent a lifetime attempting in vain. A few drops of scopolamin deftly injected under the epidermis and the most recalcitrant prevaricator is at the mercy of the pitiless truth seeker. At last we are in a position to learn on indubitable testimony whether Peary really was the first to reach the pole. The golden hour of justification has struck for Doctor Cook—if he cares to bare his arm to the needle and his past to the probing of the scopolamin investigator. And let the nature fakers beware!

The possibilities are magnificent. In a short time everybody will have his vest-pocket scopolamin set, or possibly the syringe and vial will be attached by a strap to the wrist like a watch. Chased and embossed sets, of precious metal, jeweled, will be made up for women, to be worn lavallière fashion by a ribbon or a chain about the neck. And everybody will know the truth about everything.

You will walk confidently into a clothing emporium and select your winter overcoat.

"You guarantee this all wool of virgin yarn?" you will query the salesman.

"We do," the salesman will reply unblushingly.

"Very well," you will make answer, slipping out the syringe. "We shall see. Kindly roll up your sleeve."

And you will take or leave the coat accordingly.

Similarly with the butcher who tries to sell you something that looks like calf's liver but is considerably more venerable. And with the engaging young business person who offers you gorgeously engraved sheets of finest bank-note vellum representing, so he says, gilt-edged security and fabulous wealth. And at last, if you are skillful with the needle, you may be able to get fresh eggs for breakfast.

There will be weeping and wailing in the ranks of politics. And in a short time nobody will ask the nauseous question, "Who won the war?" for we are on the eve, it would appear, of finding out.

All of which is encouraging, not to say exciting. But every silver cloud has its sable lining. You may be enthusiastic about scopolamin to-day. Wait!

There will come a black and awesome night. As the clock strikes three in the distant tower you will creep up the steps with your shoes in your hand, tiptoe across the veranda, fit your key in the lock with painstaking care, enter your front hall with bated breath, and—

There will come a thunderous *click* and the lights in the chandelier will flash. You will see her there, waiting—your wife! In her hand will be poised a gleaming cylinder tipped with a slender stiletto. And on her lips will be formed an awful question.

"John," you will hear her say, "where have you been?"

And you will know there is no escape.

## THE PRINCE WHO WON'T STAY PUT

**E**NGLAND, we are told, is having trouble with the Prince of Wales. Not the sort of trouble that so often in the past has arisen between the heir to the British throne and the wise men of the empire; the prince's name has been whispered in connection with no scandal; Parliament has not had to pay his debts, nor has he departed from the attitude of strict neutrality in matters of party politics that is considered good form for the members of British royalty. Yet some of his future subjects are dissatisfied with him, and on two counts: first, his fond-

ness for risking his neck in the hunting field and on the race course; second, his unwillingness to risk his freedom at the altar of matrimony. The prince who on a steeplechaser's back sails over or into the widest water jump with equal nonchalance "refuses" the—to a royal prince, at least—easily leaped barrier that lies between lonely bachelorhood and married bliss. The newspapers and no doubt the ladies of the royal family have selected many a charming mate for him, but the world's most photographed young man continues to be photographed alone.

It is natural that the English people should want to see their future king married and the father of princes ready to carry on the royal line; yet despite the growlers many an English bachelor—and perhaps here and there an unregenerate married man—must look with lenient eyes on his underanxiety to exchange the pleasures of a single man with plenty of money for the responsibilities of wedlock. As for his chance-taking on horseback—well, in a country where sport is almost a religion a penchant for leaping five-barred gates will not be held against him as too serious a fault. With the exception of getting married the Prince of Wales has done all that has been asked of him, and done it well. In France he got as close to the actual fighting as he was allowed to get; since the war he has traveled pretty well all over the globe and has made many friends for England both within and without the British Empire; and at home he has performed his part creditably in the speech-making and public appearances that are the chief duties of the heir to the crown.

In addition to which he displays a nice taste in clothes and is the possessor of a smile that would be worth a fortune to any movie star. What more could be asked of a future king?

## YELLOW MEN AND BOOKS

**A**SSIDUOUSLY copying the ways of the Western World, Japan, among her other successful imitations, is producing books as we do, and they are being turned out by the ton. Many of the works are in the English language. Also, the Japanese are cultivating the magazine habit, and their railroad stations and other public places exhibit news stands of modern make-up and all the display devices to which we are accustomed.

Every one in Japan who makes any pretense to position has plenty of books, and he reads them. One of the chief reasons that the Japanese have made such astonishing progress in the understanding of the European and American mind and character is their passion for books. As a diplomat observed: "They have learned Europe in sixty years, but it will take us six hundred to know them half so well!"

Some of the strangest bookshops imaginable are to be seen in the larger cities of Japan. These places are devoted exclusively to English and American catalogues—catalogues of clothing, of plumbing fixtures, of furniture, of machinery, in fact of all kinds of merchandise. And such bookshops are patronized by Japanese artisans, who, consulting these catalogues, know what to charge the rich foreigner for any piece of work he wants done, which is generally from three to five times the native price. Usually the catalogue hunter cannot read English, but the shopkeeper translates for a modest fee. Shrewd business!

Going from Japan to China you soon discover the difference in these things. For one thing, the Chinese care nothing for magazines, and you never come across an old bookshop in the Flowery Kingdom. Indeed, the Chinese revere old books, just as they revere anything that bears the honorable stamp of age. If one desires to purchase a secondhand book in China it has to be done privately and with certain ceremony.

Regular booksellers in China are easily found, however, when once you know that a shoemaker, a baker, any sort of a merchant, may have books in his stock for sale. Books printed and bound in the Chinese manner are worth adding to your library. Properly speaking, the book is not bound. The cover is in reality a binding case fastened by a contrivance of bone pin and eye socket. The book itself is printed in parts. Each page is a double one, cut at top and bottom, and printed on



one side only. By this arrangement the happy reader turns over two pages at once, and of course reads from the back of the book forward, always beginning at the bottom of the page.

## THE WHY OF FOOTBALL'S POPULARITY

**Y**OU'VE met the man who wonders at football's tremendous popularity. Usually he never has seen a big college game, or he wouldn't wonder. Why, he wants to know, do great crowds of more or less sane people go to much trouble and considerable expense to obtain tickets that give them the doubtful privilege of sitting in a concrete stadium on a cold autumn afternoon and watch eleven earnest young men struggle violently to carry an inflated leather object of most inconvenient shape across a chalk line guarded by eleven equally earnest and violent opponents? Is this, he demands, a proper occupation for grown-up men and women?

The answer of thousands of football fans is, "Yes!"

There are many good reasons for football's great and growing popularity. One is college loyalty—but many of the people in the crowds that jam the stadiums have no college affiliation. Other good reasons are that big football games are colorful and inspiring spectacles and that at them the spirit of youth always is present and busy. But the real reason for football's grip on the American public lies in the game itself.

More than any other game, American football is a game of attack. Nine tenths of the plays are attacking plays. As in football's big brother, war, attack often is the best defense. While your team has possession of the ball your opponents cannot score. But the rules say that the team holding the ball must advance it ten yards on four plays or surrender it—and with it the chance of scoring. Therefore the team in possession of the ball always must attack. Meanwhile the opposing team, although called the defense, really are attackers too, for in trying to prevent their opponents from advancing the required ten yards they are on each play attacking with the purpose of obtaining the ball and with it a chance to score. Even the punt, usually considered a defensive play, often is an attack, for the side that kicks usually expects to gain ground as the price of surrendering the ball and always hopes that their opponents will boggle the difficult business of catching the twisting punt and that one of the "breaks" upon which victory or defeat so often depends, will result.

This, we think, is the underlying reason for football's popularity. In war, business and sport the American spirit is the attacking spirit, and football is a game of attack.



## POPULAR TOPICS

**T**IMES are hard for the farmer. Last year his prewar dollar was worth only sixty-nine cents in purchasing power. Department of agriculture statistics show that for over six thousand farms of more than average size, representing an average investment of \$16,400 in capital and labor, the average return in 1922 was only \$917—which had to pay interest on mortgages, interest on investment, and living expenses. This discouraging condition is causing many farmers to move to towns and cities to engage in other work. Last year our farm population decreased 1.5 per cent despite the fact that there were more than three times as many births on farms as there were deaths. More than a million more people moved from the country to the city than moved from the city to the country. There were serious losses in farm population in every group of farming States.



**T**HE government realizes that this movement away from the soil is economically harmful but the department of agriculture is encouraged by the fact that business men of the cities are beginning to realize that in the long run their prosperity

depends upon the prosperity of the farmer. Industrial leaders as well as political leaders hope and expect that the next Congress will enact legislation that will make it possible for the farmer to reap a fair profit on his investment and his labor.



**T**HE American farmer, by the way, is considered the most efficient man of his class in the world. By the adoption of scientific farming methods and the use of labor-saving machinery he has been able to sell his wheat in competition with the peasant farmers of other nations and still maintain his higher standard of living. In China it keeps seven men busy on the farm to support ten in the city; in the United States only three.



**A**NOTHER new automobile soon will be manufactured in the United States. Monsieur André Citroën, who is called "the Henry Ford of France" is building a plant here. There will be a temptation for punsters to call the little Citroën the "Lemon" or the "Quince," but they are warned to look up the performance of the flivver's French cousin in crossing the Sahara Desert before they yield to it.



**I**N 1920 there were five thousand fewer blind people in the United States than there were in 1910. Much of the credit for this improvement is due the National Committee for the Prevention of Blindness which is directing this movement for the conservation of eyesight.



**A**N English woman inventor claims that she can perform the highly desirable miracle of making the hair to grow on heads from which it has departed. She uses an electrical apparatus that gives a blue light so powerful that it penetrates the three skins under which the hair grows and attacks the uric acid crystals which are blamed for causing baldness.



**A**NOTHER English invention is an electric chair which causes the unfortunate who is seated in it to lose weight at the rate of six pounds an hour. A sleepy patient and a careless operator might result in some stout person being shrunk without trace.



**W**INNEBAGO COUNTY has won the proud distinction of being the champion tree-planting county of the nation. Last April 17,500 trees were planted in this Illinois county.



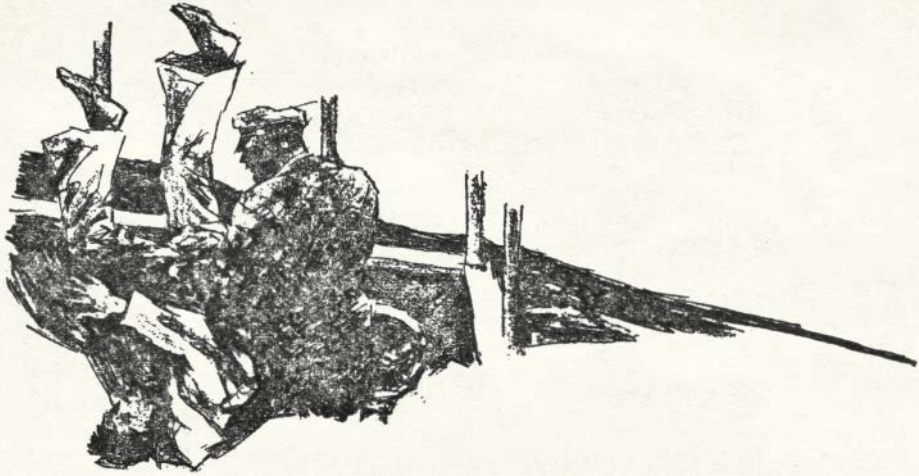
**E**VERY so often the doctors discover a new disease. Cigarette rash is the latest. It is a skin disorder which came to the attention of the medicos of Havana recently. When the patient gave up smoking the rash disappeared; when he started again the rash followed suit. Whether the patient decided that life with the rash and cigarettes was preferable to life without either we don't know.



**A**PPARENTLY it is never too early or too late to start a career as a painter. One of the pictures exhibited at the English Royal Academy show this year is the first venture in oil painting of Mrs. S. A. Barrett, a woman seventy-one years old. In the Paris Salon hang two miniatures by Miss Marsue Burrows, an American girl of fifteen. She is the youngest exhibitor ever known at the Salon.



**O**F course prohibition in the United States has had nothing to do with the two-thousand-per-cent increase in shipments of Scotch and Irish whiskys to Mexico and the West Indian islands. Of course not!



# Four Bells

By Ralph D. Paine

Author of "Anchors Aweigh," "First Down, Kentucky!" Etc.

## WHAT HAPPENED IN PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

The blood of all his Devon ancestors urged Dick Cary to this hairbrained venture with old Ramon Bazán. What might have seemed a fantastic fabric of fevered imagination back on the quiet New Hampshire farm whence the big seaman hailed took on the substance of reality here in ancient Cartagena where the storied waves of the Spanish Main lapped the crumbling walls that his forebears had stormed on even wilder undertakings. Moreover, how else was he to win back to freedom? Here in the seclusion of Bazán's home he was an honored guest and safe. But once across its threshold he would become *El Tigre Amarillo Grande* again, the great Yellow Tiger who ripped iron bars from stone-bound casements, slew gangs of assailants single-handed, and defied the walls of prisons that had defied the centuries. Every man's hand would be set against him. He was an outlaw, marked and branded, with a price on his head. That he had done what he had done for good and sufficient reason Cartagena did not know. Fajardo and one other knew. The five bravos who set upon him that night were Fajardo's hired men. But four of them were dead. The fifth—he whose knife had found the ribs of the *Tarragona's* second officer—had kept his secret well. And Fajardo had disappeared. Decidedly Cartagena was far from knowing the truth. And meanwhile Cartagena would not sleep soundly while the Yellow Tiger was at large. Safety for Dick Cary was bounded by the four walls of Bazán's house. He fretted at the enforced inactivity. Bazán counseled patience. His plans were maturing fast. The decrepit *Valkyrie* was rounding into fair condition. The crew was secured. But a few more days and the haunted bell of the ancestral treasure galleon that swung in Bazán's patio would be sounding the hours again on the deck of the *Valkyrie*, and Dick Cary would be walking the bridge, free, safe, and master on his own ship, with Cartagena far behind, and the fabulous treasure of Cocos Island at the end of the voyage. It sounded very alluring to Cary. But how could he help fretting, with Teresa Fernandez gone? She would grieve. She might even think him dead, this stanch little daughter of ancient Spain, this trim little stewardess with the saucy tongue and the big heart, the niece of old Bazán, whom he loved.

## (A Five-Part Story—Part III.)

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### THE MASTER TAKES COMMAND.

IT was the opinion of Señor Bazán that the bell of the galleon *Neustra Señora del Rosario* should be mounted on the deck of his own vessel. The ancient bell had once sounded the watches from the forecastle head of another treasure ship in these same seas. Also, it possessed a

legendary virtue which was not to be overlooked, that of ringing its ghostly warning when fatal disaster impended. From what he could learn of the rusty relic of a tramp steamer Richard Cary felt inclined to endorse the old man's whimsy. It would be handy to know in advance when the *Valkyrie* intended plunging to the bottom of the Caribbean or the Pacific.

"I am too wise to believe all kinds of

nonsense, Ricardo, like the ignorant people of Cartagena," said Papa Ramon, "but this bell of the galleon—how can I doubt it? And there is no bell on the *Valkyrie* so I save some good dollars. These Colombian thieves stole the brass fittings while my steamer was empty and anchored during the war. And the galleon bell had the blessing of the Holy Church and the favor of Our Lady of Rosario so we make no mistake in carrying it on our voyage."

Richard Cary reflected quite logically that it was no more fantastical than pinning one's faith and fortune to a pirate's chart of Cocos Island. The whole thing might be unreal but it had the texture of consistency. Like a satisfactory fairy tale, the improbable and the absurd were made entirely plausible. The twentieth century had very little to do with it.

And so the chief engineer of the *Valkyrie* sent two of his native helpers with a mule cart. They unbolted the heavy bronze bell from the weather-darkened frame of Spanish oak. It clanged as they bore it out of the patio, a mellow note that throbbed and lingered like a phantom voice. A carpenter was instructed to set up another frame on the roof of the forward deck house.

The residence of Señor Bazán was to remain closed during his absence. This he had announced to the black woman in the kitchen and to the faithful Indian lad. It was uncertain when their master would return. Two months' wages in advance he was generous enough to pay them, although it made him wince, and they could enjoy a vacation among their own people. They would be notified when to reopen the house. The señor who lived next door had consented to receive the green parrot and the little brown monkey. The key also would be left with him. His energy phenomenally sufficient for his needs, Ramon Bazán made the final arrangements for departure. Richard Cary admired the tenacious sagacity with which one obstacle after another was ridden over. He himself felt more and more like a big, useless lump of a man, to have to sit and look on. Give him a ship under his feet and he would be quit of this foolish trance.

He wondered how the old man proposed to set him aboard the *Valkyrie* and hide him there. It was a nut to crack. He forbore to ask too many questions. They annoyed Papa Ramon. He was his own strate-

gist. An uncannily strong finish he was making of it. The adventure was like a magic draft of the elixir of youth. It enabled him to hold decrepitude at arm's length, for a little while to grin in the face of the old devil of death that had so often jumped out at him from the dark.

The journey from the house to the quay was boldly and simply contrived. At eleven o'clock at night the muchacho waited in the alley with a one-horse carriage. The top had been raised. Richard Cary was directed to double himself on the rear seat. He slid down as far as possible with his knees almost up to his chin. Around and over him were piled the personal luggage, rolls of blankets, canvas bags filled with clothing, folded hammocks, two or three valises, until they filled the back of the carriage to the roof.

Señor Bazán conspicuously hunched himself in front with the driver. This was the factor of safety. The old man was the passport through the streets of Cartagena where he was as well known as the Church of San Pedro Clavér and almost as much of an antiquity. Cary perceived this. Alone he had been hemmed in and helpless. Before the carriage rolled out of the alley Ramon Bazán turned to say very softly:

"Hold out your hand, Ricardo. Here is a pistol I forgot to give you. If anything trips our plans I don't want you to be caught like a rat. Never mind me. You just shoot your way out if you can. Run for La Popa. The lame Palacio may help you to flee to the coast or the mountains. I sent him money yesterday as a gift from you. It was your wish."

"Bless your heart, that would leave you a fine chance to square yourself," gratefully replied Cary. "If I have to leg it I'll put you in my pocket. We must see this thing through together. Cast off, muchacho, and full speed ahead."

The carriage rattled through the silent, galleried streets and provoked no curiosity until it approached a gateway in the city wall. A police officer in a white uniform was strolling out of a wine shop. In the light from the windows the carriage attracted his attention. It was moving too rapidly, the horse at a gallop. Even a young Indian driver had nerves. They were feeling the strain. He was anxious to get through that gateway. It had been much less trying to haul *El Tigre Amarillo* into

Cartagena under a load of wood than to haul him out again in a hired carriage.

The lieutenant of police jumped from the curb and raised his sword as a peremptory signal to halt. The despairing muchacho, a slave to a uniform, laid back on the reins and jerked the horse to its haunches. The carriage stopped so abruptly that Richard Cary bounced beneath his mountain of luggage. He knew that something had gone askew. He made elbow room to free the heavy pistol. Then he heard the petulant voice of Ramon Bazán upbraiding the officer. It was asinine to meddle with the owner of a ship in haste to go aboard and enjoy a few hours of sleep, a ship which was to sail at dawn.

The lieutenant was a young man of polished manners who now recognized this abusive old gentleman. He was about to offer a laughing apology with a caution to drive with more care when Ramon Bazán swayed forward, a hand plucking at his breast. He stuttered something in a queer, frightened little voice.

Richard Cary heard and comprehended. In a flash he saw the library and a frail figure toppled across the desk, face contorted, eyes bulging. Before he could toss the luggage aside, oblivious of his own predicament, the quick-witted muchacho had thrown an arm around the drooping old man to hold him in the carriage. A twitch of the reins, a chirrup, and the horse was in motion. It broke into a quick trot.

The lieutenant of police stared for a moment and strolled homeward from the wine shop. Señor Bazán was getting quite feeble, he said to himself. Silly of him to be bothering with a ship. Greedy to make more money even if it killed him.

The frightened driver steered the horse through the gateway in the wall, one arm still supporting the flaccid, silent shape of his master. In the wide, open space between the wall and the quay the lad halted the carriage and wailed a "*mucho malo*." Richard Cary instantly crawled out and lifted poor Ramon from the front seat. The driver threw a roll of blankets and a canvas sack on the ground. They laid the stricken man down very gently.

Cary put a finger on his pulse. It was not stilled but the beat was faint and slow. The one hope was to search his pockets for the precious vial. Thank God, it had not been forgotten. The lad held a small

flash lamp while Cary pried open Ramon's jaw and crushed two capsules in his mouth.

They waited a few minutes. The excruciating pain was eased. The sufferer was able to whisper a few words. Ricardo was to carry him to the beach near the quay where a boat would be found. There was to be no turning back. It was a command.

Some of the luggage was shifted to the front of the carriage. This made room in the rear so that Cary could sit and hold the old gentleman in his arms. Thus they came to the deep sand at the edge of the deserted beach. The Indian lad indicated the skiff which, earlier in the night, he had placed in readiness for the stealthy embarkation. Then he stood waiting for orders. First they made a bed on the sand for Ramon Bazán. He was too weak to lift his head. Cary mercifully refrained from questions concerning the plan of action. It had been withheld from him. Childish vanity and secretiveness had made it enjoyable to lead the big Ricardo by the nose.

It was not in the mind of Ricardo, however, to let the voyage be delayed or thwarted. He would use his own wits. He tried to conjecture just how the crafty Papa Bazán had expected to turn the trick of smuggling him on board. It was something very deceptive and complicated, no doubt.

"I am not in his class when it comes to hocus-pocus," said the dubitating young man. "He was going off to the ship first, I imagine, leaving me on the beach until he could signal with a flash light. Most of the crew must be ashore for a last night in port. Well, it's up to me to play it alone. And I did hope to get clear of Cartagena without any more rough stuff."

Having finished this brief debate with himself the brawny seafarer moved with an alert and easy confidence. He helped the driver stow the luggage in the skiff. Then they made a comfortable nest for Señor Bazán, who manifested no more than a glimmering interest in this, the supreme exploit of his life. Richard Cary was made to feel forgetful of himself. Once at sea Papa Ramon might rally and live to enchant himself with the pirate's chart amid the volcanic cliffs of Cocos Island. He deserved to win.

With the Indian lad in the stern of the skiff Cary picked up the oars and drove ahead. A few hundred yards out in the

dusky harbor floated the *Valkyrie*, an uncouth blotch against the stars. Here and there a light gleamed from a round port or a deck-house window. Cary aimed the skiff to come up under the steamer's stern as the course least likely to be detected. As soon as he came close aboard he used an oar as a paddle. The skiff stole beneath the overhang and then slid along the vessel's side until it nudged the steeply slanting gangway steps.

Cary made fast with a turn of line and motioned the lad to stay where he was. Then he gathered Ramon Bazán from the blankets and deftly doubled him over his shoulder. It was like carrying a helpless infant. With one hand free Cary awkwardly footed it up the steps, steadied by a shifting grip of the side rope.

Quietly he stepped on the deck, which was unlighted. No one hailed him. It was wisdom to look about and find his bearings. The impromptu capture of a seagoing steamer had not been contemplated in his darkest hours as a fugitive. It required some care.

The first thought was to deposit Ramon Bazán in a place where he might rest undisturbed. The living quarters would be forward of the saloon. Presumably they included a vacant room for the owner and another for the captain. On tiptoe Cary bore his burden along the deck. Fortune favored him. He found a darkened passage and entered it. The pocket flash lamp showed him his own room, identified by a desk and the rolls of charts in the racks overhead.

This was good enough. He rolled Ramon Bazán into the bunk after removing his coat and shoes. The old man mustered breath to thank him and then fell asleep. At a guess, he was no worse off than when he had been bowled over in his library.

Closing the door, Captain Richard Cary returned to the deck. For so heavy a man his tread was light and quick. He ran down the gangway steps and bade the Indian lad fetch up the luggage and leave it on deck. Then he was to shove off in the skiff and go back to his horse and carriage on the beach.

Captain Cary climbed on board again and stood listening. He heard, down below, the clatter of a shovel, the pulsations of a pump and the hiss of a leaky steam pipe. This was heartening. He would take the

vessel to sea with daylight enough to find the channel. Pilot be hanged! There were marks and buoys enough.

In the crew's quarters up in the bows two or three men were quarreling over a game of cards, or it sounded like that. They could be left to their own devices. The saloon was lighted, the door open. A husky voice was bawling to the steward.

Richard Cary had to stoop to enter the small saloon. At the table sat his chief officer, Bradley Duff, and a plump, flashy young man with kinky hair and a flattened nose. An elderly mulatto in a dirty apron just then emerged from the pantry with a tray.

The late supper was interrupted, but not rudely. "Big Dick" Cary intruded his soothing presence with the air of a man who disliked violence. He received no greeting for the reason that the three men in the saloon had suddenly forgotten what speech was for. They were as dumb as three oysters.

The blustering Bradley Duff blew a long breath through his ragged mustache. The kinky-haired young man in the pink silk shirt showed the whites of his eyes and slid lower in his chair. He seemed to be ebbing under the table. The glasses on the steward's tray jingled together. His feet were riveted to the floor.

The large, pleasant-featured visitor could not help smiling as he said:

"Good evening, *Mister* Duff. I am Captain Cary, the master of this ship."

The spell was broken. The plump young man slid lower as he murmured, "*Madre de Dios! Esta El Tigre Amarillo!*" The steward wrenched his feet from the floor. They would have retreated swiftly to the pantry but Captain Cary crooked a finger at him. He obeyed and joined the others at the table.

Mr. Bradley Duff had not slid down in his chair. His mottled cheeks were puffed out. His pimpled nose was redder, if that were possible. He was a beefy, truculent figure, a man who had been valorous in his prime, before some hidden flaw had broken him. Wiping his mouth with the back of his hand he hoarsely burst out:

"Like hell you are the master of this ship, you big buckaroo. I know who you are—the guy that busted loose and fooled the town into thinking he was a bad hombre. I'm no kid to be scared by a bogymen."

You make me laugh. Master, my eye! You've gone clean bughouse. Wait till the owner comes off to-night. He'll throw a fit. I am waiting for his pet skipper."

"The owner is on board," said Cary, "but he is to be left alone until I say so. He is a sick man. We shall get under way at four-thirty, Mr. Duff. What's the word from the chief engineer?"

"None of your business," was the savage reply. "Here, I've stood enough play-acting from you."

Snatching a bottle from the tray Mr. Duff hurled it with a mighty swing of his thick arm. Cary ducked his head. A miss was as good as a mile. To his sincere regret he was in for a disturbance.

Before the enraged Mr. Duff could fling another bottle Cary jumped forward and tapped him over the head with the butt of the heavy pistol. Too bad, but it had to be done. The blow was not meant to be deadly. It was enough to put the unlucky chief officer to sleep.

A pink silk shirt was streaking it for the saloon door. Captain Cary thrust out a foot and the plump young man fell. He rebounded like a ball. Catching him on the rebound, Cary called to the elderly steward:

"Do you talk English? What's your name?"

"Rufus Pilley, sah. I's a British subjec' f'um Jamaica, if you please, cap'n, an' I stands on mah rights to be treated nice. You don't have to blam me with no pistol. At yo' service, sah."

"Bully for you, Rufus. Your views are sound. Who is this hot sport that I hold in my hands? Does he belong on board?"

"Th' secon' mate, Mr. Panchito, cap'n, sah. He kin speak some English but you done scared him till he's green as a lizard."

"Lock him up, Rufus. The pantry will do. Step lively."

Mr. Panchito offered no resistance. It was a thing to be thankful for that the Yellow Tiger had spared his life. Having tucked him away Captain Cary exclaimed:

"Now Rufus, help me lug Mr. Duff to his room. He will wake up with a headache. Sorry, but it couldn't be helped."

"Thank you, sah. When you gits done an' finished with disciplin' the crew, kin I serve you a tasty suppah, cap'n? It looks like it's hungry work, conquerin' all hands like th' way you started off."

"You are a sensible man," grinned Cary. "We'll get on well."

They left Mr. Duff in his room. He displayed no interest. Cary looked in at Señor Ramon Bazán. It was like being in charge of an infirmary. The aged treasure seeker was awake. He demanded a nip of rum and lime juice. It was an auspicious symptom. Rufus Pilley, very sympathetic, volunteered as a nurse for the night. He trotted off to mix the drink.

"I was afraid you were fighting, Ricardo," said Papa Ramon. "If you will bring the chief officer here I can explain it so he will understand you are the captain."

"Oh, Mr. Duff is quiet enough," was the careless reply. "He has just turned in. You heard something smash? Mr. Duff dropped a bottle. You turn over and go to sleep again as soon as the steward brings the toddy. We are off for Cocos Island in the morning, with a westward ho and a rumbelow."

"I am a very happy old man, Ricardo. Yes, I will sleep like a child. The ship is safe with you."

With two officers mutinous and twenty men yet to deal with Captain Cary was not as happy as Señor Bazán. He went into the wheelhouse and found the voice tube to the engine room.

"Is this the chief?" he asked.

"Yes. Who the dickens are you?"

"The master, Captain Cary. Come to the saloon right away, if you please."

"Right away, sir. I'm dead to the world."

"Can you kick her out of harbor at daybreak?"

"She can do that much, Captain Cary. Come down here later and I'll make you weep."

It was the tired voice of a Yankee from down East, rare music to Richard Cary's ears. Presently the youthful chief engineer came dragging his lank frame into the saloon. A greasy cap was pulled over a shock of brown hair. The boiler suit was black with oil and coal dust. His face was besmirched like a burned-cork minstrel. The teeth gleamed in the smile of a rover who could not be daunted by life's rough roads. He was a tropical tramp because he liked it.

"You look to me as if old Daddy Bazán knew where to find the right skipper," said he, reaching for the water pitcher. "This

is one pie-eyed voyage to the West coast, believe me. My name is Charlie Burnham, sir, and it takes a good deal to give me the yips or I'd be raving right now."

"Burnham?" said Cary. "You sound like a letter from home. There are lots of Burnhams in my New Hampshire village of Wingfield."

"Cousins of mine, I guess. Shucks, I was raised in Tobey Centre, only thirty miles from Wingfield. I'm a hick from a rock-ribbed farm. It was the darned chores that made me run away—cows to milk and wood to chop and snow to shovel and stone walls to break your back."

"Shake hands on that," grinned Captain Cary. "Is there such a place as New Hampshire on the map?"

"Gosh, you wouldn't think so. It was never like this. Say, there can't be two men like you on this coast. You must be the bird who got mad and cleaned up Cartagena a while ago. You sure did make yourself hard to find. This looks like a nice get-away. I'm not butting in on your affairs, am I?"

"Not a bit, Charlie Burnham. I'm the bird. Now tell me about this ship. What have you got for a black gang?"

"Two assistants. That's what they signed on as. Colombians. Eight negro firemen and a couple of oilers. I can cuss in Spanish so we're doing pretty well. Short-handed but I couldn't scrape up another man."

"What about the deck force? Did Mr. Duff have any luck?"

"Half a dozen black and tans, Indians and such. I guess I can steal one or two of 'em at a pinch."

Charlie Burnham gulped another glass of water and fished a cigarette from a damp packet. He was eying the tall fair-haired skipper with a certain grave concern. Cary noticed the change of manner and missed the brave twinkle. Something worried his valiant Yankee engineer.

"What's on your mind, Charlie?" he asked. "You can't be getting cold feet. It's a great life if you keep calm. I'll be glad to help you handle your crowd."

"Oh, I can ride those ginks, Captain Cary. I got wise to their curves when I was running the ice plant at Baranquilla. But look here, I don't want to be a false alarm, so don't kid me. You may have a lively time getting this ship away. For one thing, this

rummy of a chief officer has made no hit with me."

"I made a hit with him," gravely replied Cary, "but it may not last long. What else is in your noddle?"

"A dozen of these men are ashore, Captain Cary, and most of 'em will be pickled. They were having a powwow on deck yesterday. It meant nothing in my young life but it popped into my mind just now. It was this crazy dope about *El Tigre Amarillo*—they swore he was still hiding in Cartagena—and the main gazabo of the police had offered a thousand dollars reward for the outlaw, dead or alive. One of the firemen had a poster and was reading it to the bunch. They got all jazzed up over it. You know how they go in the air. Every mother's son of 'em was all set to grab The Tiger with his bare hands and get the thousand dollars."

"Flattering, I call it," said Cary. "I hadn't heard about the reward. They will try to cash in before we sail, Charlie?"

"It may be a flivver, sir, but I thought I ought to tip you off. They won't have the nerve unless they see a chance to rush you in a mob."

"Then I must keep them from getting their heads together," said Cary. "And my two officers are of no use to me. That is unfortunate."

"I'll say so," replied the chief engineer, "but I'll do my darnedest to make that thousand dollars hard to collect. Sorry I must go below, sir. Be sure to give me a call when the party begins."

## CHAPTER XIV.

### SHAKING A CREW TOGETHER.

The master of the *Valkyrie* prowled on deck for some time. The two or three men in the forecabin had ceased their noise and were presumably in their bunks. The steamer was quiet. Cary regretted that he had been compelled to tap Mr. Duff on the head but there had been no other way out of it. Quick action had been demanded or the dandyish second mate, Mr. Panchito, might have escaped from the saloon to raise an alarm.

First impressions of Mr. Bradley Duff had been more favorable than expected. He amounted to more than a rum-eaten shell of a man. There had been no cowardice in his violent rebellion. His sense of the



fitness of things had been outraged, that a chief officer left in charge of a ship should be challenged by a crazy vagabond with no credentials.

On shore Mr. Duff might be a blatant ruin. To such men, however, the sea is often the breath of salvation and its austere traditions have power to restore, for the time, the habits of courage and fidelity.

To Richard Cary the whole adventure had taken a disagreeable slant. The flavor was spoiled. He was out of the frying pan into the fire. The tidings of that thousand-dollar reward stuck in his throat. It hadn't occurred to him that this Colombian crew might regard him as a treasure to be hunted with murderous enthusiasm. The shoe was very much on the wrong foot. If Señor Bazán was aware of this excessively awkward aspect he was not letting it fret him. His confidence in the colossal Ricardo who plucked iron bars from windows and walked out of prisons was either sublime or senile.

Nothing could be attempted by the crew during the night. It would be easy enough to stay under cover until after the boat load of firemen and sailors had returned from the town. But this would not get the steamer to sea unless—unless—yes, there was a fighting chance.

Richard Cary walked the deck an hour longer trying to fit together this detail and that. One whose life and liberty hung by a hair could not afford to overlook the component parts that might spell success or failure. He had no fatuous intention of storming through the ship and crushing mutiny single-handed. The chief engineer, willing as he was, ought to be left below with his invalid machinery. And any disturbance on board would be certain to attract attention on shore.

While Captain Cary, with deliberate scrutiny, was weighing and testing his plans he heard the splash of oars and the cadenced thump of tholepins. The ship's boat presently bumped alongside with much loud mirth and gusty argument. Cary withdrew to the wheelhouse where he could watch them go forward to their quarters. They lingered in a noisy group, evidently surprised at finding no officer on watch. What was to be done with the boat? Should they hoist it to the davits or leave it in the water? One of the mates ought to be somewhere about to give orders. However, these returning mariners were weary after

much liquor and dancing with the girls. They forgot the boat and stumbled forward, weaving this way and that, arms around one another, singing sentimentally.

Richard Cary counted them as well as he could. A dozen or so! Charlie Burnham must have kept a couple more on watch in the fireroom. The two or three already in the forecabin accounted for the lot. There was this to be said for this scratch crew of Colombians: They had not run wild ashore and it had been a harmless spree.

Cary went to the gangway and turned the boat adrift. It was a needless hazard to leave it tied alongside. There should be no scrambling out of the ship in the morning to arouse the police of Cartagena. One hornet's nest was enough. Next he stole into the chief officer's room and flashed the light on him. Alas, Mr. Duff was indisposed to be an active partner. He slumbered heavily, his crimsoned nose trumpeting like a bugle. His gray hair was slightly clotted but the pistol butt had no more than scratched his scalp. The effect had been more soporific than serious.

Shaking his shoulder failed to stir him although he grunted and muttered a very profane desire to be let alone. This was disappointing. Captain Cary turned his steps to the room which harbored Señor Ramón Bazán. The steward nodded in a chair. He put a finger to his lips and whispered:

"Sleepin' like he was rocked in a cradle, cap'n. What kin I do foh you, sah?"

"Produce that supper you promised me, Rufus. I shall be kept up all night."

"Right away, sah. I didn't hear you blam no more people," hopefully observed the steward as he rambled aft. "Th' reason I has lived a long while an' kep' mah health is 'cause I abstained mahself from fool questions. But what does you aims to do wid th' second mate, Mr. Panchito? You done lock him in mah pantry. How kin I find suppah foh you, cap'n?"

"Sure enough, George. How careless of me! What is your opinion of Mr. Panchito?"

"He ain't so worse, sah, tho' dese Colombia yaller men don't class with us Jamaica folks, in mah jedgment. Mr. Panchito was in th' Colombia navy till th' navy filled up an' sunk one night, right smack in dis yere harbor, cap'n. It got tired of stayin' afloat. Th' one gunboat was all the Colombia navy done was, so Mr. Panchito had to go git

him another job. Um-m-m, when you come bulgin' in to-night he was so skeered his hair mighty near uninked. It was jes' like a nightmare bustin' in on him, all dis say-so 'bout *El Diablo* prancin' an' ravin' through Cartagena."

"That sounds better," heartily exclaimed the skipper. "You have seen the owner of the vessel, Señor Bazán, and you know I am the lawful master. Can you talk to Mr. Panchito in his own lingo?"

"Yes, cap'n. I was two years in a gen'leman's house in Cartagena an' then he ups an' dies on me."

"Then make Mr. Panchito savvy that I am easy to get along with if he jumps lively."

Mr. Panchito was released from the pantry, anticipating sudden death. Nothing like this had ever happened in the navy of Colombia. When invited to sit at table with a good-humored *El Diablo* who smiled often he plucked up spirit and found his own voice. In his heart was dismay at the thought of losing this position as second mate, with its excellent wages, and he was anxious to do anything in his power to hold it. To annoy this giant of a captain was to be rapped on the head with a pistol butt. Mr. Panchito had not the remotest idea of collecting any thousand-dollar reward.

After a refreshing supper Captain Cary and Mr. Panchito went arm in arm to the wheelhouse. The chief engineer sent up the information that the first assistant, two firemen and an oiler were on watch to keep steam in readiness for morning.

"Hold them down there, Charlie," was the order. "Have you got a gun?"

"A sort of a one. All right, sir, I'll hold 'em here. What's the big idea?"

"Fetch me a hammer and spikes and some short pieces of heavy scantling. I don't need the rest of the crew. Can you manage to steam as far as the Boca Chica?"

"Sure! I sling a mean shovel myself. Nail 'em up? That's a corker."

Soon Captain Cary went forward with Mr. Panchito to reconnoiter. A wooden house with large windows had been built at Mr. Duff's suggestion to give the crew lodgings more livable in the tropics than the noisome kennels under the deck of the vessel's bow. These were so leaky that rough weather would flood them and they were foully dark. It had been cheaper to build a shelter than to make repairs.

Mr. Panchito was eager to assist the captain's carpentry by discouraging with a pistol any attempts to break out. The doors had hasps and padlocks but these could not withstand much battering from within. Richard Cary spiked them fast with swift, powerful blows of a machinist's hammer. The noise awoke the dozen or more sailors and firemen. For the moment they imagined the mate was pounding to call all hands on deck. They tumbled from the bunks, crowded to the doors, and couldn't push them open.

There was a commotion in this stout wooden coop. Bare toes could not kick through obstinate doors. The terrific hammering dinned at them. It was like being inside a bass drum. Fearfully they flew for the windows.

And now the rotund Mr. Panchito exhibited a frenzied agility. He bounded from one window to another, flourishing the pistol, pushing a head back, belaboring a wriggling pair of shoulders. It was like a multiplied jack in the box. He caught one limber fellow by the leg as he dived for the deck. Into the window he stuffed him by main strength. Mr. Panchito was magnificent. As a second mate he was already deserving encomiums.

Laughter made Richard Cary miss a spike as often as he hit it. He too had to gallop round and round the wooden structure which seemed to have a hundred windows and as many frantic men trying to spill out of them. Never had he heard the Spanish language actually threaten to set a building on fire. As fast as he dammed a man back inside he slapped a piece of board across a window and whacked the spikes into it.

Mr. Panchito was running himself to death. He sounded like a whistling buoy. There was no leisure for him while those infernal heads were popping out and *El Diablo* was at his heels. One by one the windows were made secure enough to check the eruption. Then Captain Cary had time to spike more boards across the windows. Even if the captives pulled the bunks to pieces for battering-rams, they were safely caged for the present. In their own tongue Mr. Panchito informed them through the cracks that if they cared to live longer it was essential to be as still as mice and to beseech the goodness of God on their sinful knees.

"*Mucho bueno, Capitan Cary,*" exclaimed this excellent second mate whose pink shirt stuck wetly to his skin.

"One hundred per cent *bueno,*" was the hearty verdict. "If the Colombian navy hadn't dropped out from under you, it would have been Admiral Panchito."

"*Si, señor.* Now ees what?"

"Now is what? That is as bright a remark as I ever had put to me, Mr. Panchito." Cary held up two fingers. "*Dos hombres.* Just the two of us. We must make the old steamboat, *el vapor,* vamose from Cartagena."

"*Dos hombres? Si, señor,*" instantly agreed the second mate to whom nothing was now incredible.

They adjourned to the saloon where the steward was waiting with food and drink.

"Seems like I heard yo' conquerin' somebody else, Cap'n Cary."

"You did, Rufus. Now I've knocked off. I forgot to ask you—is there a cook to be accounted for?"

"Yes, sah. He come aboard with th' men an' is sleepin' it off."

"Please turn him out for an early breakfast. Does he have to be conquered?"

"Not him. I showed one man who was boss yestiddy. Um-m-m, I's his speshul brand of Yellow Tiger."

"Then we are all checked up," said Cary "Now, Mr. Panchito, you can siesta yourself on those cushions for an hour or two. I'll be on deck."

Dawn had no more than touched Cartagena with rosy fingers when Mr. Panchito was lifted from the cushions and stood upon his feet. Captain Cary was holding a steaming cup of coffee under his nose. The second mate rubbed his kinky head with both hands, yawned, and sighed a long "*Si, señor.*" Gently but firmly he was led forward and escorted into the wheelhouse. Did he know the channel out through the lagoon? To Cary's gestures he nodded confident assent. Through the voice tube the chief engineer assured them that she could flop her propeller over if nobody spoke harshly to her. Leaving Mr. Panchito propped against the steering wheel Cary ran to the bow to handle the anchor winch himself.

He opened the valves and grasped the lever. Steam hissed from rusty connections but the piston began to chug back and forth. Anxiously he threw the winch into gear.

With a frightful clamor the drum very slowly revolved, dragging in the links of the cable. If the winch didn't fly into fragments or pull itself out of the deck the anchor would have to break out of the mud.

A series of protesting shrieks from the laboring winch, a dead stop, another effort and it was taking hold in grim earnest. The cable was coming home link by link. Cary jumped to look overside. The huge ring of the anchor came surging out of the water. The *Valkyrie* was free. Her master let the winch revolve until the anchor hung flat against the bow. This was good enough. It could be stowed later.

He waved his hand to Mr. Panchito who had drooped himself over a window ledge of the wheelhouse. The pink shirt moved over to the steering wheel. The whistle of the *Valkyrie* blew no farewell to the port of Cartagena. It would have been a foolish waste of steam.

The steamer sluggishly gathered headway, riding light in ballast. It was odd to see her heading for sea without any visible crew. Two men were in the wheelhouse. Not a soul moved on deck.

Safely she avoided the shoals and made the wide circuit to swing into the narrow fairway of the Boca Chica between the moldering, grass-grown forts. By now Captain Richard Cary was pacing the bridge in solitary grandeur. His brow was serene with contentment. The ship was heaving under his feet as she felt the swell of the wide Caribbean. He was gazing ahead.

"Now ees what?" he said to himself. A rumbling cough made him whirl about. Mr. Bradley Duff was clinging to a stanchion with one hand. The other tenderly caressed his scalp. On his puffy features was written a bitter resentment. The night's rest had not sweetened his temper. Cary was quick to offer amends.

"I hated to have to do it, Mr. Duff. Señor Bazán was near dying in my room and I didn't dare jolt him with any more excitement. You refused to listen to me and——"

"I went in and saw the old gentleman just now," grumpily replied the chief officer. "He set me straight about you. I didn't air my troubles. He has chirked up quite a bit. But what was the sense in all the hush stuff? Why didn't the old coot tell me you were coming aboard to take command? Do you think I'd ha' blabbed it

ashore? It was nothing to me if a big Yankee sailorman had enjoyed beating up the town."

"You wouldn't have blabbed when you were sober," said Cary. "It was the Colombian crew that made Señor Bazán nervous. They had some foolish notions about me."

"And so you boxed up the crew, Captain Cary? That is a new one on me. And now you will have to let 'em loose. How about that?"

"Not a thing to worry about if you feel like turning to, Mr. Duff," was the cheery assurance.

This compliment so astonished Mr. Duff that he blew his mustache like a walrus. He tried, with no great success, to push his chest out and pull his stomach in. His bleary eye brightened as he ripped out:

"Hell's bells, young man, we'll show 'em who runs this ship. Of course they may refuse duty and try to make you put back. Seems to me I heard some mention of a thousand dollars reward for you. It went in one ear and out the other. I never needed money bad enough to dirty my hands by crimping a fellow Yank in a foreign port. You'll take my word for that."

"I believe you, Mr. Duff. Then I will release the men and set the watches if they behave themselves."

Mr. Duff was pacified. He looked almost pleasant. His professional instincts had been not dead but dormant. Presently he trudged forward to pull the spikes from the doors of the forecabin house. The men came piling out, hungry and hostile. Mr. Duff's fist smote the first one under the chin. The others took the hint. They were not so rampant.

On the bridge they happened to descry the figure of a very tall and broad young man with a thatch of yellow hair that shone in the sun like spun gold. In every way he was a most unusual young man. He was looking at them with steady, untroubled eyes, as if they were no more than so many noisy insects.

This was a great surprise. The young man could be none other than the dreaded *Tigre Amarillo* whose capture they had so gayly discussed for the fun of spending an imaginary fortune. Last night, when the boards had been mysteriously nailed on the windows there had been frightened surmises—the man with the hammer had been ever

so much bigger and more powerful than Mr. Duff—but they had later agreed that they were drunk and their vision was untrustworthy.

Swiftly now their startled minds were adjusting themselves. Their emotions were easy to read. Sixteen men in all, if they could unite—the ship still within sight of the Boca Chica—if they couldn't manage to take her all the way back to Cartagena they could anchor inside and send a boat once they had gotten the upper hand of the three Americanos. The second mate and the assistant engineers were Colombians. They would be glad to aid the cause of justice. This yellow-haired monster of a man had been guilty of crimes to make one shudder.

Captain Richard Cary saw them hesitate and crowd together. He jumped down the iron ladder and shoved into the group. A knife flashed. He slapped the hand that held it. The sailor clasped a benumbed wrist. The chief officer was bravely collaring them. It was no more than a flurry. They were given no time to organize and act cohesively.

"Hustle 'em along, Mr. Duff," said Cary. "Breakfast be hanged! Send the firemen below. Put your sailors at work. Keep all hands moving. Give me a good man to relieve the second mate at the wheel. We are too short-handed to stave any of them up. So be as easy as you can."

"Here is a quartermaster, sir," panted Mr. Duff, jerking his thumb at a pock-marked fellow with a chronic grin.

"Aye, I'll just take him along," said the skipper.

With this he grasped the quartermaster around the waist, deftly flipped him head down and heels up and, thus reversed, tucked him under one arm. Encumbered in this manner Captain Cary strode for the wheelhouse where he stood his spluttering quartermaster right end up and cuffed him erect. He was shown the course on the compass card in the binnacle. He gripped the spokes with the most zealous sincerity. He had no other thought in the world than to steer an absolutely correct course. Neither to the right nor left did he glance.

The steamer's speed increased to five knots. The chief engineer, still at his post, called through the tube:

"All the firemen came tumbling down at once, Captain Cary. They are awful sore

about no breakfast. This bunch of mine would sooner eat than fight."

"I'll send grub and coffee down, Charlie. Can you stand by two or three hours longer? Things are smoothing out."

"Sure I can. These engines interest me. I just sit and wonder what makes 'em go. Come down when you get a minute."

"Right-o, Charlie boy. It looks like a happy voyage even if we did get off to a bum start."

Soon Mr. Duff lumbered to the bridge to report:

"I am going to feed my animals directly, sir. They are washing down with the hose and scrubbing for their lives. A smart ship, by the time we slide into the Pacific. The second mate refused to go off watch. He bounces after the men and damns their eyes if they turn their heads to spit. The only moment Mr. Panchito took off was to shift into a purple silk shirt and a necktie with yellow spots."

The routine set in motion, Richard Cary went in to visit the invalid Señor Ramon Bazán. He was sitting up in bed. Joyously he piped:

"A life on the ocean wave, Ricardo! I am a man ten years younger. How is my fine ship and my great captain?"

"Not a care in the world," was the genial reply. "Everybody earning his wages and the course set for the Isthmus."

"Bend your ear down, Ricardo mine. Softly now. There is no whisper of our secret plans? They know nothing about the treasure chart and Cocos Island?"

"Not a suspicion, Papa Ramon. To Buenaventura for cargo."

"What kind of a crew is it to trust when we find the six million dollars and the gold ingots? This is the only thing that has worried me, Ricardo. I could do no better for a crew in Cartagena. This chief officer, Bradley Duff. Will he be a bad egg?"

"Right as can be. You can't always judge a man by his looks and manners. As for the crew, there will be no trouble with them."

"El Draque has come again to the Spanish Main," said Ramon Bazán, fondly regarding his commander. "Remember now! The treasure chart is wrapped in the rubber cloth, under my shirt, Ricardo. Now take me into my own room and you get yourself all settled comfortably in here where you belong."

To the *Valkyrie* came a breathing spell. Outwardly she was an unlovely little ocean tramp which had seen much better days, plodding along the Colombian coast on some humdrum errand to earn a pittance by begging cargoes from port to port. Her discolored sides rolled to the regular impulses of the sea and the propeller blades flailed the water into foam. A banner of black smoke trailed from the shabby funnel and spread behind her in a dirty smudge.

The early-morning weather had been kind to these argonauts. During the forenoon, however, Mr. Duff cocked a knowing eye at the barometer and sniffed the warm breeze. It was damper than he liked. His feet pained him more than usual. His broken arches had warned him of more than one sudden gale of wind and rain. He mentioned his misgivings to Captain Cary, who received them with respect. They set about doing what they could to make things secure, swinging the boats inboard and lashing them, covering hatches, attending to odds and ends neglected in the haste of departure.

Even while they toiled the sky grew overcast and the sea lost its sparkle. The wind veered this way and that before it began to blow strongly out of the east. It threatened to blow much harder. The crew realized that the *Valkyrie* was ill prepared to endure furious weather. They laid aside all ideas of plotting mutiny. It was more essential to save themselves from drowning. By noon the steamer was wallowing in a gray waste of raging water. She rolled with a sickening motion as if about to turn bottom up. The seas broke solid on her decks and poured through smashed skylights, though the leaky joints of deadlights, through weather-cracked doors. When pounded and submerged like this the ship was not much tighter than a basket.

Leaving Mr. Duff on the bridge Richard Cary went down to the engine room. He found a red-eyed, haggard Charlie Burnham hanging to the throttle valve with both hands to ease her or jam ahead when the indicator bell whirred like an alarm clock. Water was sloshing over the greasy floor plates. The first assistant was up to his waist in the filth of the bilge, trying to clear the pumps of the loose coal which had choked the suction pipe. He was a small man limp with seasickness and bruises. When he stooped over to try to claw the

coal away and free the suction strainer the water boiled over his head as the ship rolled far down.

Cary crawled over and pulled him out of the bilge. This was a job for a man of some height and strength. He plunged in himself and was working with the energy of a dredge when Charlie Burnham slid across the floor to yell in his ear:

"The pumps are drawing a little, sir. You can clear it if anybody can. If you don't, it's good night. We've got to keep the water down or it will put out the fires."

Cary wiped the floating grease from his eyes and grunted:

"I'll do my best to clear it, Charlie, if I have to stand on my head. How is she steaming?"

"Like a dizzy old miracle. Better than she knows how. It's lucky I held all the firemen below. They are working short shifts but it's banging 'em around something awful."

Twenty minutes later Captain Cary hauled himself out of the bilge. The pumps were sturdily pulling water and the flood in the engine room was checked. He went into the stokehole. Half-naked men were staggering and tumbling to and fro in a fog of steam from the hot ashes and salt water. Red coals spilled out when a furnace door was opened. Frequently the wretched toilers lost their footing and were flung headlong. Arms were seared with burns, bodies contused.

When the captain of the ship suddenly loomed among them they cowered from him, dropping slice bars, letting coal fall from their shovels. Their nerves were already rasped to breaking. They were disheartened men dumbly struggling for survival against the obliterating ocean. Instead of striking and cursing them this mighty captain was smiling like a friend. He snatched a shovel from a half-dead fireman with a bleeding shoulder and pushed him out of the way. The shovel ate into a pile of coal on the floor and swiftly fed it into a furnace.

The captain poised himself against the wild rolling of the ship and shot the coal into that furnace like three or four men. He was all grease and grime like themselves. He was *El Diablo* of a stoker, setting them an example to wonder at. The word passed that he had been in the bilges, making the pumps suck to save the fires. This was a new kind of captain.

It restored their hope and made them oblivious of hurts and fatigue. For some time the captain plied the shovel or raked the fires with a long slice bar. They had heard of his prowess with an iron bar. It was the truth: He handled this heavy bar like a straw. They watched him with the eager excitement of children. The ship was safe with such a captain. He could do anything. It was certain that he would preserve their lives.

When at length the captain desisted from stoking like a giant, he shouted a few words of Spanish at them. They were all *mucho bueno hombres* and *viva el vapor!* It was a little storm, nothing to worry brave sailors of Colombia. They grinned and clapped their hands together. He was not a yellow tiger but *El Capitan Grande*.

When he climbed to the bridge the sea seemed less violent and the sky not so somber. Mr. Duff was planted beside the engine-room indicator, jockeying the ship as best he could to ward off the blows of the toppling combers. His red face was streaked with salt. A sou'wester was jammed on his gray pow. The wind whipped his oilskin coat out behind him. At a glance he was competent, a man restored to his element.

"All right, Mr. Duff," said Cary. "We have seen the worst of it. Go below and ease your feet. You may as well snooze till I call you. There was nothing I could do up here. I left the ship in good hands."

"Thank you for that," beamed the chief officer. "It shook the ship up some, but by Judas, it's worth the damage. It shook this flighty crew together. I don't anticipate much more trouble with them."

"Neither do I, Mr. Duff. This gale has blown some of the nonsense out of their heads. I think we can make it a contented ship."

Sunset found a quieting sea and a dying wind. The *Valkyrie* was on her course for Colon. After a while the second mate came up to relieve the captain and let him snatch a few hours of sleep. Richard Cary waited a moment. A sailor paused beside the wooden house in the bows. Upon the roof was mounted the bronze bell of the galleon *Neustra Señora del Rosario*. The sailor pulled a cord and the ancient bell rang out the hour, *ding-dong—ding-dong—ding-dong—ding-dong*. Eight bells!

"All's well and westward ho," said Rich-

ard Cary, the sense of illusion stealing over him. "It's still the same. Ships have changed but men are the same. And the game is still worth playing."

## CHAPTER XV.

## IN THE HOUSE OF MYSTERY.

Only to Mr. McClement, chief engineer of the *Tarragona*, had Teresa Fernandez made known her intention of leaving the ship at the end of the voyage. Never again did she wish to see the walls of Cartagena and the white moonlight in the plazas or to hear the wind in the coconut palms and the bells in the church towers. The thoughtful McClement did not try to dissuade her. Convinced as she was that Richard Cary had been wickedly done to death, it was not a decision to be argued. Her plans were uncertain, she said. If she were fitted to earn a living ashore she would not go to sea again. The sea made her sad.

She had a last talk with McClement the night before the ship was due at New York. It was a farewell, he suspected. Teresa had resolved to break all ties with the *Tarragona* and her shipmates.

"Will you let me look you up in New York?" he asked. "We might have dinner together, or something like that. If I can cheer you up a bit——"

"Thank you very much, Mr. McClement. I will let you know where to find me if I need you. On your next trip to Cartagena you may hear something of how—of how it happened, but you will never find Mr. Cary."

"I can't be so cocksure of that, Miss Fernandez. As I have insisted right along, a man like Cary doesn't vanish without a trace. Colonel Fajardo is the blighter for me to keep an eye on. He will be looking for you on the ship, won't he? Hot after you again, I fancy. He may give himself away. He will be badly upset when he makes the discovery that you have stayed in New York."

"Do you truly expect to see Colonel Fajardo waiting on the wharf in Cartagena, Mr. McClement?" demanded Teresa. Her face was solemn, her dark eyes very large, her hands clasped. She was urged against her will to discover what this loyal friend might hold secluded in the secret places of his understanding. Sometimes he frightened her, he seemed so wise and penetrating and

yet vouchsafed so little. To her tense question he replied, laying a hand on hers:

"No more of that, my dear girl. You must be up early when the ship docks tomorrow morning, so it's time for you to say your prayers and go to bed."

"Ah, yes, I always say my prayers," she breathed in low tones. "And will you remember to say a prayer for the soul of poor Teresa who found her lover and lost him so soon?"

"God may be a trifle surprised at hearing from a perfect stranger," he answered, with his cynical twinkle, "but I am always at your service, Miss Fernandez."

"It will comfort me," said she, "to know you believe I am still good—in spite of—no matter what—no matter what—oh, Mr. McClement, I am such a very, very unhappy woman."

She sobbed the words. For the first time her proud and righteous composure had broken. It was the realization that in all the world there was no one else than this man who could comprehend her, in whom, if needs be, she could unreservedly confide. He was a link, as faithful as forged iron, between the brief joy of which she had been bereft and the dark perspective of the future.

McClement made no comment. He knew when silence was golden. Teresa quickly regained her poise. The display of emotion had been like the swirl of an eddy on the surface of a deep, swift stream.

"To have a second mate left on the beach means so little in a great fleet of ships like the Fruit Company's," said she. "The captain will report him absent from duty, and it is soon forgotten. Mr. Cary was a new man in the service—a stranger—they scratched him off the list. And you have packed his clothes in the two bags, Mr. McClement? And all the little things that belonged to him?"

"Yes. I found his home address—a letter from his mother. I kept it for you. Shall I send the stuff to her, or what? How about waiting another trip?"

"Wait for what?" Teresa exclaimed. "Mr. Cary is dead, I tell you. Colonel Fajardo killed him. How else can it be—think, Mr. McClement, two days the *Tarragona* was at Porto Colombia and two days at Santa Marta loading bananas—a whole week on the coast before we sailed for Kingston. And the company's radio sta-

tions at those ports! I have told you this over and over again. Can you imagine Mr. Cary alive and not sending a radio to me—to the captain—to explain why he was missing? It is impossible. A whole week on the coast and then to Kingston."

"I grant you all that," replied McClement. "It has knocked the props pretty well from under me. What about Dick Cary's mother? There's the rub."

"His things ought to be sent to her, I suppose," said Teresa. "What else can we do? And who will write to her? You or I? Maybe the port captain who hired him will send her a letter. I don't know about that. But Mr. Cary is nothing but a second mate that jumped his ship."

"Writing his mother! Humph!" grunted McClement. "What the deuce is there to tell her but to sit tight and hope for news? My word, but it is a rotten situation for her, isn't it?"

"I am the one to write a letter to her," said Teresa. "And I will tell her why. It is because I loved him and was ready to die for him."

Troubled sleep and wakeful hours were Teresa's portion during this last night in the ship which had long been her home. The primitive instinct of flight had driven her to break these familiar bonds. Abhorrent was the thought of returning to the long wharf at Cartagena with the ugly cargo sheds and the tapering masts of a Colombian schooner lifting beyond them. There was the fear that somehow she might betray herself, that out of the very air accusation might be directed against her.

She felt neither guilt nor remorse but she was too young to die. And it would be hideously unjust if she should be taken and put to death for what she had done. Not by chance had she been delivered from punishment. The miraculous decree of fate had shielded her.

She wondered if the evil spirit of Colonel Fajardo haunted the narrow strip of wharf beyond the cargo shed, waiting, waiting for the ship to bring Teresa Fernandez back to Cartagena. The unholy vision could not be thrust aside—the gaunt figure and the harsh, cruel face bleached with sudden terror—the bit of red ribbon like a fleck of blood on the breast of the white coat—the whiplike crack of the little pistol—the strangled scream—the splash just astern of the schooner and the patch of frothy water with

the widening circles—the huge black fins shearing the surface and then the obliteration of Colonel Fajardo.

Unpleasant and distressing, such a crimson page of remembrance as this, but not to be regretted or moaned over. Such was Teresa's inflexible verdict. She was poignantly unhappy but not because her soul was stained with a deadly sin. Raging, more than once, grinding her small white teeth, she had been sorry that Colonel Fajardo had only one death to die. The Holy Office of the Inquisition would have known how to have made it more lingering and painful.

These thoughts would leave her alone as soon as she should have seen the last of the ship which had been so intimately associated with him. There was something more troublesome and she could see no way to meet it. Write a letter to the mother of Richard Cary? What could she, Teresa, say to his mother by way of explanation? What could she tell the mother of a splendid son? That he was dead? How? Where? Why? Where was the proof? Who had buried him and where was his grave? He was dead. This was all Teresa knew as she had read it in the hard eyes of Colonel Fajardo, in his twitching smile, gloating, gratified, unable to dissemble his own secret. But a mother of a son—and such a son—here was a wall of difficulty that loomed to the sky.

While the passengers were landing next morning, very impatient to run the gantlet of the customs inspectors and hurl themselves into taxicabs, Miss Fernandez was the efficient light-footed stewardess with a blithe word and a quick readiness to aid the ladies and amuse the children. She turned aside from her duty only to accost Mr. McClement and say:

"Leave Mr. Cary's things with the baggage-master on the wharf, to be sent for. This is my advice. They must not go to his home in New Hampshire till I write the letter. It is going to be a very hard letter to write. Good-by, dear friend, good-by."

At her leisure she packed her trunk and shook hands with her good comrades, the purser, the doctor, the second steward, and the wireless operators who expressed themselves as broken-hearted to a man. She was saucy to Mr. Schwartz, the bullying chief steward, and boxed his ears when he



would have chucked her under the chin in token of an amicable parting.

From the ship she went to the office of the port steward and demanded her wages, also a first-class recommendation. These were promptly handed over. No longer a stewardess in trim uniform, with white cap and apron, Miss Fernandez reappeared in a small hotel below Madison Square where she would be unlikely to encounter passengers and officers with whom she had sailed.

Her savings banks' books were a substantial anchor to windward. She had done well for herself at sea. There was little faith in Uncle Ramon Bazán's promises of leaving her his property. He had too many bats in his aged head. Meanwhile she had dreaded being cast on a lee shore of adversity and having to ask his help. There would be a string to it, as she said, that she would have to go and live in his Cartagena house, with the detestable brown monkey and the squawking green parrot and an uncle who had a worse temper than either.

There were friends in New York but she did not care to see them. They were mostly South Americans or seafaring people. Her intention was to rest a while and then to look for another position as stewardess on some route removed from the Caribbean, perhaps the Spanish line to Cadiz or a Lamport & Holt boat to Buenos Aires.

Prudent with her money as she was she permitted herself the pleasure of buying some new clothes, preferring to dress in black. The results were admirable. She had excellent taste. A simple elegance distinguished her. It was partly an inheritance. There was a certain exotic charm about her, the eyes, the hair, the coloring of her race. She was not so vivacious, alas, as when Richard Cary had wooed her in the tropics. At times she was like a nun, in moods pensive and wistful.

Day after day she postponed writing the letter to the widowed mother of the tall, ruddy son who had been so carelessly confident that nothing could harm him. The longer the delay the more impossible it became to put pen to paper. At last she ceased to deceive herself in the matter. That letter would never be written by Teresa Fernandez.

The dilemma held her like a vise. Every passing day was a merciless turn of the screw. Inevitably she was compelled to try

to put herself in the mother's place. Therefore she came to perceive, more and more clearly, that her flight from Cartagena had been futile. She had fled from the deed she had done but there were consequences which she could neither flee nor evade.

In putting herself in the mother's place Teresa had to deny that Richard Cary was dead. What mother would accept such a message as anything more than flimsy conjecture, as meaning anything at all? A mother's impulse would be to fly to Cartagena herself or to send some one. She would have to *know* before the tenacious illusions of hope could finally be dissipated and extinguished.

For Teresa Fernandez to allow herself to hope was to destroy the whole fabric of her justification. Even the faintest whisper of hope and she was no longer absolved. She had killed Colonel Fajardo because he had deserved to die, because otherwise he would have gone unpunished. He was guilty. Of this she had been as certain as that the tides flowed and the sun set.

But this certainty could never convince Richard Cary's mother. And in her heart of hearts did it entirely convince Teresa Fernandez? During the voyage northward to New York she had been visited by visions of hope. They had come not in her waking hours, however, but when she was asleep and dreaming. Then had Richard Cary appeared to her, masterful and tender, his deep voice vowing that he loved her, aye, for much longer than a little while. She had felt his kisses warm on her lips and his arm holding her close.

Cruel, empty dreams she had called them, but now they took substance and seemed to be calling her. For Richard Cary's mother and for her own sake she discerned that she must go back to Cartagena. It had been necessary for her to leave the ship and seclude herself amid different scenes where she might be solitary and detached. Now she was thinking clearly, recovered from that instinct of flight and concealment that had driven her away. It was ordained that she should go back to Cartagena in order to bring to light the hidden circumstances. She could do nothing else than attempt it. By sea or by land she could find no peace or sanctuary.

A fortnight in New York sufficed to rid this conclusion of its fears and hesitations. It was the sequel, logical and unescapable,

of the verdict which she had privately inflicted upon the wicked Colonel Fajardo.

Winter had gone. It was in the month of April when Teresa made this voyage to the southward. The tourist travel had slackened. There were few tired business men and restless wives and daughters. Teresa was fortunate enough to be given a state-room to herself. She was also alone at a small table in the dining saloon. It would have made her happier to have been helping the stewardess who was a heavy, middle-aged woman with twinges of rheumatism.

There were books to read, long hours in a deck chair, and the chat of casual acquaintances. The men tried to flirt with her and found it wasted time. The voyage was something to be endured in quietude, with all the patience she could summon. Her courage was equal to the undertaking.

Apart and silent she stood, with an air of grave serenity, when the ship passed in through the Boca Chica and slowly followed the channel of the broad lagoon. The Colombian customs officials would come aboard and summon the passengers for Cartagena into the saloon to check them on the list and examine their passports. This was what Teresa was inwardly dreading. If suspicion had followed her departure she would learn it now.

A new *comandante* of the port entered the saloon. He was a white-haired, kindly man wearing spectacles. Importantly he scrutinized the purser's papers and ticked off the names with a pencil. Teresa sat watching him. He had not come to her name. One little white shoe tapped the floor with a quick pit-pat. Otherwise she appeared calm. He held the pencil in air and exclaimed:

"Señorita Teresa Fernandez!"

Glancing over his spectacles he perceived her sitting there. In tones of surprise he repeated the name. She flinched and held her breath. Rising from his chair the *comandante* crossed over to her and put out his hand. It was a friendly gesture. With a sigh she took the hand he offered. Her fingers were as cold as ice.

"It is an agreeable surprise, young lady," said he, "to find you among the passengers, bound homeward to Cartagena. I welcome the lovely niece of my friend Señor Ramon Bazán."

Teresa murmured words vaguely polite. The *comandante* returned to his papers.

He was fussily preoccupied. Presently Teresa slipped away to her room, there to remain until the other passengers had disembarked. She wished to have no reunions on the wharf with friends who had come to see the steamer arrive.

The barrier had been safely passed. She was free to enter the city as a woman innocent of suspicion so far as the officials were concerned. No information had been lodged against her, or the *comandante* and his harbor police would have summarily detained her.

In the heat of the day she hired one of the carriages at the gate and was driven to the residence of her uncle. She would tell him what her errand was, to search for tidings of Richard Cary's fate. With a will to help her Uncle Ramon might be able to burrow beneath the surface of things. In years gone by he had pulled strings in the complex politics of the city and was still respected in certain quarters for the things he knew and didn't tell. Crotchety as he was, she thought he was really fond of her when she refrained from teasing. And he had expressed an unusual liking for the big second mate of the *Tarragona*.

Teresa rang the bell of the ancient house with the rose-tinted walls and the jutting gallery. Expectantly she waited for the Indian lad to come pattering through the hall, or the shuffling slippers of Uncle Ramon himself. Again she pulled the brass knob. She could hear the echoing jingle of the bell. It awakened no response in the silent house. Possibly they were asleep, her uncle, the muchacho, the fat black woman in the kitchen. It was early, however, for the *siesta*. Uncle Ramon should now be eating the midday breakfast in a shady corner of the patio.

This was a situation awkward and unforeseen. She had taken it implicitly for granted that her funny old uncle would be found in his house because he had always been there. To her he was a lifelong habit and fixture, growing no older or more infirm.

While Teresa stood on the pavement, the carriage waiting with her trunk, the neighbor who lived next door came strolling home under an enormous green umbrella. He was a courtly, bland gentleman with grayish side whiskers who was manager of a bank and had large commercial interests in the interior of the country. Teresa had known this affluent Alonso de Mello ever since he

had been wont to carry her across the plaza on his shoulder and toss her squealing into a clump of plumed pampas grass. He was her uncle's financial adviser and loyal friend, ignoring his twists of temper.

Teresa walked along the pavement to meet him. His green umbrella was a familiar sight. Now it was like a beacon in troubled waters. At sight of her Alonso de Mello swept off his hat with the graceful homage of an hidalgo. He was a gentleman of the old school. Very much surprised he was to see Teresa. Kissing her on the cheek, as was his privilege, he sonorously exclaimed:

"Old Ramon told me you had failed to come south in the *Tarragona* last voyage. All he could learn was that you had left your position as stewardess. Come into my house and have breakfast. The family will thank me a thousand times for bringing you."

"And as many thanks to you, dear Señor de Mello," replied Teresa, grasping his arm as they walked with the umbrella over them, "but I must find out how to get into my uncle's house. I came to make him a visit and the house is locked as tight as a jail. Where is he? What do you know? Is anything wrong?"

"The house is closed. He has gone away," answered the banker, with an oddly perplexed manner. "Ah, you have your trunk in the carriage, Teresa? Then stay with us. I beseech it of you as a favor."

"I knew you would say just that, Señor de Mello, but if you don't mind I shall stay in my uncle's house if there is any way to break into it. He must be coming back soon. Where has he gone? What has become of his two servants?"

"You are a girl not to be cajoled if her mind is made up," smiled the affectionate neighbor. "Wait, if you please, while I get the key. Uncle Ramon left it with me. Let the driver carry in your trunk, if you insist. Then you can run in and out as you please and have your meals with us. Your uncle's servants have been sent away, you ought to know, until he returns to the city."

Señor de Mello was obviously fencing with the story of Uncle Ramon's curious departure, as if it might require considerable explanation. Teresa was mystified but she asked no more questions until the banker came back with the heavy iron key. At his heels galloped a little brown monkey

squeaking its annoyance at something or other. Teresa eyed it with dislike. She knew that monkey of old. It was not to be mistaken for any other wretched monkey in Colombia. It pulled at her skirt with tiny black paws and would have frisked to her shoulder but she thrust it away with her foot.

"Little imp of the pit! You are no friend of mine. It is beyond me how my uncle could bear to part with you."

The monkey grinned at her, showing every tooth in its head, and it was a most malevolent grin. Tail looped over its back it scampered into the house ahead of them, casting back proud and hateful glances. This house belonged to it. These two persons were intruders. Into the silent patio scampered the monkey and went hand over hand up the trellis from which it swayed in a contemptuous manner.

Teresa was not interested in the antics of little brown monkeys. She went into the library. It was clean and orderly. The other rooms had been left in the same condition by the faithful servants.

"Yes, I think I will stay here, Señor de Mello. It will amuse me to keep house after living so much in ships. Just now I am tired. I have not been feeling as strong as usual. Will you excuse me from calling on your family till later in the afternoon? I had breakfast on the ship."

"As you say, Teresa. You have everything here for your comfort. You will dine with us to-night, of course. And now where has your uncle gone? Let us sit down. Your uncle is self-willed and like a mule to handle, as you know. And an old man must not be crossed too much. In the inscrutable wisdom of God, our Ramon Bazán took it into his head to become a shipowner and engage in the west-coast trade. A bolt from a clear sky, I assure you, when he came to me to turn his securities into cash and finance the affair. He insisted on buying the old *Valkyrie* some time ago, very secretly, before he announced what he proposed to do with her. You remember the small German tramp steamer, Teresa, that was idle so long in the harbor.

"Then suddenly he told me he had decided to make repairs and go to Buenaventura for a cargo. It took much more money than he could afford to invest in such a scheme but I could not refuse to get the funds together for him. My advice

amounted to nothing. Objections drove him quite frantic. He had the bit between his teeth. Restless, craving change and excitement before death snatched him, he hit upon this foolish enterprise."

"He did not tell you everything," wisely observed Teresa. "I have not the slightest idea of what was in his ridiculous mind but he expected to bring back more dollars than he spent. Uncle Ramon was never an idiot when it came to his precious money."

"I called him an idiot," said Señor Alonso de Mello, "and he grinned precisely like that monkey on the trellis. So away he sailed and that was the last seen of him."

"What did he do for a crew?" asked Teresa, the deep-water mariner. "And where did he find a captain?"

"He had a man named Captain Bradley Duff, and Cartagena was very well pleased to get rid of him. All the vices of the famous Anglo-Saxon race and none of its virtues were visible to the eye. An unsanctified windbag, down at the heel, who had been annoying this coast for some time."

"Captain Bradley Duff?" said the disgusted Teresa. "He was kicked off the wharf when I was in the *Tarragona*. He came on board and tried to borrow money from the officers and passengers. Then he got drunk in the smoking room. And this is the man that my uncle took as captain in his old steamer? You were too soft with Uncle Ramon, my dear sir. He is in his second childhood, You should have locked him in a room and given him some toys to play with. Has anything been heard of this *Valkyrie*?"

"Yes, she passed through the Canal. I interested myself to find that out, but she is not yet reported as arriving at Buenaventura. I feel some anxiety, for soon she will be overdue."

"There will be gray hairs in my head if I sit here in his house until he comes back," cried Teresa, in a sudden gust of anger. "He has gone the good God knows where. May He protect the silliest voyage that a ship ever made. Yes, Señor de Mello, I think I had better stay alone for a while this afternoon and reflect on what I am to do."

As the good Señor de Mello bowed himself out it escaped his notice that the little brown monkey was still roosting on the trellis. Teresa, also, was unobservant. She had discovered that the galleon bell had

been removed from its framework of Spanish oak. This was more food for speculation. It was fairly easy to fathom, however, for one who knew Señor Ramon Bazán and the history of the sonorous bell of *Neustra Señora del Rosario*. It had been his notion to take the bell along in his steamer by way of precaution. Quite sensible of him, thought Teresa, but to be regretted because with the bell still in the patio she might have been told if any catastrophe was about to put an end to her erratic old kinsman.

While Teresa was pondering this odd discovery the monkey descended to the floor and bethought himself of some urgent business of his own. With a furtive glance at Teresa, who paid no attention, he scuttled into a corner where two green tubs had formerly stood. The coconut palms had been carried into the house of Señor de Mello that they might not perish of thirst. The monkey was exceedingly indignant, as his language conveyed, at finding his favorite depository of loot disturbed.

There was the wide crack in the masonry, however, into which he had crammed the fragments into which he had torn the letters purloined from the library desk. Into this crevice he now inserted a paw and found what he so anxiously sought.

It was a brier pipe with an amber bit, the choicest treasure acquired during a long career of zealous burglary. The huge guest of Papa Bazán had forgotten the pipe that night when he had gone away in the dark. A prize beyond compare for the covetous monkey who had found it in the library next morning and had fled to hide it in the safest, surest place he knew.

Then he had been violently snatched away and kept as a captive in the house of Señor de Mello and there had been no chance to retrieve the brier pipe. He had been sitting at the top of the trellis wondering what made him feel so sorrowful and uneasy. At last he had remembered. It was the pipe, tucked away in the crack of the wall behind the green tubs.

In a happy frame of mind the monkey wandered across the patio, the pipe held firmly between his teeth, a finger in the bowl. He had the air of one for whom solace waited if only he could find a match and a pinch of tobacco.

Teresa caught sight of this absurdly gratified monkey with the pipe in its mouth,

She gasped and sprang to her feet. Like a flash she dived to catch the horrid beast but he flew from under her hands and raced for the nearest room. Teresa was after him. She picked up an empty flowerpot and hurled it. The aim was wild but the crash was startling. The monkey's nervous system was so shaken that he dropped the pipe and vanished beneath a bed.

The panting Teresa swooped for the pipe. She was laughing hysterically. She could not believe her eyes. She fondled the pipe, turning it over and over in her hands. It was the pipe which once before she had rescued from the pest of a monkey, when she had brought Richard Cary from the ship for an evening call on her uncle.

This brier pipe was unmistakable. There were the initials neatly carved on the side of the smoke-blackened bowl. *R. C.!*

She put a hand to her head. Richard Cary had taken the pipe back to the ship that night. She was certain of this because she had insisted on cleaning it before he smoked it again. She had forced a jet of steam through it in the pantry and then had sent it to his room by the deck steward. Ricardo had returned his thanks. This had been her last word from him.

Later in the evening, about ten o'clock, he had gone ashore. A quartermaster had seen him walk off the wharf and through the customhouse gate. Betwixt that time and the present, then, he had been in the house of Uncle Ramon Bazán. The pipe was evidence unquestionable, or so it appeared to her confused sense. But if Richard Cary had been in her uncle's house since leaving the ship that last time, why had he sent no word to explain his absence? Why had her uncle kept silent?

Both joy and anguish overwhelmed her. The room went suddenly dark before her eyes. Never before had she fainted.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### BLIND ROADS OF DESTINY.

Joy in the belief that Richard Cary had not died that night in Cartagena! Anguish that she, Teresa Fernandez, had stained her hands with blood for which there had been no justification! She felt herself falling, falling, falling into unfathomable depths while a fateful little monkey sat and grinned at her.

She found herself lying on the stone floor

which felt cool against her cheek. Languor overpowered her like a drug. A few feet away was a long wicker chair with chintz cushions, a chair to recline in if she could make the effort. She dared not try to stand. Like a child that had not learned to walk she crept to the chair and, for lack of strength, knelt with her head on a cushion. A few minutes more and she was able to lift herself into the chair and lie relaxed, grateful that she was no longer falling, falling to dreadful darkness.

The brown monkey had watched her from his hiding place. He was as un pitying as destiny itself. All that interested him was the brier pipe which had slipped from Teresa's fingers. There it was, on the stone floor, near where she had so suddenly and curiously concluded to lie down for a short time. Very cautiously he peered around the bamboo screen and scratched his hairy hide. The woman appeared to sleep in the long wicker chair. It was worth risking a bold sortie. Nothing venture, nothing have.

The monkey advanced in a series of short dashes, ready to retreat on the instant. He was still nervous from the crash of that hurtling flowerpot. A fragment had nicked his bald rump. A final leap and he pounced on the pipe and silently fled out into the patio. Having fled to a safe distance he informed the woman what he thought of her.

The woman was not as indifferent as the thievish little beast surmised. It was her intention to recover that blackened brier pipe with the initials, *R. C.*, neatly cut on the side of the bowl. Her slender body was still a prisoner to weakness, however, and so she watched the monkey, through the doorway of the room, as it gamboled insolently with the pipe between its teeth.

Ere long it sauntered over to the corner where the two green tubs had been, assuming a specious air of indifference. Apparently the woman had forgotten his existence and was enjoying her siesta in the long wicker chair. The monkey examined the wide crevice between the stones where his treasures had been habitually concealed. After an absence it was advisable to take account of stock.

Some other recollection, also a pleasing one, haunted his simian intelligence. Into the crevice went an eager paw. It raked out one handful after another of tiny white bits of paper and let them flutter. He brushed them together as they fell and tossed

them in air. They came drifting down like the petals of the small white flowers when a certain monkey was scrambling up a favorite trellis.

Amusing enough but soon tiresome. This monkey was apt to suffer from ennui. Giving thought to the matter, he picked up the pipe, rapped it on a stone, and then stuffed the bits of paper into the bowl. It was expertly done, a few bits of paper and a finger tamping them down. This had been the custom of the tall man with the yellow hair who had been kind enough to leave the pipe behind him.

Solemnly the monkey waited for the fascinating smoke to curl from the bowl. He waited rather anxiously because he was very much afraid of fire. Teresa Fernandez thought it time to interfere. She could see that wide crack between the stones of the wall and she did not know how deep it might be. If the malignant little devil of a monkey should thrust Richard Cary's pipe in too far, for safe-keeping, it might drop between the stones and be lost to her forever.

She cried out sharply, insulting the ancestors of all monkeys. This one jumped as if he had been shot and spun about, hiding the pipe behind its back. Teresa was rapidly recovering. Indignation goaded her to action. Reaching out an arm, she caught up a book from a small table and let it fly through the doorway. It fell far short of the mark but hit a galvanized watering can. Bang!

The monkey leaped into the air. He was sensitive to shocks. That woman was determined to seek his life. If it was the brier pipe that made her so ruthless, then he would let her have it. Better a live pauper than a dead monkey! Only the gods of the jungle knew what she would be throwing at him next. A bombardment of those explosive flowerpots and books that went "bang" might put an end to his career. Old Papa Bazán had a temper but he was never like this.

Thereupon the mistreated monkey dropped the pipe and sped at top speed to a far part of the house, into the vegetable bin beyond the kitchen where there were burlap sacks to pull over oneself. The atmosphere of home had been ruined by a hateful alien presence in petticoats.

Her mind slightly relieved Teresa called herself a useless girl for yielding so weakly

to a fainting spell. It was the breaking strain but she was by no means ready to surrender to the impact of circumstances. She walked into the bathroom and let the water run cool in the basin. She splashed her face and temples and laved her wrists. This was no time to indulge in hysteria or to let her wits be tangled. It was a mercy that she could be alone in this empty house until the late hours of the afternoon.

Soon she felt strong enough to cross the patio and regain possession of Richard Cary's pipe. It had intimately belonged to him, a companion of his night watches in all the ships he had known. He had told her this. Perhaps he had thought of Teresa when he had smoked his pipe on the rocking bridge of the *Tarragona* under the star-spattered skies of the Caribbean.

Now she caressed the pipe with the palm of her hand until the bowl shone like polished teak. With a hairpin she fished out the crumpled bits of paper which the monkey had so painstakingly rammed therein.

Here was a queer thing. She was quick to notice it and as quick to deduce its immense significance. When she had cleaned the pipe for Ricardo, that last night on shipboard, she had dug out the evil-smelling dottle in order to put steam through it and blow out the nicotine. It had been a labor of love.

Teresa knew as much about pipes as a man. She had listened to many shipmates deliver orations or wrangle over the merits of their pet briers or meerschams, their clays and corncobs. She had watched them carefully scrape the burned cake when the bowl was almost filled.

Ricardo's pipe had been almost clear of this charred cake, as hard as coal. This she remembered because it had been easy to clean it. He must have been busy with his knife not long before that, as men were accustomed to do when there was almost no room for tobacco in the bowl.

But this same brier pipe, as she now held it in her hand, was caked and foul. It had been smoked a good deal since she had last seen it on board the *Tarragona*. A pipe could not get in this condition unless it had been smoked longer than a day or a week. Why, it was time to dig out the bowl again and cut away the black, hard cake. Here was something very engrossing to study, enough to make a girl ever so

much flightier than Uncle Ramon Bazán in his maddest moments.

Merely the tobacco ash burned hard in a brier pipe, but on the random roads of life there is no incident that can be called negligible. The little brown monkeys of chance momentarily meddle with the affairs of humankind and pass gayly on.

Teresa Fernandez found a resting place on the bench near the frame of the galleon bell. Her senses were awakened to their normal alertness. Who else than Richard Cary could have been smoking this pipe? Not her Uncle Ramon. He had forsaken his black, rank cigars after two or three heart seizures had almost popped him into his grave.

"Ricardo has been here," she said to herself, "and he must have stayed some time. I could be no more certain of it if he told me himself."

She tried to banish the specter of her own frightful situation with respect to the man she had slain on the wharf as an act of retribution. This must await its turn. Unless she could control her mind to this extent, she was hopelessly, helplessly befogged, and adrift without chart or compass. Why had Ricardo failed to return to the ship? Why and how and whither had he vanished again, from the house of Uncle Ramon Bazán? These were the questions she was first compelled to grope with. Her intuitions might be feminine but life had taught her the logic of cause and effect. When the occasion required she could be as practical as a navigator working out his sights.

"They went away together, Ricardo and Uncle Ramon," she thought aloud. "It has to be so. Uncle Ramon knew better than to hire that worthless Bradley Duff to command his steamer. When so much money is risked you can't fool him as easy as all that. It is hard to find officers in Cartagena. In a pinch Bradley Duff may have been signed as a mate, but not as a captain. I know my old uncle very well. He would never trust himself, much less his ship, to a notorious beach comber who has nobody's respect.

"It was Ricardo who went as captain. Señor de Mello is mistaken. How does it happen that he never mentioned Mr. Cary to me to-day? How could they be in the two houses side by side and Alonso de Mello not know Mr. Cary was going to sail with my Uncle Ramon? The second officer of

my old ship, the *Tarragona*? Why, it would have been at the end of Alonso de Mello's tongue to tell me how my uncle had such a splendidly competent officer with him. Nobody could forget Ricardo if they met him only once."

Teresa ceased to be logical for the moment and veered to sentiment by way of shadowy consolation. She went on to say to herself:

"Buenaventura! A lucky omen, perhaps. It means good fortune. This is the west-coast port they sailed for? One of the little English ships that captured the great galleon of my ancestor, Don Juan Diego Fernandez, in Cartagena harbor, was the *Bonaventure*. And how grand Ricardo looked when he was telling me how my brave ancestor fought in his golden armor. 'I saw him,' said Ricardo, just like that. He frightened me. Bad luck for Don Juan Diego Fernandez, but good fortune for the Englishmen. And Ricardo is one of them. He is not like a Yankee at all."

Good fortune? Could there be such a thing in the world for Teresa Fernandez? The spirit of Colonel Fajardo had indeed risen from the muddy waters of the harbor to claim its vengeance and reprisal. Teresa's will was still strong enough to hold this issue in the background. Let it fasten a grip on her and she was lost. Time enough for this struggle.

Broodingly she considered another issue intimately more vital. Had Richard Cary loved her? Had she been more to him than a passing fancy, a pretty girl to kiss, another sweetheart in a new port?

With never a word to explain his desertion from the ship, with never a message of any kind during these intervening weeks, it would seem that he had forgotten her. He had left her to wonder and to grieve. What a tragic fool she would have been to write a letter to his mother, breaking the news that her son was dead in Cartagena!

Thus Teresa sadly argued with herself but love and logic cannot be mated. She loved Richard Cary with an unwavering constancy. And her belief that he cared for her in the same way might be shaken but could not be destroyed. He was the soul of candor. His simplicity was as massive as a mountainside. Honesty was in him if ever it dwelt in any man.

The fateful brown monkey, unhappily secluded beneath the burlap sacks in the vege-

table bin, had reason for ironic mirth. Those crumpled scraps of paper in a corner of the patio—if the woman had been wise enough to smooth them and try to piece them together, a word or two here, a phrase there, she might have found the answer to her question.

Absorbed in her study of the brier pipe Teresa had paid no heed to the scattered bits of paper so minutely torn by a monkey's busy fingers. They had failed to impress her as bearing any resemblance to the remains of a letter. She went from room to room, searching for sign or trace of the occupancy of Richard Cary. There might be something else besides his pipe. The search yielded nothing at all. The library desk was vainly ransacked. The wastebaskets had been emptied. There was absolutely nothing anywhere to indicate that Uncle Ramon Bazán had entertained a guest.

Weary and bewildered Teresa threw herself upon the bed in the coolest room. It would be an ordeal to have to meet Señor Alonso de Mello's family at dinner but it could not be avoided. There were questions to ask him. She had to know more about the singular voyage of her Uncle Ramon. Where else could she try to find information? Uncle Ramon's two servants, of course, the Indian lad and the negress who had cooked and slaved for him. José and Rosa were all the names by which she knew them. She was in ignorance of where either lived. It might not be in Cartagena at all. Unless Señor de Mello could help her it might be impossible to find the two servants. Then again, if the furtive Uncle Ramon had been guarding some secret, as it seemed plausible to assume, it would have been like him to bind José and Rosa to silence after his departure.

This house held a secret. It concerned Richard Cary. This was as far as Teresa could grope in her labyrinth. But it was not her habit to hesitate and grope for long. She would take a path and follow it to the bitter end once the choice of direction had been made.

It was a long, long afternoon to spend in this silent house that refused to whisper its secret. Teresa drowsed off more than once, dreadfully tired and feeling the heat after the passage across the Caribbean and the strong wind that was almost always blowing there, whistling through a ship's

stays, whipping the blue surface into foaming surges, blowing beneath a hard, bright sky, pelting the decks with sparkling showers of spray; the wind with a tang to it, the wind that Richard Cary had so zestfully drawn deep into his lungs, standing with arms folded across his mighty chest.

It was a breath of this same wind that came, at length, and drew through the long windows of Ramon Bazán's house when the sun was going down. It stirred the sultry air. Teresa dropped her fan. She would take her bath and do her hair and put on the evening gown of black lace which had been her one extravagant purchase in New York. The household of Señor de Mello dined with a certain amount of formality.

When she was dressed Teresa remembered the odious monkey which had betaken itself into retirement. She could never coax it into following her next door. Señor de Mello would have to intervene. She refused to spend a night under the same roof with it. She went to close the door into the rear hall. This would keep her pet aversion penned in the kitchen quarters.

The breeze had increased and was buoyantly sweeping through the patio. It caught up the bits of torn paper and whirled them like snowflakes. Teresa noticed them because she hated the slightest disorder. She had been disciplined in the immaculate routine of well-kept ships in the passenger trade. Flying bits of paper annoyed her. It was too late to brush them up. They were drifting hither and yon.

Now that they had attracted her attention she called herself a stupid fool for neglecting to examine them in the first place. She had been thinking of something else. Was there writing on them? She stooped to catch a few as they eddied to the floor. One or two floated behind a bench. Others settled in the dusty basin of the fountain. In the open court the light of the sky was failing. She took the bits of paper to a lamp.

So small and crumpled that it seemed a waste of time to pore over them, they bore the marks of a pen and this quickened her curiosity. She had never seen Richard Cary's handwriting and therefore this could not be called a definite clew. But it was not her Uncle Ramon's crabbed fist. It was a vigorous hand that had driven the pen hard.

Malign luck, perversity, the influence of



a little brown monkey, call it what you will, so ordered it that the breeze failed to waft to Teresa even a fragment or two which might have brought her precious consolation. All it required was a bit of paper with her name or some remembered word of endearment, or a broken hint to be interpreted. What she found herself able to read were such meaningless words as these:

*and will—so he—wish I—you told me—wait for*

"If Ricardo wrote this, as perhaps he did," said Teresa, "why was it thrown away? Or was it a letter from somebody else to my uncle, and the monkey found it in the wastebasket? And I might have had all the pieces to puzzle over! Too late now. Some of the scraps have flown out of the windows. For such stupidity I deserve to have the devil fly away with me. Two words only that might be a message to Teresa—*will wait*. Ah, if Ricardo is waiting, Teresa will never rest until she finds him again."

Before going out she carefully closed the windows. Other scraps of paper might possibly reveal something in the morning. She carried herself bravely, did Teresa, when she entered the large living room of Señor Alonso de Mello's hospitable home. It had been her fancy to arrange her hair not so much in the latest mode as in the Spanish fashion of other days, the glossy tresses piled high on her head and thrust through with a comb of hammered silver. A scarf from Seville, shot with threads of gold and crimson, was across her bare shoulders. She looked the patrician, a girl of the blood of the ancient house of Fernandez.

The welcome of Señora de Mello was affectionate. She was a plain, motherly woman with a double chin and no waist line who found contentment within four walls, and had come to the opinion that the younger generation needed the intercession of all the saints in the calendar. Teresa she excepted from this index expurgatorious.

Just now her only son and his wife were making a brief visit, en route to New York and Paris for the annual pleasure jaunt. Antonio de Mello had married a Colombian heiress owning vast banana and coffee plantations, cattle ranches, gold mines, and what not. Ostensibly he directed these interests but his real vocation was that of a sportsman, a spender, a cosmopolitan figure in the world of folly and fashion.

Teresa Fernandez stiffened when young De Mello and his wife came into the room. The daughter-in-law displayed all the latest improvements from plucked eyebrows to no manners whatever. A thin, fretful person, beauty had passed her by. With a very bored air she said to Teresa:

"We are sailing to-morrow. So sorry you are not to be the stewardess. We came south with you last year in the *Tarragona*. As I remember, you were quite capable and obliging. Most of them are like the other people one hires nowadays, utterly impossible."

That kindly gentleman, Alonso de Mello, was dismayed by this crass rudeness to a guest. By his old-fashioned code a Fernandez could not demean herself. She dignified the task. Before he could voice his reproof Teresa was heard to reply, her demeanor serene but her eye glittering:

"Ah, yes, I remember the trip. Why not? You had the B suite, and rowdy parties in it every night. There were ladies on board. They requested the captain to stop the disturbance. It was most unusual. A ship's good name is highly regarded."

Young Antonio de Mello perceived that his heiress had caught a Tartar. Also, he knew Teresa of old. He cleverly contrived to draw her aside and said:

"Pardon my wife's lack of tact. Think how I adored you when we were young. And you are more beautiful than ever, La Belle Teresa. How many lovers at this moment? Be frank with an old friend."

"Only one, I swear it, thou scamp of an Antonio," smiled Teresa, "and he has run away from me."

"He is an imbecile. Then I am just in time to apply for the vacancy."

"The vacancy is in your silly head, not in my poor heart," she told him.

Before the scamp could parry this insult his small daughter, aged five, came running in to throw herself into the arms of Teresa Fernandez. It was a joyous reunion. They had been shipmates. This explained it. Teresa was a lawful capture who had to be led jealously by the hand, away from the grown-ups, and held in audience by this devoted admirer. Breathlessly the child rattled on:

"And I can't stay up for dinner but mamma said I could see you for five minutes after I yelled and wouldn't stay good. And if you don't go in the ship with us

to-morrow I'll cry some more. Why aren't you a stewardess, Teresa? You know the story you told me—'bout the jaguar that climbed right up on the roof of the peon's hut and clawed and scratched and growled awful till he made a hole and tumbled in?"

"Yes, my sweet angel," laughed Teresa. "I have told that story to lots of little boys and girls on the ship. The last trip I made as stewardess I told the story to a little boy from Bogotá. I had to tell it to him four times and his eyes got bigger and bigger and he wiggled his feet and said 'Oh, my,' just like you."

"I wasn't real scared, Teresa, but I bet I can scare you, awful. My story is terrible. You'll just scream."

"Good heavens, child, don't tell it just before bedtime," warned Teresa. "And have pity on me. Why, I shan't sleep a wink myself."

"Well, I won't make it so awful terrible then," said the small girl as she cuddled in Teresa's lap. "My nurse told it to me. It's the story 'bout The Great Yellow Tiger that ran right into Cartagena and—and what do you s'pose he did?"

"Sant' Iago preserve us! A great yellow tiger," cried Teresa, imitating extreme terror. "Indeed, that does scare me more terribly than my spotted jaguar on the roof."

"He was looking for naughty little boys and girls," solemnly affirmed the narrator. "That's what my nurse says. And he bit iron bars off of windows to find 'em. Your old jaguar couldn't do that. All he could do was scratch through a straw roof with his claws. Want to hear some more 'bout The Great Yellow Tiger?"

"Not to-night, darling," said Teresa. "He is much too terrible for me. Did he run back to the jungle?"

"Yes, but maybe he'll come out of the jungle again if the boys and girls aren't as good as they can be. Glad I don't live in Cartagena."

"You will be far away across the ocean and no yellow tiger can swim after you," comforted Teresa. "Besides, you are never naughty. You tell your nurse that you don't want to hear that story any more."

"It scared you, didn't it? Oh, I have a little monkey to play with but I couldn't find him to-day. Señor Ramon Bazán left it when he went away. Will you play with me and the monkey to-morrow, Teresa?"

"Perhaps, if you will promise not to tell

me such awful stories. They make me squirm."

The small daughter was presently summoned by her nurse. It was a tearful departure. The Great Yellow Tiger! *El Tigre Amarillo Grande!* A child's fantasy that meant no more to Teresa Fernandez than the spotted jaguar tumbling through the thatched roof of the peon's hut.

She rejoined the De Mello family and was escorted into dinner by her host. The wife of young De Mello was in no mood to make herself agreeable. Her husband displeased her the more by paying court to Teresa. He was flagrant about it. And she appeared to find it diverting. The talk had no significance, however, until Antonio chanced to remark:

"I went to the steamer this afternoon to look at our rooms. It was odd not to see Colonel Fajardo swaggering about, damning everybody in sight. This new *comandante* of the port reminds me of a retired schoolmaster, tiresomely virtuous and well behaved. Fajardo, now, was a character, wicked enough to please my taste. I miss him. What's this scandal about his disappearance? You hear the gossip of the wharf, Teresa."

"This is my first trip south since he disappeared, as you call it, Antonio. I heard nothing about him on the ship. What is the scandal?"

"Merely that he had left his girls and his debts behind him, with no farewells. He had been going the pace for years—I used to hear some wild stories in the clubs and cafés."

The elder De Mello broke in to say: "More than one jealous husband threatened to shoot him. He was beginning to break—liquor had the upper hand of him—and he fled in some kind of sudden panic, I imagine. A threat, perhaps, and his courage went to pieces."

"Strange. A born fire eater and a soldier with a record," was Antonio's comment. "The moral is, of course, that one must be virtuous. I shall take it to heart."

"I hope so," said Teresa, "or some day you may fly away, *pouf!* like Colonel Fajardo, and people will say shocking things about you."

The wife of Antonio was not interested in the petty scandals of Cartagena and low people of whom she was in ignorance. She said something sharp to her husband and

began to talk volubly herself, the plans for the summer in Paris, the new dances, the racy gossip concerning persons of importance. Teresa welcomed the respite. She found a glass of champagne very grateful. She had known dinner parties less fatiguing than this one. Antonio turned sulky and glowered at his wife. Teresa excused herself rather early. The elder De Mello escorted her into her own house that he might retrieve the monkey and take it back with him. This gave Teresa an opportunity to inquire, at a venture:

"Did you happen to meet the tall, fair-haired young man, a Mr. Cary, who was visiting my Uncle Ramon before he sailed?"

"Pardon me, Teresa, but Ramon had no visitors at all. Is this Mr. Cary a friend of yours? Did he say he was expecting to visit Ramon Bazán?"

"I inferred so. I am mistaken, then? You are quite sure?"

"Positive of it," exclaimed Alonso de Mello. "I was in the house several times during the last fortnight before he went away, with his business affairs to look over and so on. He was alone, I am sure. He always had that air of hiding away by himself. He preferred it."

"Thank you," said Teresa. "Mr. Cary must have changed his plans."

"Who is the young man, may I ask?"

"He was an officer in the *Tarragona* for a short time. Probably you have never heard his name. I thought Uncle Ramon might have taken him in his steamer for the west-coast voyage."

"I should have known it," replied the banker. "The last time I saw Ramon he told me that Captain Bradley Duff and the chief engineer were the only American officers on board."

"A pipe dream of mine, as you might say," exclaimed Teresa. The atrocious pun made her feel like giggling with a touch of hysteria. She controlled herself and harmlessly inquired:

"Do you know where to find the two servants if I decide to spend some time here?"

"Then you refuse to stay with us? I am afraid you must let me look for new servants. These two reported that the house was in order and gave me the keys. Where they went is beyond me. Your uncle was to send them word of his return."

"Never mind, Señor de Mello. I have not yet made up my mind what to do. It is a thing to sleep over."

He was too courteous to press her with interrogations. She was an independent girl accustomed to her own gait. Something he mentioned quite casually came like a light in the dark.

"I instructed my agent in Panama to let me know when the *Valkyrie* reaches Buena-ventura. Then you can cable your uncle if you feel anxious for his safety or wish to adjust your own plans. I mentioned, I think, that the steamer had passed through the Canal. She was delayed at Balboa for repairs after some heavy weather on this coast."

"Delayed at Balboa?" cried Teresa, with sudden eagerness. "I am glad he stopped to have his old ship patched up."

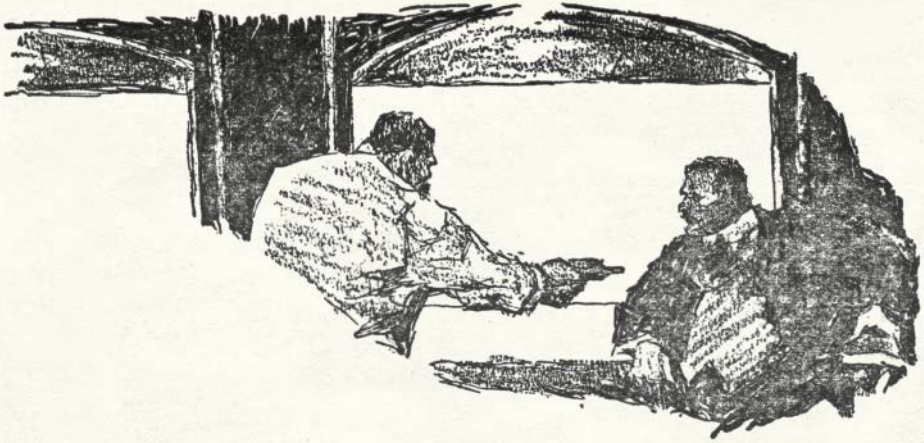
After Alonso de Mello had bade her good night she was able to discern quite clearly the path she was to follow. She would not try to find Richard Cary with cable messages and wait and wait for an answer which might never come. Her evidence that he still lived was so slight as to be grotesque. A brier pipe and an inquisitive monkey! Her faith was scarcely more than the shadow of things hoped for. She was ready to swear on the cross that she had read his death in the hard, gloating eyes of Colonel Fajardo.

Even though he were alive and had been in this house of mystery, this house that whispered of a carefully shrouded secret, why could she expect to receive any answer to a message? Old Ramon Bazán had carried his secrecy with him.

"His ship stayed at Balboa," said Teresa. "Then her officers and crew must have been ashore in Panama. That is where I must go to find out anything. There is nothing for me in Cartagena."

*To be continued in the next number, November 7th.*





# 'The Man the Cook Made

By Calvin Johnston

*Author of "The Jane—By Act of Providence," "Pioneer of Dust Storm Station," Etc.*

Showing how good—good railroading for instance—may come of evil cooking.

THE South Coast Limited, due at midnight, swept in from the stormy dark an hour late, and the switch-engine crew, after setting out the diner, watched the cheerful green tail light twinkle out of sight. The gleeful whoop flung back by the speeding locomotive emphasized the desolation of the yards, now silent and lifeless under the drive of black November rain. Even the old-timers of the night-yard service suddenly felt that life had rushed on past and left them cast away in this forbidding spot, and turned with a common impulse toward the shanty down the line whose window flashed redly at intervals, like that of a lighthouse.

They turned to their work desperately, that cozy haven in mind—black, rain-glittering figures under the circling lanterns, with the old croupy engine coughing answer to the signals. Luckily they had an unusually light switching list for a bad night and with the last car flung into its position they were all on the move for the shanty with the closing of the switch.

The door of the big soft-coal stove was closed, shutting off the red flare which had burst through the window in beacon rays; for a moment the crew stood filling their pipes and grinning comfortably as they listened to the slash of the black rain without,

and the roaring draft of the stove. All but the foreman, who groaned dismally.

"'Tis the cold sausages and sinkers he eats every night," explained Denny the old switchman. "But cheer up, foreman, good may come of it."

"Ye mean I will die in a few minutes," said the foreman; though he groaned, being on a diet of sausages and sinkers, he was scandalized by Denny's cheerfulness.

"How much good would come of that 'tis not for me to say," replied Denny philosophically; "but I was not considering it at the moment, having in mind the case of 'Cookhouse' Murphy, the man-killer, who brought Superintendent Rivets of the old P. D. to galloping dyspepsia and so made a man of him among men."

"If it is a true story I will listen to it," said the foreman, suspicious but glad to hear that there was any compensation for the suffering of dyspepsia, beside the irresistible flavor of the cold sausages and sinkers.

"A man believes what he wants to," observed Denny, "so whether this story is true or not makes little difference to ye, foreman. As I remember, the facts, so to speak, are these:

When Mr. Rivets took his first job as superintendent of the Plains Division, be-

ing transferred from the last end where he was only train master, he found the celebrated Fallon clique of officials making a very good thing out of the company. Conductors, agents and even the wrecking boss were in on the graft, which included every form of it from pilfering a wrecked freight train, and knocking down, to crooked ballast contracts. Dave Fallon, train master of the Foothills Freight Division, who had expected to succeed as superintendent, was boss of the ring; a stalwart he was, with swinging shoulders, and hair and beard coal black even at fifty years. 'Twas the tremendous good humor of Fallon, I think, which carried people along with him more than his sharp wits and illigant appearance; his hard blue eye was never unfriendly, his laugh was ready, showing, it seemed, a hundred white teeth. And when he first greeted Rivets as his new boss the superintendent was convinced that some whispers he had heard against the man were false.

But 'twas not many months till the signs of graft on the foothills end began to show and when Rivets would start an investigation a secret opposition was felt which stiffened the further he pushed it; witnesses were stubborn or passed the buck. At last two or three of the boldest grafters were discharged; but though Fallon was called in at the hearing of these cases and agreed in the firing of the men caught with the goods he had his organization so well in hand that they did not dare turn on him.

Of course the discharge of two or three petty thieves did not remedy the situation and it was nearly a year before Rivets suspected a fraud in the ballast contracts—which in that early day were made even by a train master—and called Fallon in to explain.

"You cannot expect me to convict myself on the little evidence you have here," said Fallon with good humor. "And why interest yourself in me farther than my duties as train master, which are to put the trains through the foothills."

"No train master could do that better," said Rivets; "and after this you can give it all your attention and I will handle the ballast contract."

Fallon in the tremendous humor of him laughed down at the superintendent and went back to his headquarters; and from the hour he got there there was the divil to pay through all the foothills, with power

failures and freight wrecks and even a burned bridge, so that a system blockade threatened. Of course Rivets got the grief, as superintendent, and being still new to his job became afraid that every wire from general headquarters about the trouble would be his discharge.

He wanted to protect the company from graft but he was a mild man by nature and experience had not taught him there is no such thing as a compromise with dishonesty, for where is honesty in such a bargain? Still, for all his mildness, he looked blackly on the rough gang around him and it was nip and tuck whether he would not fire Fallon and go down himself in the smash which was sure to follow.

And at this pass he was in the train master's office at sundown and Fallon called him over to his desk to show a wire from the general superintendent to Rivets. The wire advised that the G. S. and maybe the general manager also would be down on him in three days if the foothills blockade still threatened.

Fallon watched him read, and good-humoredly pushed another paper at him across the desk—a bill for ballasting from a contractor.

"I can get Fallon later," thought Rivets, driven to a desperate compromise to save himself, and pushing the bill back said: "Your O. K. is good."

The general superintendent did not come to the foothills, for the trouble stopped by magic; but Rivets was bluffed and the grafting went on and though promising himself for two years to call the gang he never felt himself strong enough with the management to risk the row. And then on the trail of Rivets, the poltroon, came a man who did not stop to bluff, a creature more fatal than Fallon and all the foothills gang—Cookhouse Murphy, the man-killer.

'Twas on a winter night and Rivets, working late in his office, had stopped to light his pipe, when he saw the door open a crack and a head like that of a lion pushed inside.

"Pull the shades," said the lion's head, and though the tone was cautious and husky it rattled the window so that Rivets turned to see what could be coming in there also.

"Why should I pull the shades?" asked Rivets.

"So that nobody can see me with you," explained the other.

"If you are that sensitive you can stay outside," said Rivets, but when the other explained he was an old friend and schoolmate Rivets was glad he had the shades to pull.

So the body followed the lion's head and it was Murphy, who used to live with his mother in the little house back of the Rivets' and play marbles with Rivets himself and frighten all the boys of the neighborhood out of their senses. "How is your mother?" asked Rivets.

"She got too rough with me," explained Murphy. "I ran away. But what good did it do me? The farther I go the rougher it gets."

Rivets asked where his hat was, with sympathy, and said he would get him a pair of shoes and a coat come to-morrow, and handed him a cigar.

"Thanks, superintendent. When do I eat?" he said, and Rivets hurried out to the lunch stand for a dozen sandwiches.

"Now we can talk in comfort," said Murphy, "about how you will hide me out," and Rivets repeated his words.

"Sure, you will never see a man traveling just to get somewhere in the shape I am in," explained Murphy. "He would only be traveling to get away from somewhere."

In a faint voice, for a man will expect the worst of old schoolmates, Rivets asked why he should do so.

"Y'understand I could never stand rough people," said Murphy, "and since leaving home I have moved on from several locations because of them. Till at last I came to a cow camp down in the Territory and asked for a job.

"You are too big and fat to ride a pony," said the foreman, "and seem tough enough to be a good cook."

"I am not tough and no bandy-legged foreman can call me so, but I can cook," I told him.

"Well, you have a job," he said, "Mr. Murphy. Go over and tell that big man at the wagon that he is fired and you have his job. If you have to fight him for it, 'tis all right with me; only be careful that both of you are not crippled, for the outfit must be fed."

"Right away, superintendent, I understood that I was among rough people, but after licking the cook, and a broth of a fight he made of it, I took charge of the wagon, for after the foreman had been so kind to

me I hated to leave him without any cook at all.

"But I had better moved on at the start, for the other bad men with the outfit began quarreling about the grub, beginning at the first meal and keeping it up for a week, till with a loss of temper I let one have it in the head with a biscuit. Over he went, and came up with his gun, though he shot too late to be of use to him. He did not even die of my bullet and yet I was arrested and convicted for the sake of the example and was on my way to the pen when I escaped the guard.

"'Tis grand of you, superintendent," said Murphy, fixing his old schoolmate with the same look which had frightened him into fits when a little boy, "to clothe and feed me and hide me out."

"Thank you," said Rivets faintly, and paced the floor. "I can think of no hiding place at all," he said. "Don't you believe you would be safer out of the country entirely?"

"I am too easily spotted to make the attempt," said Murphy. "I will be patient while you think again."

"Glory be, I can smuggle you out in my car," said the superintendent; "it is there across the tracks right now. You can be sheltered there to-night—it is empty, my chef having quit yesterday."

"Y'see what comes of thinking," said Murphy. "Now, in a white cap and apron and along of you in a private car I will not be suspected and there will be no need to leave the country at all."

Rivets, though a mild man, was no coward; and small shame to him that, remembering the bitterness against Murphy in the cow camp, and the man who was knocked down with a biscuit, a shiver of terror should run over him at Murphy's words.

"I like my coffee strong and black," said Murphy, "and eggs hard, scrambled in plenty of grease. Grease," he said, "and saleratus is the foundation of good cooking. And when I manufacture a flapjack, 'tis not one of the flimsy sort you can tear apart with a fork. 'Tis he-man cooking you will get, superintendent. And I remember we had the same tastes when we were boys and you had candy or cookies in your pocket."

Rivets paled and his stomach felt as cold as the grave. "But what can I do, and Murphy a fugitive asking shelter of me for

old time's sake, and ready to wreck my train any time if he does not get it!" he reflected. So he escorted Murphy to the car which was to take him down the division next day and went home filled with apprehension of the coffee and flapjacks.

Now as any man of learning who has thought on such things will tell ye at length, it is a lucky thing for mankind that misfortunes never come singly. For instance, if Superintendent Rivets had been a carefree man at the time Murphy descended upon him, he would soon have been brooding on nothing else and gone into a decline as a monomaniac, y'understand. But devil a chance for monomania did a superintendent have on that division, with a new grief every day to furnish distraction, and the old griefs of the Fallon crowd dug up as fast as they were buried. So it is that two or a dozen troubles are better than one, each fighting for first place in a man's mind and none of them holding it long enough to own him.

Of course Murphy had first chance of the day at Rivets, because he had his audience at breakfast every morning, and Rivets would respond with the gloomy coffee which left indelible stains on the table, and chase the slippery scrambled eggs around the platter with the fear of a man who is pursuing a danger he does not want to catch up with at all. But if he became peevish, a glance at Murphy towering above in white cap and apron and growling congratulations on his appetite would cause Rivets to reflect.

"Sure I must not criticize the poor fugitive," he would think. "Murphy is sensitive and has already suffered too much from the treatment of rough people." So for the sake of old times he would smile pleasantly to the growl of his old playmate as he had done many a time before when Murphy had sway as the boy handler of Rivets' alley. And instead of fighting the flapjack with knife and fork he learned to swallow it all of one piece, and when it was down Murphy would rub his own great stomach with envy.

"A happy man I would be with your appetite, superintendent," he would say; "but I am condemned day after day to prepare delicacies and see you bolt them like a lion, while I cannot eat the flapjacks at all without a misery in my stomach which would make me jump off the train."

But Rivets had no time at all to consider the after effect of his meals, y'understand, the last bite no sooner being down than another grief would seize him impatiently by the hair of his head. And the coffee, making him incoherent, he would babble to Murphy as he worked so that soon the cook knew as much of the affairs of the Plains Division as Rivets himself.

"I am out of luck, superintendent," said Murphy with sympathy, "that I am not free to take this Fallon crowd on myself to a finish fight. But what with the trouble at the cow camp and the cursed law taking the part of the sheriff against me I must be content to second ye in the kitchen," and having bought a cook book he would prepare all manner of delicacies to get Rivets in condition for the battle he felt sure would come.

At this time a new branch line had been surveyed on the west end and General Superintendent Regan, joining Rivets at Barlow, rode out to give the survey the once-over before construction began. Now this Regan was a man of craftiness, which he had cultivated all the more to reinforce the work of nature, who had made him little and scrawny. He it was who had given Rivets his division and though wishing the latter was less mild with some of the employees still backed him against the general manager as the best man for the job.

But before leaving on this trip the general manager had dropped in on him for a word. "I am making no accusations against your favorite," he said, "but I believe that Rivets is costing us too much money. Where it goes both in train service and maintenance of way is not for me to say right now, Regan. But the excess expense must stop, and if Rivets is fired in the investigation 'twill reflect on yourself."

"I will look to it," said Regan with confidence; nevertheless he took the road for the trip with the fear that Rivets had failed him after all and was slated to go.

But having craft he did not at once take up the grievance against Rivets on meeting him. Instead, he reasoned to himself: "Tis not what you see in the man himself which reveals him, but in his work whose expression he cannot change at will."

So Regan passed the day at Barlow exploring the yards and offices, passing the time with the men who never suspected at all he was searching for Rivets in them-

selves. "They are brisker at Barlow than formerly," he thought that evening as he boarded the car with Rivets; "and yet I see no sign of the sternness in the superintendent which is necessary to run a railroad."

Now, never had even the craft of Regan led him to study a cook and he did not study Murphy with an object in view, but he acknowledged an interest in the appearance of a lion's head from the gangway as the cook peered in to make sure it was no deputy sheriff come to dine. And he leant an ear to the clatter and growls from the kitchen, and sniffed the fumes of saleratus strong as sulphur as Murphy manufactured the biscuit. "'Tis the fiend's own cook Rivets has with him," reflected Regan, and in the course of conversation learned how he came to be employed.

"I tell ye in confidence," said Rivets in undertones, "for I am not the man to betray a schoolfellow," and Murphy came in and set down the biscuit with a crash and a pot roast smoking as black as the bottomless pit.

"Such is the delicacies I serve my friends," he said with a hard look, "and can eat divil a platterful myself for the misery in my stomach."

"It is tough luck, Murphy," said Rivets with sympathy, and after helping his guest attacked the dinner with rapacity. And Regan thought that now and again he heard a snarl above the roar of the train as his host chewed on the roast or broke into a biscuit as yellow as brimstone.

"Saints above," reflected Regan, "if Rivets is a sheep in business he is a wolf at the table," and began turning over the circumstance in mind with speculation.

For two or three days following they were out looking over the survey of the branch line and then returned to the car at Sundown, Fallon's headquarters.

Of course the train master was on hand to introduce his ballast contractor and land him a section of the construction work on the branch line. It struck Regan at the time that Rivets showed little enthusiasm for this contractor and his work, and yet at a show-down he indorsed him. "Now, the general manager," thought Regan, "would see collusion between Rivets and Fallon in putting over this contractor whose ballast work does not look good to me at all." But he listened to all that was said

without remark and laughed at the jokes of the illigant train master who invited himself to dinner at the car.

As Regan had done, Dave Fallon took an interest in the lion's head which appeared from the gangway as Murphy made sure that no deputy sheriff was present.

"General," said the cook to the general superintendent, "'tis not often I have the honor to cook for people of station, but a large learned book I have on the mysteries of cooking and have been studying for two days on cream puffs to do honor to the occasion. They will come on," he said, "immediately after the pot roast and biscuit."

"Many thanks," said Regan. "I will not soon forget the cream puffs," and again thought he heard a snarl from Rivets.

"By the Great Gun of Athlone!" thought Fallon, "this Murphy would be inconspicuous in a penitentiary but he is a suspicious character in a kitchen," and the fear of him became certainty when the sulphurous biscuit were crashed down on the table and the smudge of the pot roast blackened the air.

"Murphy should have a cinder net over the pot as we have in the stack of a locomotive," said Fallon aside to the general superintendent, laughing in the tremendous humor of him. He broke into a biscuit and whispered again, "'Tis diving in the crater of a volcano." Little attention Rivets paid to his guests, but sat baring his teeth at his plate, and to the surprise of Fallon the other guest soon followed the host's example and devoured the food with rapacity.

"Never have I appreciated the delicacies of the table till I encountered the arts of Murphy," exclaimed Regan earnestly. "My own chef will not cook the meat till it is done and his biscuit are no better than popcorn compared to these."

"Sure he is joking," thought Fallon in doubt, and then saw that he was not.

"Another biscuit for yourself, Fallon, and a chunk of roast," said Regan. "Is it possible there is not work enough for a train master on the west end to give him an appetite?" There was something in the manner and tone of Regan that Fallon did not like.

"By the fiend, I will show that I can go as far as he can," thinks the train master, and himself wolfs at the dinner, joking and laughing.



"Bring on the cream puffs," exclaimed Regan at last, and Fallon's laughter died and his heart sank as one was set down before him with a bang.

"I am still game," thought Fallon, "and devil a taste can be worse than the one I have now." So he ate on though silenced with apprehension. But even Rivets sat amazed by the enjoyment of the general superintendent who rolled the tough morsels of cream puff under his tongue and in the end asked for a second one.

But Murphy explained in disappointment that he had only manufactured four and one had not puffed at all because he had forgotten to put the saleratus in it.

"Well, I hope for better luck next time," said Regan, and lighted his cigar and sipped the indelible coffee with the air of a Turk full of hashish and dreaming of fabulous paradise.

"If you will excuse me," said Fallon, "I will go look after my trains," and walked up the yard dazed, with his eyes out of focus as if turning inquiring glances on his interior.

"I do not understand what is going forward in that car at all," he said, "that they should juggle with death in the form of Murphy's biscuit." But late that night the cream puffs stinging his imagination into life during a nightmare, he reflected:

"Sure, this Murphy is a desperado disguised as a chef, who is guarding Rivets in case trouble breaks out." And he gnawed his black beard and was consoled, because assassins were nothing to Dave so long as they were not in the kitchen.

For the next several days the two superintendents stayed on the west end inspecting here and there, and Fallon, going over the descriptions of bad men at large with the sheriff, found that of Cookhouse Murphy and gave the officer a tip. And in this he was moved by two reasons: First, he did not want Rivets encouraged by having a guard, and second, by personal revenge, for the cream puff had stung him to the quick. "A curse on Regan with his goat's stomach, who made me eat it," he said, at times starting up from his desk, and for two days was not himself at all, bawling and quarreling with his best friends.

When the car arrived he boarded with the sheriff who got the drop on Murphy as he put his head out of the gangway to see if an officer was there. "We have discov-

ered that the man is a dangerous criminal," explained Fallon.

To his astonishment there was no protest from Rivets, who sat still with the smile of the peace which passes understanding. It was Regan who took up the defense.

"Murphy is only a criminal at large, y'understand, Mr. Sheriff," he said with craft; "but here in the car he is not at large. And never was the likes of him as a cook. I do not see how Rivets would thrive without him, and as you know 'tis a serious matter for the county that the P. D. be well managed."

"I would like to oblige you, but what can I do?" said the officer shaking his head.

"Well, I will go his bail," said Regan.

"But as ye know, Mr. Regan," said the sheriff, "he is already tried and convicted and I have only to take him to the pen."

"Why are you after him?" demanded Regan; "because he fought a man in a cow camp? No. That has already been settled in court. You are after him because he escaped; if he had not escaped you would not be after him. And I tell you I will go his bail on this charge for a hundred dollars."

"If it was only legal," said the officer, scratching his head.

"Do you argue a point of law with me, the general superintendent of the P. D., who is himself law to a thousand voters in this county? Of course," said Regan, "when Murphy comes to you and gives himself up the bail money is to be returned to me," and he counted out the hundred. "It is understood."

"Now that you have explained the law—yes," said the sheriff slowly. "To be paid back to you when Murphy comes in and gives himself up."

"Do you understand, Murphy?" asked Regan.

"Yes," replied Murphy with reflection, "when I come in and give myself up."

"To safeguard you, sheriff," went on Regan, "we will make it a condition that Murphy shall not leave the car; so, not being a criminal at large you have no jurisdiction."

"Fair enough," said the sheriff, pocketing the money, and Dave Fallon durst not protest in a matter which the big boss made his personal interest.

So Murphy was saved and Regan con-

gratulated the two old schoolmates, while Rivets listened like a man going to his doom; and never again the peace which passes understanding appeared in his face.

That afternoon Regan left for the East and Rivets, with one more day left in the Sundown Yard, sat brooding till dinner was served. And during those few hours his expression changed from gloom to fear, from fear to desperation, till as dinner was served he huddled in his chair like a cornered rat and gave Murphy a poison look.

"I have a delicacy for dessert," growled Murphy, swollen with the triumph of the cream puffs, and at a shake of the lion's head Rivets crept to the table and shutting his eyes bolted the food with rapacity. But when opening them he beheld the dessert he was seen to start violently. "What is that?" he asked.

"A Napoleon," answered Murphy.

"A Napoleon!" said Rivets, his face twisting to that of a demon's. "It is Waterloo!" And rising he rushed from the car.

"What is the meaning of this hell which has broke loose on the west end?" demanded the general manager two days later of Regan.

"Easy," snarled Regan who was under the care of a stomach specialist; "I am in no mood to be rawhided."

"Messages, bulletins have been pouring in from Rivets, and to-day comes Train-master Fallon with a black eye and a scar over the crown where Rivets tried to scalp him. 'Tis reported your favorite hit the train master's office like a cyclone, calling 'thieves;' he found contracts and tore them up after the fight and has gone down the west end firing employees as he went and filling their places from the east end. At one station he was in a shooting affray and potted a ballast contractor in the leg."

"'Tis not for me officially to approve shooting and scalping," answered Regan,

*Another Calvin Johnston railroad story in the next number.*

"but it is a form of railroading which has its uses." And he added a few words of enlightenment.

"But what made Rivets hang fire so long and then explode this way?" asked the other.

"'Tis the way of mild and crafty men," said Regan; and that was all that the G. M. could get out of him. But later to his doctor he told the story with anxiety. "'Twas only a matter of a few days more of Murphy's delicacies," he said with a groan, "and I knew dyspepsia would spur Rivets to action. But I did not think it would drive him to shoot and scalp and destroy. I used myself as a decoy—I ate one of the cream puffs—I do not want to run amuck, doctor—but you must get in your cure quickly or the general manager's blood will be on your head."

"So dyspepsia made a fighting man out of Rivets," concluded the old switchman; "best of all it was chronic, so that soon he had the backing of the general manager and all the directors."

"What went with Murphy?" inquired young Hogan.

"When Rivets went back to the car and threatened to make him eat a biscuit he fled terror-stricken. It was told afterward that he became superintendent of eating on the I. X. L.—to be sure the dining-car mortality was heavy on that road, but I do not know as a fact that Murphy was superintendent, and facts are the whole sum and substance of what I am telling, y'understand."

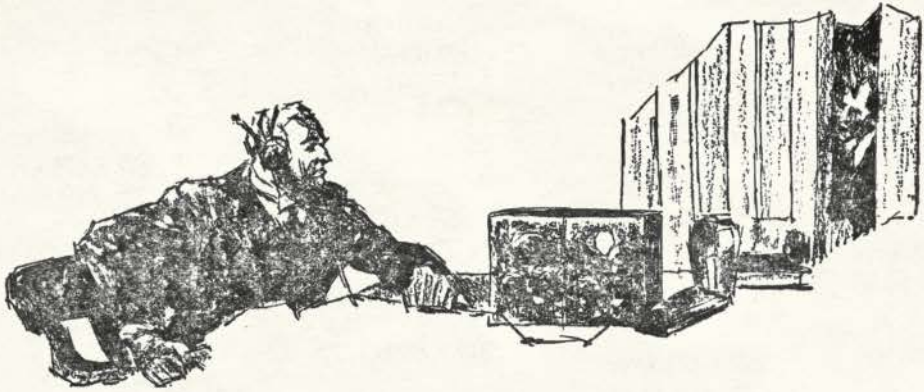
"Facts!" snarled the foreman, and then addressing them all in equivocal terms sent them out about their business. But they obeyed him as a dyspeptic, without resentment, even taking the trouble to remind him kindly that sausages and mince pie might yet make a man out of him worthy of the best days of railroading.



## MAKING DELAY A FINE ART

THE House of Representatives was in the midst of its fight last April over the size of the navy. The committee on naval affairs, uncertain of its strength, was sparing for time.

"If God had referred the ark to a committee on naval affairs," said a Texas congressman, "it's my opinion it wouldn't have been built yet."



# He Walked Like a Sailor

By Alan Sullivan

*Author of "Brains," "The Circuit of the Wild Swan," Etc.*

**By that token Mirrlees' guest was a dangerous man.**

**L**ITTLE Mirrlees was rather full of it that night. He had, that very afternoon, succeeded in rigging up his receiving apparatus and for the past hour sat drinking in the messages of the throbbing ether. They impressed him the more because they gave him an intoxicating and supremely novel sense of being in touch with humanity—without being bothered by it. And that was what he had always wanted.

A little man was Mirrlees, with a large protruding forehead, thin sensitive lips, bright restless eyes and a nervous inquiring manner. He lived quite alone since he had taken up writing. You can imagine him surrounded by a phalanx of semiwashed dishes, semisoiled linen and semiformed ideas, moving from one to the other, and happy, utterly happy because his cottage was three miles from anywhere. He was of the tribe that occasionally, but only occasionally, turns out something big, because he reckoned that he could interpret humanity without being soiled by its contact.

To-night he was in, a seventh heaven. He could participate without being contaminated. The set was good for a considerable range of wave length. He listened for a while to the three-hundred-meter stuff being broadcast from Manchester, then jumped delightedly to three thousand and laid his

quivering ear against the talk going on between Paris and Rome.

Presently, with an impulse that seemed in a grotesque sort of way patriotic, he switched back to the Manchester wave and came in on "The Gondoliers" played by a London company. He was tiring of this when there ensued a pause and a metallic voice, peculiarly dry and hard, cut into the music.

"Scotland Yard states that information is urgently wanted as to James Thomson, alias Bredin, alias Jenks, suspected of robbery and murder in Leeds. Thomson is about five feet four and extremely dark, broad shouldered, black mustache when last seen, heavy dark brows, and walks like a sailor. Dressed in blue suit, blue neckcloth, and soft black hat. Reward of—"

Just at this point some static interference messed things up and Mirrlees snorted indignantly. It was always the way with these newfangled contrivances. People chucked them on the market before they were half perfected. He was interested in that reward. Not that it would ever come his way, but it would help the plot to know how much it was considered worth while to put James Thomson out of further temptation. He bent his head over a little farther, shifted his glance from the picture to the door—and noticed that the handle was turning very slowly.

He blinked at this, at first with a mild curiosity, then with an odd consciousness that the nearest house was a half-hour walk distant. Also he could not remember having heard any one. Nor was any one expected at eleven o'clock at night. His throat felt rather queer, and in the same moment the door, which opened inward, began to move slowly—very slowly. He had not dreamed a door could move so slowly. Quite automatically he lifted the steel clip from his head and laid it on the table. The last thing he heard was a snatch of chorus from "The Gondoliers." This struck him as being absurdly out of place, considering everything.

Now between doors that are opened and doors that open there is a great gulf. This one was of the latter sort and presently he heard from the hall what seemed to be a sound. Perhaps it was not so much actual sound as the cessation of what we call silence, and it was a moment or two before he could distinguish breathing. And even then he was not sure, for it might have been his own. What convinced him was the very gradual projection beyond the edge of the door of a portion of a round black thing he took to be the top of a man's head. The hair seemed to be blue-black and rather oily. Mirrlees regarded it with intense interest, and swallowed again. Followed a dark, low brow—then nose and eye. At sight of the latter the little man stiffened.

He and the eye held each other for such time as may be computed by heartbeats. It neither winked nor blinked, a lustrous untamed eye in which was focused a pinpoint of strange and nameless light. Mirrlees had never seen one like it before. Then a shoulder and neck, thick and broad, the shoulder rounded with muscle, the neck like a round, full column covered with tawny skin. And all this time not a sound save that of breathing—some one's breathing. The rest of him was inside now. A short man, inordinately broad, clad in rusty blue, heavy flanked and bandy legged, his upper lip clean shaven but stained as though with blue ink. He shot a glance round the room that missed nothing, then fastened on the puny figure at the desk. From that the glance moved to the windows. These were shut, for Mirrlees had bored holes in the sash to admit the leads from his aërials. Suddenly the man laughed. He had seen on the table the remains of Mirrlees' dinner.

What happened immediately after that Mirrlees never quite remembered, except that in a very short time there was no food left. He had not known that a man could eat thus. When it was over the stranger, though to Mirrlees he was now not quite a stranger, demanded drink, and getting it, lit a short, foul-smelling pipe. At the first puff he leaned back and gave a deep grunt of content.

"Ever have an empty belly?"

Mirrlees shook his head, for this seemed simpler than speech. He had done a little dieting, but not worth mentioning. He was wondering how he would suggest to Thomson—for this was Thomson—that there were no valuables in the house and that there never had been. He wondered too if murder was ever committed just for the sheer joy of the thing. The surprise of his spirit, the suspense and breathlessness were now giving way to sheer terror. Perhaps up to this moment he had been too astonished to be afraid. He gripped the edge of the table tightly, so that his hand, thus anchored, might steady his voice when he was forced to speak.

"Your sort never has. What's that thing—a telephone?"

"It's—it's a wireless set. I—I've just put it in."

Mirrlees knew perfectly well that in this answer he had written himself down an ardent coward. But it went without saying that Thomson knew he was a coward. Otherwise he would have demanded what the devil the man wanted, and kicked him, or tried to kick him out. So it was too late for anything of that sort. He was abysmally impressed by Thomson's obvious strength and formidable assurance. More than that he carried with him an ineffaceable suggestion of wild and lawless happenings. The tanned skin, the big muscles, the quick, dark, roving eye all brought with them wild whispers of far seas and strange lands, of rubies and copper-colored women and palms and jungle sounds and the glitter of knives in the moonlight. Yes—he had good reason to walk like a sailor. "Oh, God," whispered Mirrlees to himself, "what shall I do now?"

"What's it for?" The dark eyes narrowed and fixed suspiciously while the thick fingers crooked and curved like blunt talons worn with use.

"Nothing—that is—except for listening to

places like Genoa and Trieste and Alexandria." Mirrlees reeled these off dizzily, knowing at the same instant that they were all seaports to whose byways the burly hulk beside him was probably no stranger. Then came a new wave of fear at the fiendish change in the man's expression. There was fear in that too, but the kind that glints formidably from a brute when he is cornered—and fights.

"Can I hear it? I've been there—to all them——"

The voice broke off, choked in the hairy throat, suggestive in a grim threatening way of what he had found there—and what, perhaps, left. Mirrlees had a vision of his leaving, but recoiled at picturing any more than that.

"Yes, you can hear," he said unsteadily. "Genoa is talking to Marseilles. It's Italian, and something about a ship—the *Santa Maria*. That's all I can make out."

"Gawd," croaked the big man huskily, "but I know her! She's a boat that ran from Ajaccio to Bona and along the coast to Algiers. What about her?"

"Wrecked, I think, on the Sardinian coast. I—I don't speak much Italian."

The man swayed a little with intentness of interest. His eyes were now full of wonder. He stared at Mirrlees, apparently did not see him at all, then began in a queer, low-pitched drone like the murmur of distant surf:

"The *Santa Maria*, that damned old barge—and Sospi, the swine who owned her, and tried to knife me in Leghorn. He only tried that once, mind you." He paused for a ruminating moment, brows lowered, nostrils expanding. "It was Sospi's woman at the back of it. A little woman, skin like old ivory—and black hair. She was tired of Sospi—and told me so. Then he found out. Easy enough, for the *Santa Maria* was only five hundred tons. I wonder if Sospi was on her when she piled up. Any lives lost?"

He shot this last out so explosively that Mirrlees jumped. The Mediterranean was dangerous water, too dangerous to explore in this company. He shortened his wave length to five hundred meters, conscious that every motion was being watched and weighed.

"I don't know. They did not say anything about that. This is London talking now. Like to listen?"

It was in his head that if this big brute,

for he was nothing more, could only be anchored to the desk for a moment by the sheer fascination of science there might at least be a chance to reach the poker and defend himself. If he could get a clear swing and hit just once it might possibly do. Also he wondered chaotically whether the skull would crack or merely be dented.

"Can't you talk back?"

"No, only listen."

Came a chuckle of "Give it to me;" and Mirrlees found himself removed into the corner next the window while the blunt fingers spread the steel clip over a prognathous skull. In this motion the stranger looked like some emancipated anthropoid who had emerged from No Man's Land to dabble with horny hands in the last offerings of science. There was something so outrageous about it that Mirrlees could hardly breathe. His bodily safety seemed now of lesser import. It was perhaps half a minute before the thing was adjusted. In the next second the coarse mouth opened wide.

"What's that mean?"

"I don't know, because I didn't hear."

"All I got was 'reward one hundred pounds.'" The massive shoulders lifted, the voice changed to a rumbling menace and the cornered look sprang back into the dark eyes. "How do I know you haven't offered one hundred pounds for help when you heard me come in?" He reached suddenly forward and seemed to gather half Mirrlees' body in one mighty grip. "You tell me that—quick."

"I couldn't if I wanted to," shrilled the little man, recoiling. "You talk yourself and see what happens. You can't—I tell you. You can't." He yelped this out, with dread in his soul that London might repeat into the very ears of the man now sought by the law his own description and the price set upon his head. "Talk!" he shouted again. "Talk and see what happens! Nothing will happen, I tell you. Nothing can."

The frenzy in his tones worked in past the closely fitting receivers, till the other, puzzled, freed his ears. Rank suspicion still marked his gaze but he glanced curiously at the black box in front of him. Then, in a burst, he began a queer, throaty jargon of English, Malay, Tamil and Hindustanee, throwing it at the wireless set as though defying the thing to talk back, jerking out word after word with the same laborious care as that with which one tries a new

fountain pen. The words themselves might mean nothing. Mirrlees took one long breath. Simultaneously he managed to tune swiftly to the Eiffel Tower wave length.

"What did I tell you? Put them on again and see what you get."

The man nodded and the glint in his eyes grew less formidable. Presently he twisted his head.

"It's French. I know that much." He paused, rubbed a bristling chin and sent Mirrlees a guarded, stealthy look that had in it the awakening of some new and disturbing consciousness. "What I want to know is if some fellow were needed for something damned important wouldn't this be the best way to find him? Eh, what about that?"

"It might," whispered Mirrlees.

"You know it would, don't you?" The voice rose raggedly with almost every word. "I've got no education, but I can see that for myself. Suppose they were after me. Eh, what about that? You know it would work. And what's more, I believe that's what it's for, too. Suppose it were me, I couldn't move as fast as that thing can travel. Haven't you been listening to Genoa since I got here? Spit it out!"

Mirrlees did not answer, and curiously enough no answer seemed required, the fugitive being caught up as it were for the moment by a grotesque pride in his own deductions. He had now no fear of anything Mirrlees might do, and whatever his fear of capture it was for the time submerged in something greater and even more breathless. Mirrlees, still watching, began to anticipate what the rest of the night would be like if spent in pacifying this criminal with successive offerings of scientific food. The milkman would arrive about eight. It was now eleven-twenty.

The intruder twitched the receivers from his ears as though he had lost interest in what the rest of the world was saying. It appeared that he had made no mistake so far and was determined to make none in the future. Presently he got up and rolled back to his seat. He walked like a sailor.

"You," he said, "what do you do here?"

"I write stories," answered Mirrlees unsteadily, with a sensation that heretofore he had had nothing to write about.

A filthy pipe came out, produced with an indolent ease that was eloquent. The man sucked at it noisily, narrowing his eyes.

"Stories about what?"

Mirrlees hesitated, for every tale he had written now seemed forced and pointless. "About the Orient," he stammered. "Burma, and all that sort of thing."

The pipe gurgled till Mirrlees felt sick. "Ever been there? You don't look it—ain't got the sign marks."

"No, but——"

"Then how the dooce can you write about it? Never smelled the jungle and the orchids?"

The fellow spat disgustedly. "In Burma you live upriver for a while, then you go mad. I went mad, like the rest of them. Same stinking sweet rottenness everywhere—living things growing straight out of dead ones, with more dead underneath. That's the jungle. No beginning and no end and never will be. Always like that. Nothing matters when you get there, and never will matter. That's the jungle. The brown women understand, and they're the only ones that do. I want some more whisky."

He shot out his request so explosively that Mirrlees jumped. In the same moment the latter realized that he had nothing to say in return about Burma while this incarnation of the Orient stood so masterfully over him. The man knew. It was in every line of the swarthy face, every swift movement of those dark and fiery eyes that seemed to flout the possibility of writing things one had not lived. Mirrlees experienced a strange and fleeting wonder as to what such a life was really like, with its desires and passions and wild unthinking ecstasies. No, he had never captured that, even on paper.

"I want some more whisky."

Mirrlees made an indefinite gesture and opened a cupboard door. He only touched whisky occasionally and a bottle lasted a month. When he turned back the man was again at the receiver, the clips over his bulletlike head. Then he turned to glower, his eyes narrowed, and full of an indescribable suspicion. They fastened on Mirrlees and seemed to bore into his very soul. The blunt fingers were opening and closing, opening and closing.

"God!" he said grimly. "What did I tell you?"

"You were talking about Burma," stammered the little man.

"Burma be cursed! They're after some one now. All I got is that he killed some

person, and walks like a sailor. Reward one hundred pounds. Look here, you!"

He swung in the chair, suddenly oblivious to whisky, his expression more and more formidable. Mirrlees could almost see alarm after alarm mounting in that reckless brain. The man was thinking desperately, thinking for his life.

"I heard a bit more than that," he said slowly. "Did you get anything before I came in? Tell me straight, or——"

Mirrlees moistened his lips. If he lied he might conceivably pull the thing off. But he feared that in lying he would betray himself by very eagerness. Besides, he had never been any good at bluffing. It was perhaps better to tell the truth and treat it as a matter of small importance. He drew an uncertain breath.

"I got some of it."

The man burst into a roar of laughter. "I knew you had when you pulled that Burma stuff just now. So when I dropped in you thought I was the chap they're after. Isn't that right?" The laughter changed imperceptibly to something indescribably menacing.

"Yes," faltered Mirrlees, "for just a minute I did. Then when I really saw you I knew of course that—that it couldn't be you."

"How?" The word came out in one great burst. It made a fool of Mirrlees and called him a liar all in an instant. "Wears blue clothes and walks like a sailor, eh! Why don't you answer? Think I'm afraid of you? What about my clothes? Do I walk like a navvy?"

The little man shook his head. "I—I don't—I don't know who you are."

"You say that, but you don't mean it, same as you write about things you don't know. First thing in the morning you'll go to the police and tell 'em about me. Leastways you think you will—but you won't. Suppose I was to tell you who I really was, would you believe it? Not much. But that's what you're going to tell 'em just the same. I'll see to that in a minute. Gimme the bottle. No, I don't want water. Now come here. I'm tired and my feet are sore."

He took Mirrlees by the shoulder and, steering him across to the sofa settled his great bulk against the cushioned end. Then he put his feet in Mirrlees' lap and scowled across the bottle held close to his lips.

"In ten minutes I'll be asleep—but only part of me. The rest will be watching for you to move. If you do I'll all wake up and you'll wish you hadn't moved. It's a dodge you get in Burma, among other places. Funny you never heard of it." He tilted the bottle with a grunt of satisfaction. In less than ten minutes it was empty and the thick arm hung slack and pendant.

Mirrlees did not stir a muscle. He was conscious first of the prodigious weight in the great boots that flattened his lean thighs till knees and calves began to feel numb. The man's head lay back, baring the bristling throat. He slept but he was nevertheless obviously alert, the whole of him, even to the short black lashes that ringed the copper-colored cheeks. He seemed almost more fearless asleep than when awake and it was this casual contempt for any procedure on Mirrlees' part that did more than anything else to deepen the fear in the little man's breast. Here, blind and recumbent beside him, was the immemorial East. He could touch and feel it, while from the prone body emanated a strange sharp odor not to be found in England. Here was the door to uncounted and mysterious scenes. But on the other side of that door was murder.

This last fact began to work like acid in his brain. What could he do to aid the law of the country? It was a bitter thing to be only half or a quarter of a man in point of strength. The outlaw's breathing was slower and quieter now and Mirrlees' eye was drawn irresistibly to the fireplace close beside. The poker was there. Then he must have moved the boots slightly without knowing it, for in the next second he perceived that the brown lids had opened just a fraction.

"Drop that," came a far-off rumble.

Mirrlees dropped it hastily and felt the thin hair crawl on his head. "Have some more whisky?" he hazarded.

Followed a little silence and presently a grin of satanic wisdom. "You reckon to make me drunk and go for the police. I can't get drunk on that stuff. Yes—trot it out. Would you sooner I'd drink or sleep for a while? It's your booze."

He was instantly assured that this was a matter of entire indifference to the owner of the whisky, whereupon the second bottle went the way of the first. After this sleep followed more heavily. In ten minutes Mirrlees made an infinitesimal move, appar-

ently undetected. His breath came faster with the poker in his grip, and he was nauseated by the fumes projected toward his face in great regular gusts. The man was a brute beast and should be handled accordingly. Another move and the poker was balanced. To hit straight he must shift sidewise. He managed this in minute fractions, his pulse at his finger tips, every muscle quivering. Now he was ready.

And then it seemed a horrible thing that he was about to do. He had never wanted to hit any one before and had it not been that this man's hands were stained with blood Mirrlees would have accepted the shame of the situation, swallowed his abasement and seen the next hour through without moving. But now he stood for decency and order and justice. With this came the odd suggestion that if he could pull the thing off, stun the outlaw, bind him and turn him over to the police the door between reality and make-believe would be opened for all time. And this was worth anything. There would be real blood in his writings ever after. He gulped noisily, lifted the poker a shade higher and struck.

In that instant the man opened his eyes. It appeared to Mirrlees that he blinked like a sleepy cat and with inconceivable swiftness jerked his head on one side. There was no attempt to rise but an upflung arm curved into a guard, past which the poker crashed landing not fairly where aimed but with a glancing stroke that thudded on the bulge of the sunburned temple. This place became immediately crimson. Followed a roar that was half a groan and the big body grew limp. The brown lids quivered and closed. Then came blood, pumping endlessly as from a reservoir.

"Oh, God!" whispered Mirrlees. "Oh, God, what have I done?"

He got up, shaking. The man was about to die. There could be no doubt of that. The brown face was now ashen, or rather a dirty yellow white, horribly suggestive of death. The poker lay on the motionless breast.

Fear descended and filled the cottage. Mirrlees stared about. Everything was changed. Was this where he had lived for years? He heard himself gibbering meaningless things. Followed a sort of ghastly

calm in which he deliberated what to do next. Then because he would have to face the inevitable he put a trembling hand into the man's breast pocket. Papers and a note case. Money—some thirty pounds. The proceeds of robbery, this. But who had been the victim? He laid them down. Good evidence! Still his glance wandered, till it rested on the wireless set. If he could only hear that message from headquarters again it would help enormously. If he could but send a wave back saying that—that something had been done in the matter it would fortify him amazingly. He moved across, not daring to look behind.

Paris was transmitting conference stuff to Vienna. He got that much but it was unimportant compared to the thing on the sofa. Then Berlin, talking to Rome about some bank. He knew that the fascination of listening had dissolved, but the mere fact still gripped him. Then a silence, followed by a confused roar as he tuned to the London wave. Then a voice, metallic, dry and hard cut.

Scotland Yard informs all police stations that James Thomson, suspected of murder in Leeds, has been arrested in Derby. Proofs of the crime were found on—

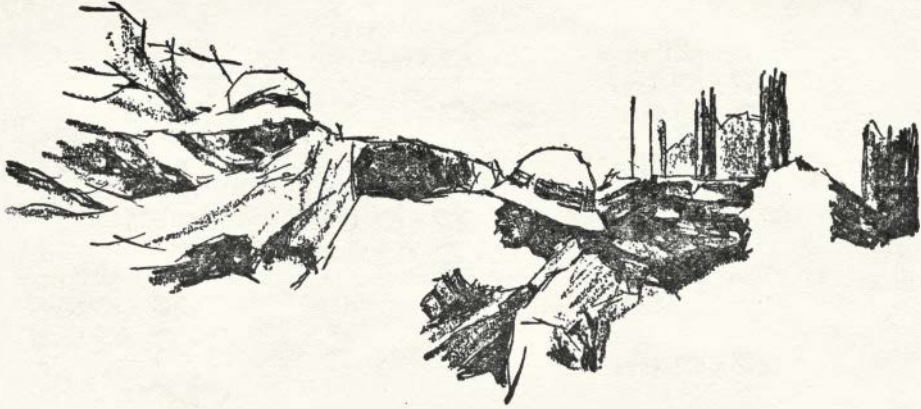
Mirrlees heard no more, because the whole world immediately began to shout into his receiver, great, mocking, derisive shouts that drove him mad. What had he done? They would be talking about him to-morrow night. He plucked off the steel clip. There wasn't much time to act now. The question was where he should go.

At that moment he heard another voice and turned slowly, as though mesmerized. The big man was sitting up, a frightful scarlet figure with the semblance of a face. His thick fingers held the note case and packet of papers. A second later he nodded contentedly and looked up. There was neither anger nor revenge in the look but a sort of massive and understanding compassion.

"Poor little devil!" he rumbled. "Nice way to treat a man just discharged from his ship, who is walking home to save money. Knocked till I was tired, I did, but you couldn't hear with those things over your head. I only wanted a bit of a lark. Then you got frightened, and hooked me up with that hundred pounds. Poor little devil!"

*Look for more of Mr. Sullivan's work in early issues.*





# The Storm Center

By Burton E. Stevenson

*Author of "The Buhl Cabinet," "The Fate of Mona Lisa," Etc.*

(A Five-Part Story—Part V.)

## CHAPTER XXX.

### THE CHEST.

THE four men were blinking on the threshold, for Delage's torch was shining full in their eyes and blinded them for an instant. The thought flashed through O'Neill's head that this was the end of everything, and he stepped to Nada's side and snatched out his pistol. But Delage, in a voice quivering with rage, shouted something in Arabic at the newcomers and O'Neill was astounded to see them drop to their knees and bow their heads.

Then he laughed to himself. In the dim light, Delage's impersonation was succeeding—for the moment, at least!

"What do you here, you dogs?" Delage demanded.

"We heard a noise, O Mullah, as we passed on our round," one of the men replied without raising his head. "The door was open——"

"Enough!" broke in Delage. "I was about to summon you. Pick up that small chest yonder and follow me."

And O'Neill who, of course, understood nothing of all this, was more and more astounded to see two of the men, at a word from their leader, spring to their feet, run to the chest and lift it between them.

"You will bring up the rear and lock the

door," said Delage in French to O'Neill, and handed him the bunch of keys; "or at least pretend to lock it. There is another at the head of the stair which you must also lock. Keep your eye on these fellows. Do not hesitate to kill them if there is any sign of danger." And taking Pat by the hand, as any bridegroom might, he stepped with her across the sill into the corridor outside.

Then O'Neill understood.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he gasped, and lapsed into speechless admiration of this effrontery.

As the little procession passed out, he followed, pushed shut the heavy door, and rattled a key in the lock.

Delage was walking ahead in stately dignity, with no appearance of haste. Pat was beside him and he was leaning toward her as though to whisper sweet nothings in her ear. Indeed, O'Neill told himself with a smile, that was probably exactly what he was doing. Then came the leader of the squad and the man with the torch, holding it high to light the way ahead; then the two men with the chest. Nada had fallen naturally into place beside him. She had drawn her cloak about her face.

Delage was magnificent. From the rear he was Ahmed to the life. He had caught perfectly the slow dignity of movement which the Marabout affected. As long as

he could keep his back turned to the guards he was safe, but once they got a good look at his face——

O'Neill gripped his pistol grimly. It would be their last look on anything in this world!

They went slowly along the corridor, nearly suffocated by the fumes from the torch, then up a narrow stone stair and through a doorway opening on the corridor above. Here too there was a heavy door which O'Neill closed carefully and made elaborate pretense of locking.

"Bring me the keys," said Delage and O'Neill went forward and gave them to him.

Delage placed them in the pocket of his tunic with ostentatious care.

"We go to Teniet," he said to the four guards. "Two of you will carry the chest to the outer court; two of you will get horses from the stables, with an ass to carry the chest. Wait!" he added as they turned to go. "Know you what has become of the servant of this man?"

"He waits in the court, O Mullah!"

"With the horses?"

"With three of them, O Mullah."

"Where is the other?"

"The white-haired *roumi* mounted it and rode away with Sidi Yada, O Mullah."

"So!" said Delage, and he translated this information to O'Neill. "It seems we shall have to go to Teniet," he added.

"You are going to take that risk?"

"I must do what I can," said Delage in the same tone. "I shall not be sorry to settle accounts with the priest!"

"Neither shall I," O'Neill assented; "but it is mighty dangerous!"

"Yes," said Delage with a shrug, and turned back to the guards. "We shall need two horses and an ass," he added to their leader. "Hasten!"

"I thought we were going to use the camels," objected O'Neill.

"The guards would suspect something certainly if they saw us ride away on camels which they know very well do not belong to me. We will start on the horses and change to the camels at Teniet. You will send your man down to Souffi with orders to precede us and wait beside the road at Teniet. He will give him this ring for a sign," and he slipped a signet from his finger. "Is everything understood?"

"Yes," said O'Neill. "It is proving easier than I thought."

"We are not safe yet," Delage warned him grimly.

He led the way along the corridor in the direction taken by the four natives and in a moment came out upon the colonnade bounding the court. The moon had arisen and the court was almost as light as day. Belayèd could be seen there, drowsing on a stone, the bridles of his three horses over one arm.

"Go," said Delage to O'Neill. "I will stay here in the shadow."

Belayèd started wide awake at O'Neill's touch.

"Listen carefully, Belayèd," said O'Neill.

"There is a plot against us here and we are in great danger. You will mount your horse and ride to the foot of the hill, where you will find a man waiting in charge of six camels. They are the camels of Sidi Abdullah and the man is Souffi, his servant. You will give him this ring and tell him to go with the camels to the foot of the hill on which stands Teniet and wait for us there in the shadow beside the road. You will yourself ride with him to make sure there is no mistake. You understand?"

"Yes, monsieur," Belayèd answered, slipped the ring upon his finger and sprang into the saddle.

"Tell the gateman to leave the gate open, as Ahmed Ammar will pass in a moment," O'Neill added.

"Yes, monsieur," said Belayèd again, and clattered across the court.

O'Neill followed him anxiously with his eyes. Would the gateman open? But it seemed to be all right, for after a moment's parley the gate swung wide and Belayèd rode through.

Ahmed's men meanwhile had roused some sleepy stableboys who presently led two horses and an ass into the court. The horses were quickly saddled but to secure the chest to the back of the ass was a difficult task. It was done at last, but it was evident that the beast could not proceed faster than a walk with so awkward a burden. He was protesting against it violently, in a voice which roused all the echoes of the court, and brought the chief of the guards out to see what was going on.

Everything was ready, and Delage, drawing his hood a little closer, stepped out into the moonlight, leading Pat by the hand:

It was a curious cortège and the chief of the guards regarded it attentively. Delage

in his red burnoose and flashing tunic, Pat in riding breeches and leggings and without a hat; a woman wrapped in a dark cloak, whose identity must have puzzled the chief, and finally O'Neill, also hatless, one hand in the pocket of his jacket, ready for the explosion which seemed likely to burst at any moment.

The chief scratched his head in perplexity but the figure which Delage made was so impressive and the nod he gave him as he passed so forbidding that he dared ask no question.

He did however venture to come forward to hold his master's stirrup.

"You do not require a guard, O Mullah?" he asked.

"No," said Delage as he swung himself into the saddle. "You will await me here."

"But the ass requires a driver."

"Give the staff to the *roumi*," said Delage with a gesture toward O'Neill, and the chief, with a grin, placed in O'Neill's hand a stout stick with which to encourage the donkey.

A moment later they were riding out through the gate. As it swung shut behind them O'Neill drew a long breath of relief. The donkey had proved unexpectedly tractable.

"But I can't drive him all the way to Teniet," he said. "We'd never get there."

"We shall have to turn him loose at the foot of the hill," said Delage.

"And abandon the chest?"

"Yes; there is nothing else to do."

"But that would be a shame!" O'Neill protested. "Can't we hide it somewhere and come back——"

"Come back!" broke in Delage impatiently. "It would be death to come back! Besides, where could we hide it? It would certainly be discovered."

A brilliant idea occurred to O'Neill.

"I could bury it in the ruins," he said. "Nobody would find it under all that débris."

"It would delay us too much."

"It would not delay you at all. Ride on to Teniet and get Landon. By the time you have done that I can catch up with you."

Delage was looking at him with a smile.

"It might do," he agreed. "Are you sure you know the road?"

"Of course I know it."

"Very well, then. Souffi will await you at Teniet, if we find it necessary to ride on."

"I'll soon join you!" cried O'Neill jubilantly.

"I shall be very worried till I see you again," said Pat.

"I also," said Nada, her eyes on his, and she waved her hand to him in a gesture which was almost like throwing a kiss.

He watched them for a moment as they rode away in the moonlight. Then, with a blow of the stick, he turned the donkey's head northward and started him off along the road. But he developed a sudden reluctance to leave Tijdad behind and O'Neill was forced to dismount and walk behind him, with frequent and violent encouragement. In this fashion he made fair progress, but more than half an hour had elapsed before he saw the white shimmer of the tent against the dark background of the hill where the ruin stood. He reached it at last, tied his horse to the tent pole, and pausing at Belayè's quarters to get a shovel, flogged the ass up the steep side of the bluff.

Once on top he considered the ruin attentively. In a moment he had made his plan. The excavation had been carried along the side of a crumbling wall some six or eight feet high, which remained poised insecurely without the support the débris had given it. To the foot of this wall O'Neill drove the donkey, untied the chest and let it fall crashing to the ground. Relieved of its burden the donkey cantered joyously away in the direction of its home.

With his shovel O'Neill dug a hole at the bottom of the excavation, pushed the chest into it, and covered it quickly with débris and loose stones. Then he examined the wall. If he could pry two or three stones from its base, a push apparently would send it over; but it proved to be stronger than it looked. With the greatest difficulty, he managed to remove two stones, but when he tested it, he found it as firm as ever.

The best he could do was to fill in the excavation about the chest and trust to luck. So he went feverishly to work and at the end of ten minutes paused to contemplate the result. Where the chest had been there was now just a heap of stones and broken tile and rubbish, like a hundred others scattered about the ruins.

He must let it go at that.

With a last look around he turned away and hastened down the hillside, pausing only

to restore the shovel to the place where he had found it. Then he untied his horse and sprang into the saddle.

He had been a long time—at least an hour; and he urged his horse forward over the loose rubble. Once on the road he shook out the reins and dug his heels into its ribs. There ahead was Tjedad; a little farther on the *zawia*; and with a sigh of relief he swung his horse's head to the east. It would be fair going now all the way to Teniet.

And at that instant a gunshot from the hill above stabbed the night.

There was another—and another.

He knew what had happened: the trick had been discovered—Ahmed's body also, perhaps. He could imagine the guards getting out their horses and saddling them in frenzied haste. In a moment the pursuit would begin.

Well, the others at least had a good start. As for himself, he could hold their pursuers back for a time; and he set his jaw and rushed on through the night.

But what was that curious glow upon the sky ahead, like the red reflection of an angry fire?

He turned to glance behind him and his heart gave a sickening leap. For from the top of the hill a great red flame leaped upward—a beacon to rouse the valley.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### THE FLIGHT.

Delage and the two women had started off briskly along the road to Teniet but before long their pace slackened. The same thought was in all their minds. It was Pat who finally voiced it.

"I feel very mean and selfish," she said, "riding off in this way and leaving Mr. O'Neill to his fate."

"So do I," agreed Nada. "One of us should have gone with him."

"But that would have been foolish," protested Delage in a voice which showed that he himself was not entirely at ease. "Besides we are not leaving him to his fate. He will soon catch up with us."

"I have a feeling that some disaster will meet him!" said Nada, and glanced nervously back along the road.

Unconsciously they had all drawn rein.

"But we cannot go back now!" Delage objected. "We must go on as we had

planned. Nothing can happen to him. Ahmed will not be missed before morning."

"It seemed to me," said Nada, "that that man who held your stirrup, the captain of his guards, suspected something. He may decide to investigate."

"He will never dare venture into Ahmed's bower," asserted Delage, but his face was thoughtful and troubled. "In any event we must go on."

"Yes, I suppose so," Nada agreed, and they started on again, but at a walk.

"Monsieur O'Neill, like all Americans whom I have ever met," Delage continued, "is governed by instinct rather than by reason. They are ready to take any risk rather than be defeated. He could not endure it to abandon that old chest."

"You did not seem at all eager to do so yourself," his sister pointed out.

"Nevertheless I would have abandoned it, because my reason told me that was the wisest thing to do. It is probably empty like all the others," he added with a shrug.

"It seemed very heavy," said his sister.

"A chest like that is always heavy."

"Perhaps it is where Ahmed kept his jewels," Pat suggested. "Unfortunately he had taken many of them out to-night—perhaps all of them. I should have told you."

Delage laughed quietly.

"You mean the ones in the little boxes on the table?" he asked. "Do not worry. I am not blind!"

"You have them?"

"Yes."

For a moment they rode on together in silence.

"I know what is in your mind," said Delage at last. "You are thinking that I am not a pleasant character. I am an adventurer, yes; but I assure you that I am neither a murderer nor a thief."

"I had never supposed so," Pat said quickly.

"If Ahmed is dead," Delage went on, "it is because he sought to deal death—and worse than death—to others. These jewels did not belong to him; they are the spoils of war, of murder, of every sort of crime; they belong to whoever can take and hold them. It is not improbable," he added, "that we ourselves will be unable to do so."

"But you do not need to tell me all this," said Pat. "I know it."

"I wanted to be sure you understood my feeling.\* The law which prevails here is the

law of force, the right of the strongest. We must subscribe to it."

"I understand," said Pat again.

"Besides," Delage added, "the jewels are yours to do as you please with; I have already promised you that!"

They had come to a turn in the road where it curved around a projecting spur of the hills and he drew rein and looked anxiously back. But there was no one in sight.

"We are losing many precious minutes," he said as they went slowly on again. "I am afraid——"

"I also," broke in his sister as though unable to keep silence any longer; "not for ourselves but for Monsieur O'Neill. He is very brave and very impetuous."

There was a quality in her voice which caused Pat to look at her quickly. She had thrown back the hood of her cloak, and for the first time, seeing her face thus in the moonlight, with its guard down as it were, Pat realized how its strange beauty was underlaid with sadness. There was something about the eyes, the lips, the whole expression, which told of many things seen and many things endured. With a quick glow of admiration and sympathy Pat reined her horse close to the other woman's side, permitting Delage to ride on ahead.

"Do not worry about Monsieur O'Neill, madame," she said. "He is very impetuous, it is true, but he is also full of resource. He will get through to us somehow."

Nada looked at her with a little smile of understanding.

"Thank you, my dear," she said.

"What was it impelled you to embark on this wild adventure, madame?" asked Pat impulsively.

"I was sick of the world," answered Nada simply. "Disgusted with it—I had reason to be. And the war had been so horrible. You cannot imagine how horrible it was, seen from the inside. I felt that I could not stand it any longer—I wanted to get away and forget myself. I was ready for anything. Besides, my brother needed my help."

"But the danger."

"The danger—I never thought of it. Whether I lived or died, it did not matter. And you—you also are here."

"I came to be near my father," said Pat, and choked back a sob. "He also needed my help."

"Poor little one!" said Nada, and leaned

toward her and patted her hand. "That is always the way; women are always doing foolish things because men need them! But do not be sad. Louis will find your father. He always does what he promises."

"I know," said Pat softly. "I think him very wonderful."

Nada smiled.

"He is not bad—Louis," she agreed. "But do not idealize him. What he needs is some one to keep him in order, to hold him to the earth. He too often permits his imagination to run away with him—as in this affair!"

Pat turned this over in her head, smiling a little to herself. She could scarcely imagine herself keeping this man in order or holding him to the earth. Indeed, she was not quite sure that she wanted to hold him to the earth!

They came up with him again a moment later. He had drawn rein and was peering anxiously back along the road, which lay empty in the moonlight.

"He should be here by this time," he said; "we have ridden very slowly. Something has detained him."

"What is it you fear?" asked his sister, looking into his face.

"The captain of the guards," Delage answered gloomily. "You were right about him—he had his nose in the air. I can see what he will do: he will discover that my camels have disappeared and he will go to my quarters to tell me and will find them empty. It will occur to him that the voice of the man for whom he held the stirrup had an unfamiliar ring and that he did not see his face. He will think it more and more strange that his master should go to Teniet to-night. He will wonder what was in the chest. He will find the treasure room unlocked. He will hesitate a long time, but sooner or later he will rouse the house, there will be a search, and then——"

He finished the sentence with a significant gesture.

They rode slowly on again with heavy hearts and came at last to the foot of the hill below Teniet. There they found Souffi and the camels waiting in the shadow of a row of olives. The camels were kneeling, ready to be mounted.

Souffi came quickly forward.

"Where is the other man?" Delage inquired.

"He rode on to the south, sir," Souffi an-

swered. "I told him to do so, since I thought there would be no camel for him. I understood there were four of you."

"That is right," nodded Delage; "the fourth will arrive presently;" and the three dismounted and gave Souffi their bridles.

Delage paced up and down for a moment in indecision.

"Well, I will go," he said at last, and looked up the hill toward Teniet. "If he is not here when I return I will send you on with Souffi and go back to look for him."

"Why do we delay, sir?" Souffi ventured to inquire.

"One of our party is up yonder," Delage answered with a gesture toward Teniet.

"You go to search for him?" asked Souffi quickly. "But in that case I should go with you."

"No; you must stay with the women. Get them on the camels."

"If there is danger of a pursuit," said Souffi, "it would perhaps be better that we do not take this road. There is another over the hills that I know—it is a very difficult one but it would be more safe."

"Perhaps you are right——" Delage began, and stopped.

From the hill above them came the report of a gun, followed in an instant by another and another.

They stared at each other breathless.

"Look, sir!" said Souffi and pointed to the west.

There, away across the valley, a new star had come into being, low against the horizon—a red star which glowed and grew larger even as they watched.

"They have lighted a beacon at Tijdad," said Souffi.

Delage looked at it for one long instant.

"Where is this road?" he demanded.

"It is back there, not far."

"Toward Tijdad?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Good!" cried Delage. "Perhaps we can save him yet! They will be after us in a moment. Listen!"

From the dark hill above them came a chorus of excited shouts. The Hamadsha were arming!

Delage caught the bridles of the three horses, led them out to the road, and with a savage lash sent them clattering away to the south.

"Now mount!" he cried, and lifted Pat to the back of the nearest camel. "Here,

like this, with your feet on this support. Pass this strap around you. Now, hold tight!"

There was a tremendous upheaval as the camel jerked himself to his feet.

"All right, Nada?"

"Yes," she answered from the back of the camel where Souffi had placed her.

"Forward, then!" cried Delage and sprang into the saddle.

A moment later, with Souffi in the lead and Delage in the rear to keep the other camels in line, they were drifting like a shadow back along the road to Tijdad.

Pat's heart was pounding furiously. The swaying motion of the camel upset her; she felt utterly impotent perched high on the back of this huge beast. And she realized that her father had been abandoned to his fate. There was no help for it. To try to save him would mean the useless sacrifice of themselves. But for a moment her spirit failed her and she leaned helplessly against the breast strap, shaking with great, despairing sobs.

For ten minutes the little caravan moved swiftly and silently through the night. Then Souffi turned his camel to the south, down a steep declivity at the side of the road and along a scarcely perceptible track which ran up a rugged valley between two spurs of hill. Delage glanced back. They could not be seen from the road.

"Stop here, Souffi," he called, "and wait for me."

He made his camel kneel and sprang to the ground.

"I am going back to the road," he said. "There is a chance that he may pass."

Pat, partially recovered from her breakdown, wiped the tears from her eyes and looked after him with adoration in her heart. Such a man! How could she hope to hold him—she, so ignorant, so inexperienced! At least she could keep on loving him; she could treasure the memory of such golden moments as they might have together!

"Listen!" cried Nada.

From far down the road came the sound of a shot—the flat crack of an automatic—then another—then silence.

But only for a moment. A scattering volley answered.

Delage was in the middle of the road waving his arms. He had thrown back his hood.

Around the curve of the hill a dim figure came rushing, with a clatter of hoofs. "O'Neill!" Delage shouted. "O'Neill, O'Neill!"

And O'Neill saw and heard and understood. With a jerk he pulled his horse back upon its haunches.

"Quick! Quick!" panted Delage, and dragged him out of the saddle, then with a kick sent the horse galloping on again. "This way!" he said, and pulled him off the road, down the declivity, into the shadow of a huge boulder.

Even as he did so a rabble of native soldiers, their burnouses bellying behind them, swept around the curve. Far ahead they glimpsed the fleeing horse and yelled with savage triumph. In an instant they had flown past.

"Now," said Delage; "this way!" and crouching low he led O'Neill along the gully to the spot where the camels waited.

"Oh, glorious, glorious!" cried Pat as the two came into sight, and the tears were running down her face again, tears of joy and pride. She clasped her heart; she longed to throw herself into the arms of this man. "Louis, come here!" she commanded; and Delage came and reached up and kissed her hand. "I adore you!" she said, smiling down at him through her tears.

O'Neill, panting and exhausted, glanced up into the face of the other woman. How beautiful she was! And then he saw that she was bending toward him, her face very tender, her hand extended. He took it in his own and pressed it against his lips.

"Give me your hand, O'Neill!" cried Delage, his voice vibrant with emotion, and O'Neill gave him his hand with a grip which had in it all his affection and admiration. "It was not for that!" laughed Delage, whose face was shining. "It was to assist you to mount. Have you ever ridden a camel? No? I thought not! Step up here; place your feet so. Now hold tight!"

O'Neill felt himself thrown violently backward and then forward. But he was scarcely conscious of it. Nothing could hurt him or astonish him any longer. For in his heart a hope had dawned—a hope seemingly so ridiculous that he scarcely dared look at it.

Souffi spoke to his beast and a moment later they were climbing swiftly up among the hills.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

## A DREAM AND AN AWAKENING.

The trail, for it was really nothing more, along which Souffi was leading them mounted rapidly between two rugged hills. It was the old pass north and south over the main ridge of the Aurès, now disused except by wandering goatherds driving their stock to market at Constantine and searching for a little pasturage along the way. Conversation was impossible, but O'Neill's heart was so full that he welcomed the enforced silence. It gave him opportunity to regain his self-control and arrange his thoughts.

For the first time in his life, he had shot at a human being in cold blood, and shot to kill. The leader of the *goum*, mounted upon a horse of pure Arab lineage, had outdistanced his companions and drawn nearer and nearer in that wild race along the Tjedad road. O'Neill, looking back, had realized his danger; had realized not only that his pursuer was mounted upon a far better steed than his own, but was also a hundred times his superior in horsemanship. He was armed with a long native gun, which he carried in one hand high above his head, but for some reason he did not attempt to use it, being, perhaps, sure of his quarry and preferring to ride him down.

This was only a matter of minutes: then O'Neill had turned in his saddle, fired and missed—fired again, and saw his pursuer pitch headlong into the road. That was the last thing he remembered clearly until he had seen a red-robed figure standing in the road ahead, had heard his name shouted, and recognized Delage.

He was sore and exhausted in body; his hands were so stiff he could scarcely open them; every fiber cried out for rest. But in spite of it all he was happier than he had ever been in his life, for there ahead of him rode the woman whom he had never expected to see again and there had been a light in her eyes when she looked at him which he had never dared hope to see there!

For an hour the camels mounted steadily, with a regular rocking motion infinitely soothing, once one learned to accommodate oneself to it, and with a sure-footedness which astonished O'Neill. More than once he caught himself nodding and jerked himself awake with an effort. Delage brought up the rear, to keep the pack camel in line

and to watch the trail, but there was no sign of pursuit. Apparently the guards had swept on to Teniet, and from there, perhaps, joined with the warriors of the Hamadsha, had continued the chase along the road to the south. In time, they would come up with the riderless horses, and that would puzzle them.

Nevertheless Delage was very uneasy. The absence of pursuit seemed to him more menacing than pursuit itself would have been. The natives were, of course, thoroughly familiar with this track over the mountains, and some of them must have returned from Teniet to search for O'Neill as soon as they found that his horse was riderless. It must have occurred to them that he might have found the hill trail and taken it, and Delage could not understand why a scouting party had not been sent forward along the trail to make sure.

For the tenth time he stopped his camel and looked long and closely along the way they had come. The trail was shadowed here and there by a spur of rising ground and curved occasionally out of sight, but for the most part it lay clear in the moonlight, and he could see no sign of any moving object. Yes, they seemed to be safe; but for an hour longer the flight continued. Then, conscious from his own fatigue of how nearly exhausted his companions must be, he called a halt and rode forward to consult with Souffi.

But Souffi urged that they press on as long as possible; the women could be tied to their saddles so that they would not fall off if they went to sleep. He too was disturbed. Their escape had been too easy. Besides, he knew of no place in this neighborhood where they could lie safely concealed. Farther on there was such a place, if they could reach it.

"Very well," Delage nodded, and explained all this to his companions. "I know that you are tired," he added to the women; "but you must hold on for a while longer."

So again the march was taken up, with the moon sinking rapidly toward the hills at their right. The air grew colder and colder as they mounted but at last they crested the ridge and once on the other side, with the hills before them sloping away toward the desert, it grew warmer again.

Just as O'Neill had made up his mind that he could keep awake no longer Souffi turned his camel sharply to the left, urged

it across a piece of rough ground and led the way through a narrow gorge into a little amphitheater fashioned by nature between two overhanging hills. A tiny stream, which they could hear plashing down over the rocks ahead, ran along one side of it and they could see dimly stretching high above them the precipitous bluffs which closed it in.

"I think we will be safe here, sir," said Souffi, and Delage nodded his agreement.

They dismounted, so stiff that they could scarcely move, and while Souffi watered and hobbled the camels Delage and O'Neill unstrapped a roll of blankets from the pack camel and spread them out in a sheltered corner.

"There is your bed," said Delage to the women. "Lie down at once and go to sleep. We shall start again at dawn."

"Where do you sleep?" asked Pat.

"O'Neill and I will sleep over yonder at the entrance, where we can watch the road. Do not worry about us—we shall be all right."

"Good night, then," said Pat, and put her arms about his neck and kissed him, and hid her face for a moment on his breast.

O'Neill, turning away, found himself face to face with Nada.

"Good night, Monsieur O'Neill," she said.

He could see how her eyes were shining; he longed to seize her, to crush her lips against his.

"Good night, Nada!" he answered thickly.

Souffi joined them as they were arranging their blankets.

"It is for me to watch!" he protested when he had learned their plans.

"Nonsense," said Delage; "you are as tired as we are. Besides, you have the beasts to look after."

"But no, I assure you I have no fatigue, sir," said Souffi. "For me a camel is a bed; I sleep there from moment to moment. At least you will permit me to take the first watch," he added, seeing that Delage was unconvinced.

"Very well," Delage agreed; "you will awaken me in an hour."

A moment later both he and O'Neill were sleeping the sleep of utter exhaustion.

And O'Neill had a dream. It did not start clearly, as most dreams do, but dimly and uncertainly. It seemed to be struggling to force itself into consciousness, now



for a moment blotted out and submerged, then fighting its way to the surface again, for all the world like a drowning man. Gradually it grew more clear, the mists thinned out, and suddenly O'Neill realized that he was in the mosque at Teniet.

On the platform before the *mihrab* stood the Imaum in his long robes, and before him squatted two priests garbed all in black like executioners, with various strange instruments of torture laid out on the floor in front of them. The tom-toms were pulsing viciously and beyond them a row of victims was bobbing slowly up and down with a chant rising and falling, "L-l-l-l-lah! L-l-l-l-lah! L-l-l-l-lah!"

Then O'Neill saw that he was one of these victims, and with his right hand he held Pat and with his left hand Nada, and next to Pat was Delage.

And then he understood that they had been brought here to undergo some horrid rite, some nameless mutilation, which would leave them wrecked and broken.

The pulsing of the drums mounted to a fresh fury, and suddenly the Imaum, who had prostrated himself in prayer, rose to his feet and threw back his hood, and O'Neill saw that it was Sidi Yada. He looked across at his victims, his lips parted in an evil smile, his eyes shining with triumph.

He raised his hand and the two black-garbed priests sprang forward and seized O'Neill's arms. He could feel how the hands of Pat and Nada clung desperately to his; but their hold was broken and he was dragged away toward the spot where Sidi Yada waited. For a moment the priest stood gazing down into O'Neill's eyes, then he stooped and picked up from the floor in front of him a little hammer, blunt at one end but tapering to a sharp point at the other.

"Not that!" shrieked O'Neill, his self-control slipping from him. "Not that! Kill me!"

But the priest, his smile unaltered, raised the hammer, held it poised for an instant, then brought it down sharply.

And O'Neill, stung awake by the pain, sat bolt upright, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes.

Dawn was creeping over the hills to the east; above him loomed the cliffs of the amphitheater.

Then, as he lowered his eyes, he saw, sitting calmly on a rock a few feet away, the

man whom he had just been imploring for mercy.

It was Sidi Yada.

At the same instant, beside him, a Berber soldier stepped over to the still-sleeping Delage and kicked him on the head.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### SURRENDER.

O'Neill's hand flew to his pocket.

"Do not do that," said Sidi Yada gently. "Why throw away your life?"

And following his gesture O'Neill found himself gazing into the black muzzle of a long gun, behind which appeared a particularly forbidding Berber countenance. He could see that the hammer of the gun was raised and that a lean finger twitched upon the trigger.

"You will throw your pistol here on the sand," continued the priest. "You also, monsieur," he added to Delage.

There was nothing to do but to obey.

As he drew the pistol from his pocket the thought flashed through O'Neill's mind that there would be time for one shot—that he could at least kill the man seated so coolly in front of him. But to what good? His own life would be forfeit the next instant, and also probably those of his companions.

He glanced around. There was no possible escape. The band which had surprised them numbered at least thirty. Five or six had mounted guard over the women. The rest were watching the two men, their weapons ready.

"It is no use, O'Neill," said Delage, and threw his pistol at Sidi Yada's feet.

"No, I suppose not," agreed O'Neill, and tossed his pistol beside the other.

At a motion from the priest one of his men came forward and picked up the two weapons. O'Neill was relieved to see that the gun which had threatened him was lowered.

"Now we can talk quietly," continued their captor, "and with entire frankness, since none of these men understand French. That is a very elaborate costume you are wearing, Monsieur—Abdullah!"

"Yes," agreed Delage; "I think it very handsome."

"I last saw it, if I am not mistaken, on the person of Ahmed ben Mohammed Ammar."

"It was his wedding costume," Delage explained pleasantly.

A gleam of appreciation sprang into the Arab's eyes. Evidently he found Delage very much to his liking.

"It was you then who took it from him?" he asked.

"He no longer had need of it," said Delage, with a little shrug.

"You had the bad taste, it seems, to intrude upon his wedding night."

"Ah, yes," said Delage carelessly; "those nuptials were never consummated."

The flicker of a smile passed over Sidi Yada's lips and he turned his head and looked to where the two women sat with their guard about them.

"Ah, well," he murmured, "that can be remedied." And he smiled again at the flush of anger which Delage was unable to repress. "You perhaps desire her for yourself?" he suggested.

"My desires, whatever they may be, are of little importance at present," Delage pointed out.

Sidi Yada laughed outright.

"Come, why not join me?" he asked. "I admire your intelligence—I can see that you are very clever. There are not many clever men in the world; and you will find me not too stupid. I would make you my *ulema*—my prime minister. You could have the woman—and as many others as you wish, when you get tired of her."

"Prime minister of what?" inquired Delage. "Is it that you intend to found a government?"

"It is my intention to carry on the work begun by Ahmed Ammar," explained Sidi Yada softly. "I am his successor."

"Ah, is it so?" asked Delage, and the two men exchanged a long glance. "What makes you his successor?"

"The Hamadsha have chosen me," said the priest.

Delage regarded him for yet a moment longer.

"I can see you are a better man than Ahmed Ammar," he said at last; "nevertheless, I fear that I must decline your offer."

"But why?" Sidi Yada persisted. "I assure you that the emolument would be most generous."

"It is not that," Delage explained; "but I fear that the position would involve duties which would be repugnant to me."

"I did not suspect you were so fastidious," said the priest mockingly.

"It is not that I am fastidious," explained Delage, with a shrug; "but I have never yet sold myself."

"Well, I am sorry," said Sidi Yada. "Perhaps I may have another offer to make you later on. But before doing so, there are a few things which I do not understand and which I should very much like you to explain."

"Why not consult your oracle?" suggested Delage.

"I think your explanations would be more accurate," smiled the other. "You are French, are you not?"

"My father was French."

"You belong to their secret service, perhaps?"

"Oh, no," protested Delage quickly; "nothing so banal!"

"Pardon me," said Sidi Yada; "I should have known better. Your impersonation was too perfect. Permit me to compliment you upon it, monsieur. Only for one little moment did I suspect you."

"Yes," agreed Delage, "I know when it was. It was when Mademoiselle Landon fainted in your mosque."

"But even then you managed to deceive me," and Sidi Yada looked at him thoughtfully. "If you do not belong to the secret service, what was your purpose in coming here?"

"Ah," said Delage, "that is my secret; but I can assure you that I have accomplished it!"

Sidi Yada turned this over in his mind, still looking at his prisoner. Then he nodded as though he had found the answer.

"Is it possible?" he asked, "that I have the honor of addressing Monsieur Louis Delage?"

"Even so," admitted Delage, smiling in his turn. "I am beginning to believe in your occult powers."

Sidi Yada's face was alight with interest.

"But I should have known!" he said. "I should have known! How stupid I have been!"

"Stupid, indeed," agreed Delage, "to place that renegade Mustapha ben Chenouf, in the seat opposite mine, in the Marseilles express. Stupid to kill an innocent man at Dijon. Stupid to suppose that any one so unmistakably an American as Monsieur O'Neill here could be me!"

"Ah, yes, I know," said the other sadly. "Those were Ben Chenouf's errors, not mine."

"But you selected him," Delage pointed out.

"One must make use of the instruments at hand. I am indebted to you for ridding me of him. He was beginning to get in my way."

"So I suspected," agreed Delage. "He was also in mine."

"And I am glad, in a way, that he failed to stop you," added the other, with a little bow. "Had he done so I should not now have the pleasure of talking to you."

Delage returned the bow.

"It is a mutual pleasure!" he said. In spite of his careless air he was watching the other keenly and it was evident that Sidi Yada had also mustered all his faculties for this encounter. "Have you any other questions?"

"Yes, a few. Why, after leaving Tijdad, did you go to Teniet? But for that delay you might have escaped."

"I hoped to rescue Monsieur Landon, whom you had taken away with you," Delage explained.

"I did not take him with me," said the priest. "At least only to the foot of the hill. There he left me and rode away to his ruin."

O'Neill could not repress a start of amazement.

"But I——" he began—and checked himself abruptly.

"Monsieur was saying?" Sidi Yada encouraged.

"I was going to say that I do not believe he would have gone off like that and left his daughter behind," O'Neill improvised.

"But he had seen her married to Ahmed Ammar," said the priest mockingly. "It was the first step toward the realization of a great dream. He imagined her another Cleopatra. He did inquire about you," he added. "I assured him that you were safe. I supposed you were. It was Monsieur Delage, no doubt, who rescued you?"

"Yes, it was I," said Delage. "It was very careless of you to leave that trap open."

Sidi Yada looked at him and O'Neill fancied that he actually blushed with chagrin.

"You are right," said the priest humbly. "You see how much I have to learn! Decidedly you must join me!"

11B—POP.

Delage shook his head. "What, exactly, did you do to Monsieur Landon?" he inquired carelessly.

"We—converted him."

"You knew he had need of—ah—conversion?"

"We knew that he held certain suspicions which might have proved inconvenient. So we eliminated them. We intended to abolish him, but Ammar received a passion for his daughter and we decided that it might be well to be able to produce him in the event of any inquiry, since it appears that he is very well known to the French authorities. We shall still be able to do so," he added.

"And the girl?"

"Since I am Ahmed's successor," answered Sidi Yada smoothly, "her father will probably insist upon my assuming Ahmed's responsibilities in that direction also. I suppose I shall have to consent!"

"Ah, yes, I understand," nodded Delage, the slow flush creeping into his cheeks again.

"One question more," said Sidi Yada. "Where is your native servant?"

"I do not know. I supposed you had killed him."

"We have not seen him."

"Then no doubt he found this place too dangerous and decided to decamp," said Delage carelessly.

Sidi Yada looked at him searchingly for a moment; then he summoned four or five of his men and gave them some brief instructions. In a moment they had leaped on their horses and scurried away in mad haste.

"Now," said the priest, "since we understand each other, and since it seems you do not care to join me, I come to my second proposal. When you left the *zawia* you took with you a chest which you had found in the treasure chamber. What did you do with it?"

"Ah, that," smiled Delage, "is a secret. I assure you that it is quite safe."

"There are ways of making you speak," the other pointed out, with a sudden tightening of the lips. "We could, for example, begin with the women. I could give one of them to my men. If you were still silent I could give the other one."

"Yes, you could do that," agreed Delage; "but I do not believe you would."

Sidi Yada gazed at the speaker for a moment from under half-closed lids. Then

he turned toward the group of men about the women and shouted a command.

O'Neill saw them jerk the women to their feet and start to drag them forward; but their leader shouted at them again, and they released them and motioned them on.

"Sit still!" said the priest sternly to O'Neill as the latter started to rise, and Delage also held out a restraining hand.

"Be calm," he said. "We shall have need of all our wits."

"Indeed yes!" agreed their captor, with an evil smile, and sat silent, watching the women as they drew near.

They were very pale, but admirably composed. Pat even achieved a thin little smile as she caught Delage's eyes.

"My love," he said, and for the first time his face betrayed the anguish which was eating at his heart, "you see to what I have brought you. Instead of watching, I slept. I do not ask you to forgive me, for I shall never forgive myself, but——"

"Do not talk like that," Pat broke in; "I will not permit you to talk like that!" and she came quickly forward and took his hand.

He pressed it against his cheek.

"So it is true, then?" asked Sidi Yada.

"Yes, it is true," said Delage simply.

"And this other woman—she is your——"

"She is my sister," said Delage.

The priest looked at her for an instant, and then his gaze hardened.

"This is the dancer!" he said.

"Yes."

"And Ahmed Ammar sent her into his apartments!" He rubbed his hands softly together. "Excellent! Admirable! Do you know, Monsieur Delage, I find myself admiring you more and more! You are sure you will not join me?"

"Quite sure," Delage answered.

"You will sit down over there," said Sidi Yada to the women after a moment. "I sent for you since we had reached a point in the discussion which is of interest to you. I was asking Monsieur Delage to inform me as to the whereabouts of a certain chest which he removed last night from our treasure chamber. He refused. I then suggested that, as a first step toward opening his lips, I would give one of you to my men to do as they pleased with. Monsieur Delage did me the honor to doubt whether I would go to this extreme, so it is necessary for me to prove it. Do you still refuse, Monsieur Delage?"

"What guarantee have I," asked Delage, his face livid, "that if I did tell you, you would not proceed with your plans just the same?"

"None except my word of honor."

Delage looked at him.

"You give me your word of honor?"

"On certain conditions," and Sidi Yada shifted to an easier position. "Come—there is no reason why I should not be frank with you. I owe you a debt of gratitude for brushing Ahmed Ammar aside. He was stupid—he was in my way. But as Supreme Imaum, he was inviolate. So your action was most acceptable—and most opportune. Besides, I like you; and if I were quite certain that you would go away without looking back, that you would not seek to be revenged, that you would wipe from your memory everything that has happened here since——"

"As to that," said Delage quietly, "I give you my word of honor."

"In that case I think we can reach an agreement. Return the chest to me and you go free."

"All of us?"

"Yes, all of you."

"On your word of honor?"

"Yes."

"You will not set your men upon us?"

"No—you may mount your camels and ride away. No one will molest you. But first, you understand, the chest must be in my hands."

"That is fair," Delage conceded, and turned to O'Neill. "I see no way out of it, my friend," he said. "We shall have to give up the chest."

"But of course!" cried O'Neill, his breast rising in a great breath of relief. "I would give up a thousand chests if I had them!"

"Very well," said Delage, and turned back to their captor. "It is agreed."

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### HOPE—AND DESPAIR.

Sidi Yada seemed in no hurry to depart. He sent his men out of the amphitheater to stand guard at its entrance, permitted the captives to make such toilet as they could at the little stream and assented cordially when Delage suggested coffee. So it was soon boiling over the alcohol lamp which Delage got from his stores and they sat around and watched it and talked in an en-

tirely friendly fashion. The new leader of African revolt seemed to be enjoying the experience.

Incidentally, he told them the story of their pursuit and capture.

It was he, of course, who had taken charge of the pursuit as soon as the guards from Tijdad brought news of the discovery of Ahmed's body. When the riderless horses had been discovered and he had heard the tale of the missing camels and of O'Neill's disappearance somewhere along the road, he knew immediately what had happened, had led his men at full gallop southward along the main road and had then cut across to the west along a mountain trail, certain of heading off the fugitives.

He had waited for some hours in ambush; and then at dawn, when they did not appear, had worked cautiously back along the trail until a scout had discovered their retreat. Even if they had been warned they could not have escaped, hemmed in as they were on every side.

As they were drinking their coffee and munching some biscuits which Delage produced the scouts sent out to search for Souffi reported one by one that they had found no trace of him.

"No doubt he saw you coming," said Delage, "and realizing that he could not save us decided to save his own skin. You could never hope to find him in these hills."

"We shall get him in the end," said Sidi Yada, and gave the order for the start.

One of the scouts had not returned; perhaps he had picked up the trail of the fugitive and was following it. In any event there was no reason to wait for him; so presently the cavalcade was descending along the rough path by which the captives had mounted a few hours before.

"I hope," Delage had said to O'Neill, "that there is no doubt of your being able to find that chest again."

"Oh, no," O'Neill had assured him; "I could find it blindfolded."

So they were fairly cheerful as they set off down the valley. They had lost the treasure, to be sure; but they had the assurance of safety, and during the past few days life had taken on a new meaning for all of them. So long as they were to live nothing else mattered.

It was hard going down the rugged trail, especially for the horses, and it was nearly noon before they reached the Teniet road.

"Now which way?" asked Sidi Yada.

"Toward Tijdad," Delage answered.

Sidi Yada looked at him in evident surprise but made no comment, and half an hour later they were at the foot of the hill on which the *zawia* stood.

A crowd of Ahmed's retainers—students, servants, hangers-on, augmented by most of the male residents of Tijdad—had seen them coming and swarmed down to the road to meet them, greeting the captives with yells of joy and menace, and trying to rush them, fairly foaming with rage, when they recognized Delage clad in the wedding costume of their defunct leader. For a moment O'Neill thought that the end had come; but Sidi Yada spoke a word to his soldiers, who spurred their horses upon the mob, driving it back with savage blows.

Then, when the tumult had stilled a little, the priest spoke to them briefly, announcing himself as their new ruler, promising swift vengeance upon any who failed to yield him implicit obedience, and ordering them back to their dwellings.

A moment later they were streaming off up the hill.

"Do we mount too?" Sidi Yada inquired of Delage.

"No," said the latter; "we go down yonder to the ruins."

"To the ruins?" repeated the priest. "How is that possible? I warn you not to attempt to deceive me!"

"I am not so foolish," said Delage. "And I have given you my word of honor."

"But you could not have gone to the ruins."

"I did not go to the ruins. Monsieur O'Neill took the chest there and buried it while we others rode on toward Teniet. He alone can show us where it is."

An evil light came into Sidi Yada's eyes.

"I could doubtless find it without his aid!" he remarked, and paused a moment in indecision, looking at his men.

He could trust them, of course; he could count upon their obedience; and yet he knew that he was running the risk of shaking their faith in him. They would expect vengeance for the death of Ahmed Ammar. They would not be able to understand why the man who had killed him should be allowed to escape. And there was the chest. It would be most unfortunate should its existence be unduly advertised. It might easily come to the ears of the French, who

had spies everywhere, even among these people perhaps, and who rewarded informers liberally. They would be certain to investigate any rumor of the existence of such a treasure.

Delage suspected what was passing in his mind.

"Yes, it is probable that you could find it," he agreed. "If you prefer to search for it yourself, at some other time, we will describe to you the spot where he concealed it and we will then bid you good-by."

Sidi Yada looked at him with lowering brows.

"I do not know why I should let you go," he said. "I do not know why I should take the risk."

"The risk would be much greater if we disappeared," Delage pointed out. "The presence here of Monsieur Landon and his daughter, at least, is well known."

"I was not thinking of making you disappear—nothing so crude," said the priest. "A little tap above the left temple, such as we gave to Monsieur Landon, and your enmity would be blotted out—your minds would be changed."

"There is no enmity to blot out," interrupted Delage. "You have won fairly. I even find myself admiring you. Remember, you have my word of honor—and I have yours."

Sidi Yada looked at him a moment longer—looked deep into his eyes as though reading his inmost thought; and Delage knew that his life and the lives of his companions hung by a thread.

"If by risk you mean that your followers will expect my punishment," he added, "it will be easy to arrange an escape. All I ask is an hour's start. My word of honor!" he concluded quietly, and waited.

With a gesture of decision Sidi Yada turned and spoke to the leader of his men. Five of them detached themselves from the main body; the others rode slowly off up the hill.

"Very well," said the priest. "Let us get the chest."

And Delage knew that he had won.

So they set off again, and presently to the left of the road the white tent appeared at the foot of the bluff crowned by the ruins. O'Neill looked at it with a sense of strangeness. Could it be that it was only the evening before he had ridden away to have dinner with Ahmed Ammar! It seemed to him

that years had passed since then! He was certainly at least a decade older.

As they turned from the road across the rough field they saw that a man was sitting in front of the tent.

It was Landon. He arose and came forward to meet them.

"Those Berbers did not come this morning," he shouted angrily to Delage, and then stopped, his mouth open, when he saw his face. His astonished eyes ran down over the red burnoose and the embroidered tunic, and then back to the face. "Where is Ahmed Ammar?" he demanded.

"Ahmed Ammar exists no longer," answered Sidi Yada smoothly, swinging himself to the ground. "It is I who have succeeded him!"

"You!" cried Landon, his face suddenly crimson. "But no! My daughter succeeds him. She is his wife. It was promised."

"She is not his wife," answered the priest, looking at the other with darkling eyes. "According to our law no woman is a wife until she has lived with her husband. Your daughter is still unmarried. Monsieur Delage interfered."

Landon turned and stared again at Delage, who was assisting Pat to dismount from the back of her camel.

"Delage!" he echoed; "but it was not his affair!"

"Yes it was, dad!" cried Pat, running to him. "You see, we love each other; we are——"

But her father only looked at her savagely and pushed her hand from his arm.

"Nonsense!" he said; "that woman there is his wife."

"She is my sister, Monsieur Landon," said Delage. "I have no wife—but I trust you will consent——"

"Never!" said Landon. "She would have been a queen; by Heaven, she *is* a queen!"

But Sidi Yada had had enough of it.

"No more of this nonsense!" he said. "Show me where the chest is buried. Then you may take this madman with you, if you wish. Is it up yonder?"

"Yes," said O'Neill. "I will show you."

As he mounted the bluff he glanced back. Landon was standing open-mouthed staring after them; then he turned and disappeared into the tent. Three minutes' scrambling brought them to the top of the bluff and O'Neill hurried ahead toward the ruins. He feared he knew not what; but as he rounded

the fragment of wall he breathed a sigh of relief. There, at the foot of the wall, lay the pile of rubbish undisturbed.

"The chest is there," he said.

At a word from Sidi Yada his men attacked the pile, hurling the stones right and left, scraping aside the débris with their hands. In a moment it was demolished.

But the chest had disappeared.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### THE FINAL STRUGGLE.

With a wave of his arm, Sidi Yada motioned his men to stand back.

"Now, Monsieur O'Neill," he said tensely, "if you will show me the chest."

O'Neill was staring at the spot like a man dazed.

"It isn't there!" he stammered.

"Evidently!" said the priest, and he took two short steps and thrust his face close to O'Neill's. "So you dare to mock me!"

"But it was there!" cried O'Neill. "It was there! I cannot be mistaken!"

"Think well!" said Sidi Yada between clenched teeth. "Think well before you tell me that a second time!"

O'Neill looked slowly about him—at the broken tower, the scattered piles of débris, the tottering wall. No, he could not be mistaken.

"It was there," he said again.

Sidi Yada gazed into his eyes without speaking, his lips curled back from his teeth in an ugly snarl, like a beast of prey about to spring, and O'Neill braced himself, determined at least to go down fighting.

But after a moment the priest stepped back and gave a sharp order to his men. Two of them sprang forward and seized Nada by the wrists. The other three covered Delage and O'Neill and Pat with their long rifles.

"Take one step," said Sidi Yada, his jaws still clenched, "make one movement, and you die instantly. Now, Monsieur O'Neill, I give you still a third chance before I abandon this woman to these men. You see I am very patient!"

A shudder had run through Nada as the men seized her and she had made a convulsive effort to throw them off. Now she stood erect and defiant, though pale to the lips, and smiled as she caught O'Neill's agonized eyes.

"But——" he began, and stopped. His

voice stuck in his throat. It seemed to him that he was going mad.

"There is some mistake," broke in Delage. "Evidently there is some mistake. Monsieur O'Neill has no reason to lie to you—it would be utter folly. Think, my friend," he went on, turning to O'Neill, "think carefully and describe to us exactly what happened here last night."

"I tied my horse to the tent down yonder," began O'Neill, struggling for self-control, "got a shovel from Belayèd's quarters and drove the ass up the side of the hill and into the ruins. I left it standing a moment while I looked about for a place to bury the chest. I noticed that wall—you see how insecure it looks; and I thought that I would be able to throw it down upon the chest. So I dragged the chest to that spot there at its foot, and managed to pry two stones from the base of the wall—see, those two; but it was firmer than I had thought and I could not even shake it. Time was passing; and at last, as the best thing I could do, I heaped a pile of stones and débris over the chest, leveled it off as well as I could, and left it. I swear that this is exactly what happened."

Delage looked at Sidi Yada.

"It is evident that Monsieur O'Neill is speaking the truth," he said. "If the chest is not there now it is because some one has removed it. Perhaps some native, lurking among the ruins, saw him bury it and dug it up again as soon as he had gone."

Sidi Yada glared from one face to the other.

"We shall see!" he said hoarsely.

"We have done our best to keep our agreement," Delage pointed out.

"The agreement was that you should be free when you had restored the chest to my hands. You have failed to do so. The agreement is therefore at an end."

"But at least," urged Delage, "you will permit us to assist in searching for it. Whoever found it could not have taken it far. It must be close by—perhaps still in the ruins somewhere."

Sidi Yada stopped him with a violent gesture.

"I trust you no farther," he said. "I do not want your help. Sit down there against that wall, the four of you. I warn you that if you make one motion to escape or to interfere you will be killed," and he stationed two of his men, their rifles ready, to mount

guard over them. "Where are the shovels?" he demanded of O'Neill.

"You will find them in that little shack at the side of the hill," said O'Neill, and one of the natives was sent down to get them.

"We have only to be patient," said Delage encouragingly, looking from one face to another. "The chest is certain to be discovered."

"We should have abandoned it!" groaned O'Neill in an agony of contrition. "All this is the result of my folly!"

"Do not be so silly!" protested Pat. "They will find it and some day we will look back upon all this as a great adventure."

"I hope so," said O'Neill gloomily, and put his head in his hands and went over again step by step his procedure of the night before. No, he could not be mistaken—the moonlight had made the place as bright as day. There was the wall, there was the excavation—

"Well?" asked Delage, when he at last looked up again.

O'Neill shook his head.

"I buried it under that débris," he said. "Somebody must have taken it. But I can't understand who. How would anybody know it was there?"

"He was lurking in the ruins and saw you bury it."

"Why should anybody be lurking in the ruins in the middle of the night?" O'Neill demanded.

"Ah," said Delage thoughtfully, "that is indeed a mystery!"

Something in his tone caused O'Neill to look at him.

"Do you mean to say you know?" he questioned, struck by his curious expression. "Then for Heaven's sake——"

"Be still!" Delage commanded.

O'Neill, following his look, saw that the native had returned, some picks and shovels on his shoulder. With him was Landon.

"What," asked the latter, advancing toward the priest, "are you going to explore my ruins for me?"

Sidi Yada did not reply but as he looked at the explorer his face hardened and darkened as at some sudden thought. And Delage's face also grew intent.

"Be ready!" he said in a low voice to O'Neill.

"If you would send my laborers back,"

Landon went on, "we could get ahead much more quickly."

Sidi Yada spoke a word to his men. They threw down the shovels, picked up their rifles and held them ready.

Landon looked about at them with a feeble laugh.

"Surely you are not afraid of me!" he said. "I bear you no ill will. All I want is to get to work here again."

"I will see that the laborers come to-morrow," said Sidi Yada, his eyes still intent on the explorer's.

"But I lose a day; and I have been up since dawn expecting them," complained Landon, his voice strained and querulous like a fretful child's.

His eyes were as vacant as an idiot's, his cheeks sagged into senile folds, his lips were parted in a silly smile. Apparently his mind was quite gone, and at the horror and pity of it Pat suddenly gave way and burst into convulsive sobs, covering her face with her hands to shut out the dreadful sight.

But Sidi Yada's intent gaze did not waver.

"Then you have slept little," he said. "It was very late when I bade you good-by at the foot of Tijdad."

"I do not need much sleep," answered Landon. "Last night the moon was too bright. It put queer fancies into my head. These ruins are very beautiful by moonlight."

"Ah," said the priest quickly, "so you came to the ruins. Then you must have seen Monsieur O'Neill when he arrived with the chest."

Landon's eyes slowly widened until they seemed all pupil.

He shook his head.

"I saw no one."

"Come!" said Sidi Yada with sudden fierceness, and strode forward and seized the other's wrist and bent it back until it seemed that it must snap. "Enough of this mockery! You cannot deceive me with such talk! Where is that chest?"

For an instant Landon held his idiotic smile. Then his face changed, the muscles tightened, a rush of blood suffused it, and with a single movement he snatched a pistol from his pocket and fired it full in Sidi Yada's eyes.

"Usurper!" he shouted. "Us——"

The word was drowned in the report of a rifle. The man nearest him had pressed the muzzle of his gun against his breast and



fired. And Landon crumpled to the ground like a rag.

The priest stood for a moment swaying back and forth, his hands to his face, then his knees sagged under him and he fell forward as two of his men sprang to catch him.

And as he fell there was a third report from a corner of the wall and one of the guards pitched forward on his face.

"Quick, quick, O master!" yelled a voice, and O'Neill had a glimpse of Souffi rushing upon the men bending above the priest, a clubbed rifle in his hands.

He remembered dimly afterward seeing Delage spring at the throat of the guard nearest him, of seeing the other jerk up his gun to fire, and he managed somehow to seize the barrel and drag it down just as it exploded in his face—and then the world went black.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### THE LUCK OF THE IRISH.

O'Neill opened his eyes with the sense of awaking from some horrible nightmare and he lay for a long time staring upward trying to recall what the nightmare was. He could remember dimly that it was some prolonged and outrageous form of torture, under which consciousness had come and gone, and which, strangely enough, had been accompanied by kind words and even caresses; but aside from that it was all a blank.

Then gradually he became conscious that he was looking at a ceiling and turning his head a little he saw that he was lying on a cot in a small room with whitewashed walls, lighted by a single window. Before the window a man sat reading a paper, and as O'Neill looked at him, he lowered the paper and their eyes met.

It was Delage.

In an instant he was on his feet and bending over the cot.

"You are conscious again, my friend?" he asked. "You know me?"

O'Neill nodded faintly, unable to understand the effort which even the smallest movement cost him.

"Splendid!" cried Delage, his face shining, and he pulled a bell rope which hung beside the door.

In a moment a man dressed all in white whom O'Neill had never seen before came hurrying in.

"So; you are getting well again!" he said, bending over the bed and touching O'Neill on wrist and temple. "Yes, the fever has gone. Good! Now you must sleep—a long quiet sleep."

"Have I been ill?" asked O'Neill in a voice he could not raise above a whisper.

"Very ill. But that is all past. You will drink this," and he held a glass to his lips.

O'Neill drank obediently and presently sank away into a blessed oblivion.

When he opened his eyes a second time the room was dark save for the glow of a tiny night lamp on the table beside his cot. There was some one sitting in the chair by the table; a woman, for he could see her hands folded in her lap. As he turned his head to see her better she snatched up the night lamp and looked at him.

"My love!" she said softly.

And she set the night lamp down and fell on her knees beside the bed and caught his hand and pressed it against her cheek.

O'Neill could feel that the cheek was wet with tears and a great fear crept into his heart. This was the end, then, just when life was beginning to mean something.

He passed his other hand tenderly over the bowed head.

"There, there!" he whispered. "It doesn't matter. But before I go, I should like to tell you how much I love you—how very, very much I love you."

"Go?" she echoed, raising her head quickly to look him in the face. "Go where?"

"Going—west, isn't it?" he asked, and smiled at her.

"Nonsense!" she cried. "You are going to live!"

And she laid her lips to his.

A week later a man sat in a wheeled chair on the terrace of the Grand Hotel Cirta at Constantine gazing out across the country. Below him was the native market, with its labyrinth of little shops thronged with people in every variety of picturesque and ragged costume; just beyond was a square inclosure crowded with camels, a caravan newly arrived from somewhere in the depths of the Sahara; farther on was the great gorge of the Rhumel, and stretching away to the horizon the rolling plain mounting toward the foothills of the Aurès.

His face was pale and thin, but there was a great happiness in it, and as he sat there,

his mind went back over the last two months of his life, so crowded with incident—the Marseilles express, the death of Mustapha, the villa by the Batna road, Tijdad, Teniet, Ahmed Ammar, Sidi Yada. He knew the whole story now—how Souffi had seen the Berbers closing in, had realized that his little party was in a trap, had managed to slink away among the rocks, to pull down one of the men sent to search for him, and thus mounted and armed, had followed at a distance, watching for a moment when he could intervene; but in despair, doubting whether such a moment would ever come.

Yet it had come; and when it was over only one of Sidi Yada's men was left alive, racing away toward Tijdad to give the alarm. There was no time to lose; O'Neill, a gaping wound in his left shoulder, hastily bandaged to check the flow of blood, was strapped upon a camel, and the flight began northward over the hills to the Batna road, and on through the night to Lambèse, where for a time he hung between life and death.

But life had won.

There was a quick step on the terrace behind him; some one bent over him and laid a soft cheek for an instant against his.

"You are all right?" asked Nada's voice.

"Yes, my dear."

"We are going to have our coffee out here," she said, as Pat and Delage joined

them, and she directed the waiter where to place the little table. "You may have a cup," and she poured one out for him and placed it in his hand. "What have you been thinking about?"

"I have been thinking," said O'Neill, with a gesture toward the hills on the horizon, "that over there are the Aurès, and I can see a little hill with a tumble-down ruin on it; and somewhere in that ruin is a chest; and I am very curious about the contents of that chest. Some day we are going back to find it."

"Decidedly!" agreed Delage.

"Go back into that hornet's nest!" protested Nada. "No, I think not!"

"Not to-day or to-morrow," said O'Neill; "but some day. And we shall find the chest and bring it away. And when we open it we shall discover that it is filled with jewels—jewels that I can hang all over you!"

"Nonsense!" said Nada. "I am not an idol! I do not want your jewels. And I shall never permit you to risk your life a second time!"

"But I have a talisman which takes me safely through every danger!" asserted O'Neill, worshipping her with his eyes.

"A talisman? What talisman?"

"The luck of the Irish!" said O'Neill, and caught her hand and kissed it.

THE END.

"*The Amethyst Scarab*," a complete novel by L. Adams Beck, in the next POPULAR.



## THE OBVIOUS ANSWER

NO country is complete without its matrimonial-agency house organ. France boasts not one but many such publications of which the principal individual is a sumptuously printed periodical entitled *L'Abeille*—which signifies "the bee."

A frock-coated, silk-hatted, white-mustached dandy of the boulevards was recently observed at one of the round marble tables on the wide terrace of the Café Cardinal in Paris regaling a jovial crony of equal sartorial distinction with selected readings from the "Wives Wanted" section of this delectable publication.

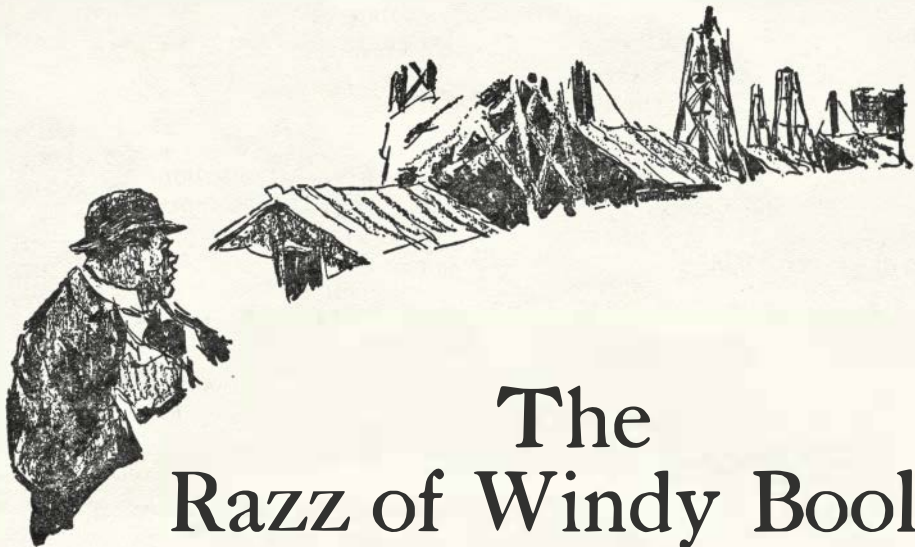
"Ah," he was heard to remark; "here's a priceless bit. Listen to this: 'Young man, twenty-nine, perfect in every respect, well-to-do, seeks marriage with young lady of same age and circumstances. Party must speak Turkish and love cats.' *Hein*, old one, what do you make of that? Droll, is it not?"

"Exceedingly, yes. 'Must speak Turkish and love cats.' It is of a ridiculousness, that."

"But by no means, dear fellow. It is, on the contrary, of a logic the most apparent."

"How? I fail to see it."

"You are of a refreshing simplicity. Observe; the lady desired must speak Turkish and love cats. It is evident therefore that the young man who wrote this ad is a person of unusual and exotic tastes. He has merely taken this delicate manner of insinuating that he proposes to pass the honeymoon in Angora."



# The Razz of Windy Boole

By Willis Brindley

*Author of "The Wile of Wilder," and other stories.*

**The oil promoter shot dice according to his own rules but he didn't expect them to work both ways.**

PERRY WILDER lolled luxuriously behind the wheel of his wonderfully beautiful, wonderfully red, wonderfully efficient new roadster.

The car was parked in front of the First National Bank. It was a good bank, Perry thought. He had intrusted it with fifty thousand dollars in cash and its vaults held an even two hundred thousand dollars' worth of bonds bought upon advice of the bank. These little things, and the wonderful red roadster, had come to Perry as his share of the sale of an oil property for an even million dollars. The quarter million was for his quarter interest and the red roadster was a little present extracted from the other three fellows for putting over the deal.

It was spring in Oklahoma—warm but not hot; the air faintly perfumed with the nice spring smells.

Perry lolled. He waved his hand in indolent greeting to passing acquaintances. Now and then he stretched a lazy foot to the starter button, listened to the rhythmic whir of the starting motor, quickly followed by the barely audible pulsations of a perfectly attuned motor mechanism. He snapped off the ignition and the pulsations

stopped. Certainly did beat winding up a Ford. Perry yawned. Vaguely he wished that something might happen.

George Washington White, colored, eased out of the hallway of the bank building, toting a wash basket full of printed matter. Time was when George had toted, reluctantly, the washing of white folks, back and forth between his home laundry and the back doors of local society. Now he was resplendent in a brass-buttoned uniform, with a cap atop, and gold braid on it and the important word "Messenger."

Perry Wilder beckoned him over and George eased the basket onto the step of the roadster, doffed the cap with its braid and its sign, and smiled broadly, displaying much gold in front, and several vacancies behind, which were to be plugged when funds were available.

Perry dipped into the basket and lifted a letter. George Washington protested, but mildly.

"I don't reckon you can have none of them, Mistah Wildah. Mistah Boole he say this very impohntant mail—got to go out to-night sure."

"Yay-uh. George, you sure do look splendidous in that raiment. What you need,

though, is a silk shirt—oughtn't ever to wear brass buttons and gold braid without a silk shirt. Drop by to-night and I wouldn't be surprised if I could fix you up with a nice yellow one with purple stripes."

Deliberately, then, he opened the letter. The jaw of the astonished George Washington White dropped, revealing much gold, but he said nothing. Instead he replaced his gilded headpiece, picked up his burden and departed post officeward. A silk shirt was a silk shirt. Perry read the letter:

DEAR FRIEND: I call you friend because I want you to be my friend, and I believe that you are going to be my friend because I have the one thing that is sure to make you a friend, and that is a sure and certain way to make much money.

I am not going to sell you oil stock. The curse of the great and growing oil business in this country—the last great business in which a poor man has an even chance with the rich—is the crooked and dishonest oil-stock schemes that have fattened the promoters while starving the victims.

No, my friend, I have no stock to sell you, but I am willing to let you in with me on the best chance in Oklahoma to-day to make money—real money. Look at Perry Wilder—I know him well. A few weeks ago he owned one Ford car. Now, as I dictate this he sits day after day lolling in his fine red automobile in front of my building, before the doors of the bank wherein he keeps that quarter million dollars which he got as his share by sale for an even million dollars of a single oil well to a big syndicate.

What Perry owned was not stock in that well. He and three friends each had a unit of its value, and that is what I am offering you, my friend—units with me as friend to friend in the finest oil prospect in the State of Oklahoma. Go in on this with me, friend, and share with me, unit for unit, wealth untold.

There was more of it—three solid pages of single-spaced typewriting. The letter-head showed spouting oil wells and the company name—"Greater Amalgamated Development Association." In type almost as large appeared the name of the president, J. Harding Boole.

J. Harding Boole. So that was what "Windy Jim" called himself now. Darned shame. Something ought to be done about it. Ho-hum. Perry slumped lower beneath the walnut steering wheel.

A cough roused him—a hesitant, apologetic cough. Beside the car stood an elderly woman well known to him as "Aunty" Goodman. She ran a tiny shop at the end of the car line and sold cigars and tobacco, small notions, and amazing cookies of her own

cooking. Normally a cheerful person, she stood now beside the car, tear-streaked, trembling, unnerved.

"Oh, Mister Wilder! Mister Wilder, I—oh, I just don't—"

Perry was all sympathy.

"That's all right, Aunty Goodman," he said heartily, opening the door of the car for her. "Get right in—I was going your way anyway and I've been intending to stop around and take you for a ride in my new car."

The woman got in, and told her story—the simple, tragic story of an investment that failed. She had come into a little money—a thousand dollars—and she had thought to invest it in a mortgage. But Mr. Boole, who always seemed to her such a perfect gentleman, had advised her to buy stock in his company that was drilling a promising wildcat north of town, and she had given the money to Mr. Boole and he had given her a paper good for a thousand shares, and now the company was broke and she had lost her thousand dollars, but Mr. Boole, he was building him a fine new house that was going to cost a hundred thousand dollars and how could it be?

Well, it could be and it was. Perry got out of her that she had called at the offices just now, and they wouldn't let her see Mr. Boole—he was in conference—but they had told her in the office that unfortunately the well had struck the ocean—oil drillers' parlance for salt water—and of course after that—

Perry had an idea. What was a thousand dollars to him? He would take care of this little matter himself and afterward take it out of "Windy" Boole's hide.

"I'll tell you what, Aunty Goodman," he said, "you just leave this to me. I know Mr. Boole pretty well and I'm pretty sure that he'll do the right thing for you, but at that—well, the oil business is no business for a woman. I'll see Boole, but if I get your money back I want you to promise me that you'll take it right in to Mr. Overholt at the bank and invest it the way he says."

He dropped her at her shop then and trekked back to his old stand in front of the bank building, got out and took the elevator to Boole's offices.

There was an outer office with mahogany counter and handsome mahogany desk and file cabinets. At the left a very large room opened off, from which came an enormous

clack of many typewriters; at the right a closed room bore the legend: "Mr. Boole, Private."

A full-blown woman who might have been thirty or forty or fifty, with bobbed hair bleached to the color of wheat straw and a face beautifully enameled in sea-shell pink, greeted him with a hard, commercial smile.

"I ain't ever been up here before, I guess," said Perry to this person. "My name's Wilder—Perry Wilder. Is Mr. Boole around?"

"Did you wish to speak to him personally?"

"Why, yes, that's the idea I had—to speak to him personally. In fact that's about the only way I know to speak to him."

"I'm sorry, but Mr. Boole is in conference and cannot be disturbed."

She said it as if she meant it. She was hard that person, hard as nails. Doubtless she it was who had told the bitter worst to Auntie Goodman. No doubt a valuable employee for this sort of a business.

To her Perry had nothing more to say. He was not long on words, anyway. He slumped into a chair by the wall and the blond person busied herself at one of the mahogany desks. But presently he sidled along the wall toward the door marked "Mr. Boole, Private," and cocked his ear to hear the better. There were people in that room all right, talking in short jerks, but he could make out no word until suddenly his ear caught three words that told a mouthful:

"Eight's my point."

It was the voice of Windy Boole.

Conference, huh? Perry Wilder vaulted the counter, reached the door in two steps and noiselessly opened it and slid in. The blonde made no move to restrain him.

Squat upon the floor sat Windy Boole, rolling the dice. Before him was much money. In a circle squatted four men whose faces were familiar and one of whom, "Bandy" Martin, Perry recognized as an ex-cowboy who was supposed to be a handy man for Boole.

"Eight's my point," called Boole again, and rolled a six and two. He had not noticed Perry but now as he looked up after gathering in the money he observed the intruder.

"Hullo," he said, with small cordiality, "want in?"

He was a small man and wiry, bald before his time.

"Why, I don't want to crowd you," said Perry.

"We're going," said one of the losers. "This guy's too good." Three of the men left, with the studied nonchalance of experienced gamblers. Bandy Martin dug into a trousers pocket and laid upon the floor five twenty-dollar bills.

"If you get that I'm clean."

"Shoots one hundred. How about you, Perry?"

"I'll take the same."

Perry laid down the money and Windy Boole picked up the dice, which had lain on the floor since the last play. With a quick movement he gathered them into the hollow of his fist and Perry, watching closely through narrowed lids that affected indifference, thought he saw the dice slide up Boole's sleeve and two other dice identical in appearance slide down into the player's hand. Perry thought he saw, but it was very quick. He could not be sure and in a case like that a man must be sure or else he must not see.

Boole gave the dice a careless fling. They bounced, rolled, stopped, a five and two on top. He had shot seven and won. He scooped in the money and sat up, unkinking his back.

"Have another?"

"No, I guess not," Perry drawled. The busted Bandy Martin picked up his cap and went out. Boole got to his feet.

"Anything particular on your mind?"

"Why, nothing very serious. Auntie Goodman's been talking to me. Seems she shot a thousand with you and lost."

"Did she? I can't keep track of these squawks. I got a woman outside takes care of those things. What's the big idea, anyway? Just how do you horn in? Anybody that's got sense knows that the oil business is perilous. This woman took a chance and lost—that's all about it, ain't it? If you don't want to see her lose, make it up to her yourself—you're rotten with money right now, they say."

"Yay-uh." Perry teetered and looked about him, up and down and all around. Windy Boole moved over to a desk and pretended to busy himself with some papers.

"But just the same, it kind of seems to me that you don't get much kick out of that kind of money. Now, in Auntie Goodman's case, that thousand was all she had. Don't you suppose—"

"No, I don't."

"Oh, very well. I'll be going. I can see that you're a very busy man."

He sauntered out then and managed a grin for the blond person in the outer office, but beneath the grin was a very considerable wrath.

"What this Windy Boole needs is a good razz," he told Harvey Overholt at the bank. Mr. Overholt nodded.

"But how, if he keeps within the law? These things are bad, Wilder—bad for the oil business and particularly bad for unfortunate investors like Mrs. Goodman—but what's to be done about it? As I understand it, Boole organizes a company, pays himself a fat salary, drills a well. No oil in the well and the company goes broke. I suspect that he lets contracts for drilling the wells to another company, which he in fact owns, at an outrageous price, but that's a thing that's hard to prove and which would hardly stand in court. I know that he let one such contract to a company which shows Bandy Martin as president and it is a matter of common knowledge that Bandy has nothing except occasionally a few dollars—"

"Which Windy takes away from him shooting craps. Well, Auntie Goodman don't lose this time—I'm drawing a thousand dollars in currency to take down to her, and I'll bring her back in a few minutes and you put the money into a mortgage for her, or a good bond."

"All right; and, Wilder, we'd better tell her to keep it quiet—let her think that you got the money from Boole and that it was hard to do, and that she mustn't tell anybody, because, you know, it's more than one man's job to save all the suckers from loss, even in this small community."

"I suppose you're right, but what this man Boole needs is a razz—a good razz. Something that will hit him where he's easy hurt, in the pocketbook."

Overholt shook his head.

"Better keep out of it, Wilder. An honest man's got mighty little chance in such a game."

Perry might have taken the banker's advice and kept out if Auntie Goodman had been the discreet person that he and the banker fancied her to be. As it happened, however, she did not keep to herself the good fortune which came to her, but told it, under pledge of secrecy, no doubt, to

sundry other unfortunates who swooped down upon Perry Wilder.

In four days he heard from a bootblack, a Confederate war veteran, two school-teachers and a girl who clerked in the ten-cent store. They cost him twenty-six hundred dollars. Then he got aboard the beautiful red roadster and went fishing, alone.

And as he fished he thought with an intensity that utterly destroyed his efficiency as a fisherman for two whole days. On the morning of the third day, however, his skill vastly improved; and by the farmer who boarded him he sent to town as nice a mess as any man could wish to see, with the compliments of Perry Wilder to the manager of the Ideal Café, and a request upon the manager to serve said fish, or as many as need be, to Bandy Martin at breakfast.

Three hours later Bandy flivvered into the yard and found Perry just about to start for more fish. Perry pretended displeasure.

"Just because a man happens to remember that a man likes trout—"

"Go on," said Bandy, who was an old tillicum. "What's on your mind?"

"Fish," said Perry. "Let's start. I got a date with a flick of 'em in a hole I know. Better let me give you one of these little short-shank hooks—they seem to be leery of those that you got where the shank is likely to show."

"How're you and Windy Boole getting on with your fishing?" Perry asked a long while afterward. "I suppose this kind seems kind of tame to you?"

"Oh, not so awful. Windy's getting on fine, but with me it's not so good. That boy does sure know how to talk to the ivories."

"To *the* ivories, or *his* ivories?"

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing. Drop in over beyond that snag and see what you can do. There's fish there all right but I couldn't seem to land any this morning. They don't seem to like my tackle."

Bandy dropped in and got a nice one.

"Say," he said as he pried the hook loose, "there's a story around that you've been giving folks back their money that they lost on Windy's stock. Windy, he heard about it and he's wild. 'You know Wilder pretty well,' he says to me, 'and it's up to you and me to put a crimp in that guy that'll let him know that he'd better keep out of my business.'"

"Yay-uh. Do you know what I think? I think you're too good a man to waste yourself on that kind of business. Supposing you and me were to do a little conspiring on the side, to let these poor suckers of Windy's make a win for once. Don't your conscience ever hurt?"

Bandy sobered. He was not a bad fellow at heart, as Perry well knew. He had been a good cow-puncher but he was any man's meat when he heard the click of dice, and Windy Boole, knowing that, got loyal service and kept him broke.

"It does at that, Perry, and that old hard-shell Windy's got out in the front office—wow!"

"I been thinking: you know that place of mine out toward the Harder field? Well, I got a whole section there, six hundred forty acres. Of course it's wildcat, but not so wildcat at that, since these deep wells been coming in. As a matter of fact the geology is right. It's kind of like another place I got over west-southwest. You maybe don't remember, but I had a nice piece of money once before, seven or eight years ago, and I bought me that section and the one out west—half a section it is out west, and got 'em both rented for cotton. Rent pays the taxes and a little bit more, and I've always figured that some day I'd do a little wildcat drilling on my own. But shucks! Now that I've got the money I've sort of lost my ambition. Do you reckon that place out toward the Harder field would interest Windy?"

"Might. But how come you want to trade with him?"

"Well, I don't say that in this thing I'm entirely benevolent, but my idea was that I might lease him, say, half of it—the south half because the buildings are on the north half. He's got as good a chance to make a well on that place as anywhere else he's likely to strike, and if he made a well, why, these school-teachers and widows and such would have a chance. And as for me—why, I'd know then that there was a chance on the other half section and of course I'd get my one barrel out of eight on the piece he leased and have no investment and no grief. Suppose we said about—let me see: He's cost me a thousand and twenty-six hundred; that's thirty-six hundred—I'll tell you: You get Windy to take over my three hundred and twenty for twelve dollars and a half an acre, which makes four thousand

dollars, and I'll pay you ten per cent, four hundred dollars. How's that?"

Bandy hesitated.

"Suppose you made it thirty-six hundred dollars and make the lease papers out to me, and what I get over that is mine."

"All right. You go back to town and fix it up and have Lem Higgins fix up the papers—he's got the abstract and everything in his safe. When you get everything ready send word to me and I'll come down and sign the papers and take over the money. Only, Bandy, don't hold up Windy too strong—we want this to go through."

For four days more, then, Perry Wilder fished and loafed and was happy, and then, summoned by a long-distance call, he drifted back to town in the purring roadster.

"It's all fixed," Bandy Martin told him. "I told Windy you were so darned rotten rich now that you'd lost your good sense and that you would turn this over to me so as to let me make a little piece of money, just for old time's sake, and he fell for it. Fact is, he's starting one of these unit things again, and the postal inspector's been after him, and he's got to have an actual lease to describe in his letters and printed matter. Lem Higgins' got the papers all fixed."

They went up to Higgins' office and Perry signed his name and accepted Bandy Martin's certified check for thirty-six hundred dollars. Higgins left then—he had a case in court—and Bandy hurried over to assign the lease to Windy Boole and collect his profit. Perry started out, too, and then, as if a sudden thought had changed his plan, returned and spoke to Higgins' stenographer.

"How many copies of that lease did you make?"

"Why, just the original and one for you. Here—I was going to put it with the other papers we are keeping for you."

"Pshaw! I wanted two, but I can make the extra one myself—there's just a few places to fill in on the machine and I can do it. I'm not much on the two finger but I can generally make the mill say what I want it to say. Give me one of those forms and one of those fancy backs to put on it."

The girl did as he asked—he had a way with him, and also she had other things to do—and for half an hour he typed slowly, whistling as he worked. Then he put the fancy back onto the paper, stapled it neatly, folded the document and slipped it into his

inside coat pocket. A few minutes later he called at Windy Boole's place.

"Mr. Boole in?"

"He's in conf—oh, it's Mr. Wilder. I'll see."

Boole beckoned him into the room behind the door marked "Mr. Boole, Private." He seemed in excellent humor.

"You let Bandy have that place pretty cheap, Perry," he said. "Maybe you didn't know that stuff all around has been going for twenty-five to forty dollars an acre."

"Shucks! That so? I been sort of out of touch. Of course I've known Bandy a long time and I thought that maybe he'd have some luck and strike a well and then I'd get my one barrel in eight and no investment——"

"I see. But if anybody strikes a well, it won't be Bandy Martin, but yours truly."

"What?" Perry's manner spoke surprise and emphatic displeasure. "Well, I certainly didn't aim—say now, look here——"

"Nothing doing. That lease was made out to Martin, his successors and assigns, and he has already assigned it to me. Here, take a look."

He reached into a basket and tossed to Perry the lease, to which an assignment form was clipped.

Perry appeared nonplused.

"Well, all right. I could hook you yet, but—fact is, Windy, what I came up here for was to see Bandy and make that lease right. There isn't much wrong with it, but a little thing sometimes results in lawsuits. Look at it and you'll see that while the paper mentions me as Amos Perry Wilder and the abstract shows transfer of title to Amos Perry Wilder, my name's signed just Perry. I used to sign myself "A. Perry" till the boys sort of kidded me out of it. Just to show you that I don't want to take an unfair advantage I'll sign Amos in front of the Perry."

He took his fountain pen from his pocket then and signed, while Windy Boole, smiling, looked on. Then he folded the paper and slipped it into his inside coat pocket and started for the door. Windy Boole yelled at him:

"Here, come back and give me my lease. Damned if I don't think you're out to do me yet."

Perry stopped at the door.

"Getting sort of absent-minded, I guess, Windy. Here you are and I'm decent

enough to hope that you make a will. I suppose I'll read about it if you do—I'm aiming to make a little trip to New York and take a look at the tall buildings and the lovely ladies. So long."

He strolled out then, with Windy Boole at his heels, and he heard Boole tell the blond person to "hurry right over to the courthouse and register this lease."

In the weeks that followed, Perry Wilder, with money in his pocket and more in the bank, saw New York and Boston and Philadelphia and Washington and had a large time. The home-town paper followed him and he read of drilling operations by J. Harding Boole and associates on the Wilder place in the Harder Pool district. And when a copy of the paper came to hand, besmeared across the first page with headlines proclaiming a well that had burst all holds and was flooding the country, he turned the nose of the red roadster west by south and stepped on the gas. And with him he carried a serious-looking person with cold gray eyes and a hard, thin mouth.

They called first on Overholt at the bank, who listened and chuckled when he heard what Perry proposed to do. Then they went over to see Higgins, the lawyer, who, speaking from the legal side, didn't think much of the project, but, as a human being, was for it strong.

"I feel as you do about it," said the serious-looking person, whom Perry had introduced as Mr. Hawkins of the post-office department. "While it may not so appear, I'm not here in my official capacity. As an individual I'm for it strong, and I think the oil business and the investing public will be greatly benefited if what Mr. Wilder proposes can be put through."

The four of them then called on Windy Boole, who was, as usual, in conference. The blond person in the outer office seemed impressed by the delegation, however, and went in without objection to interrupt the meeting.

Perry introduced Hawkins, but did not state his occupation, and then got down to business.

"I've been away, Windy," he said, "and sort of out of touch. Say, they've got a show in New York that—well, I'll tell you about that some other time. I saw about everything, I guess, that was decent, and drifted down to Washington and met up



with Mr. Hawkins here and brought him along with me. The *Oil Herald* caught up with me in Washington and I read all about how you made a big strike. How much is she running?"

"Maybe a thousand barrels a day. You'll get your eighth all right."

"Yay-uh. Well, that's what I was coming to. What I can't just understand is how come you're drilling on my place near the Harder Pool. Looks to me like trespass and I don't aim to stand for it."

"What? You're crazy! You leased that place to Bandy Martin and Bandy assigned the lease to me. Wait— Here it is."

"Yay-uh." Perry picked up the lease and studied it for a long half minute, then passed it to Higgins, the lawyer. "But the trouble is, Windy, that you've been drilling on the wrong piece. I told you, that day I came in and wrote Amos ahead of Perry Wilder, that I didn't aim to let you drill on my place down Harder way. This lease covers three hundred twenty acres I've got in cotton out west!"

Windy Boole jumped up and shook his clenched fists. His mouth opened and closed, impotently, and his face turned purple with rage. Then he cursed violently, profusely, and, the more he cursed the surer Perry Wilder felt that the game was won. If the organization and conduct of the company had been, as Boole claimed, perfectly legal, Boole would have had, according to Higgins, an excellent case in equity, but Perry had staked his play upon the certainty that Boole had not been able, in a case where real profits through a big well were at stake, to play fair with those who had invested in the project.

In the two-hour wrangle which followed it was made clear from Boole's manner and from occasional inadvertent admissions that the last thing he wanted was a Federal investigation into this affair. It was disclosed, among other things, that Boole had let a contract for the digging of the well to Bandy Martin, at five times what the job should have cost the stockholders; also that control of the company was absolutely in the hands of Boole who, by the old ruse of stopping drilling upon pretext of lack of funds, had persuaded the unit holders to give him power of attorney, in return for

which he agreed to advance his own funds to complete the well.

"Which now being admitted, and it being evident also that you advertised to own a lease that you didn't own, thereby committing a fraud upon the innocent investor, there is just one opening for you, Boole, and that is to sign a power of attorney in favor of Perry Wilder," commented Higgins dryly. "This power of attorney giving Wilder full control, he will then proceed with the plan which he has outlined—which is to operate this first well for the benefit of the unit holders, he turning over all profits to them after deducting the one barrel in eight to which he is entitled as owner of the land. This will give the unit owners plenty of money to make their investment profitable and Wilder can do what he likes with the property, except in so far as this first well is concerned. Sign here."

Windy Boole signed—not just then, but after a little more argument—and the meeting adjourned.

"But what I don't just understand yet," said Overholt, when they were talking it over at the bank, "is how you managed to slip him the wrong lease. Boole certainly thought that he had a lease from you, covering the piece he drilled."

"Sure he did," agreed Perry. "I made out a perfectly good lease to Bandy Martin and that perfectly good lease was the one that I fixed up in Boole's office by writing Amos in front of Perry Wilder, but I slipped the good lease into my pocket and when he called me for it I pulled out a different paper, that looked just like the first one but that had a different description in it altogether. I figured he wouldn't bother to look it all over carefully—and he didn't."

He grinned and the others grinned with him.

"Yay-uh. I ain't so much on this trick stuff as a rule but when I got into that crap game with Windy and saw him shift one pair of dice up his sleeve and slip another down to shoot seven with I figured that a guy that was as crooked as that was about due for a razz and I'd give it to him. What I did to him wasn't any worse than what he did to Bandy Martin and me, and it sure made a fine razz for Windy Boole."

*Another story of the oil fields by Mr. Brindley in the next issue.*



# The Horse of Castle Canon

By T. von Ziekursch

*Author of "The Breeze of Memory," "The Call of the Running Moon," Etc.*

**The great wild stallion meets his master.**

**A** HOT wind played up from the south, warmer for touching the rocks as it passed. In the bottoms it stirred the sand into little designs. The blue of the morning sky faded out as though burned by the touch of the sun and then gave way to that light brassy yellow as of molten gold. The mountains were sharp, abrupt, harsh, without a gentle undulation to alleviate the effect. Peaks and needles seemed to shoot straight aloft from the flats in a crazy assortment of forbidding false-ness. The whole region was unreal and the reds and browns, mingling into hues that were purplish tints, added to the bizarre aspect of it all.

For miles on miles it was so, a land in which only the water holes and the sparse vegetation in isolated spots afforded relief. Beyond, in ever rising wildness and sharpness the mountains rose higher, wave on wave of rocks with bottoms in which the fir and piñon pines grew in bunches surrounding scattered glades where soft carpetings of grass sprouted and grew long. Here man rarely came and the wild found paradise. An eagle floated without evident motion high aloft and along a bench of rock a bighorn ram and two ewes fed in alert

watchfulness, aware that the great pumas stalked incessantly. Far up on a crag that afforded precarious footing a mountain goat was a spot of white, his dark beady eyes discerning every slightest thing that moved. And over all ruled a silence as though life did not exist, a silence that was in itself a presence, a living, pulsing thing.

Toward the east across the dead flat the mountains rose again. In the level spaces three antelope found some manner of grazing and moved nervously at a sound. Their slender necks arched up and they looked to the wide arroyo from which the sound came. Over the edge of the break a great head arose, sharp ears forward. The wind played through the tousled mane of a gray stallion as he stood motionless, surveying the quiet scene. A second head came into view and another as the mares of his band pushed forward, things of the wild, wary as the mountain sheep or the antelope. Satisfied at last the stallion strode onto the flat, breasting the steep edge of the arroyo with ease and the agility of some more nimble-footed species. But his was a noble heritage.

Fifteen hundred years ago the Frank beat back the Saracen at Tours. Gradually came

the recession southward and east but the Saracen left his mark and more. On the plains of Castile and the Andalusian hills he left his horses. And the Spaniard found them good, the long-limbed Moroccan and the shorter, compact Arab, the horse superb, bred to the purple. With the Spaniard they came westward to the new continent, to deteriorate much, to grow smaller with the passing of centuries, to change under the new conditions that demanded only one quality—endurance. But in the south in those isolated flats where conditions most closely approach the plains of Araby are some that have held the best of those glorious qualities, some that are pure throwbacks with the short head and magnificent curving neck, the shapely thighs of that famed ancestry.

The wind played through the gray stallion's tail where it bunched thickly and then tapered down to perfection of shape. He moved with a smoothness of action that was a revelation of grace and in every line was manifest the blood of that Eastern ancestry nurtured by the desert Bedouins. The small, shapely hoofs were placed with the finesse of a danseuse and he led on slowly while the mares, a score in all, grazed hastily as they followed this wild chieftain.

Among the rocks, safely screened from any searching eyes, the man lay and looked out through a rift, marveling. His breath came faster and he stared, fascinated, drinking in every rippling of the velvety gray softness that covered those rounded muscles of shoulder and thigh. All through the night the man had lain there looking out, peering down the flat that was a valley, wondering and waiting. Perhaps those other men had turned and been thrown off the trail down there where his own horse had fallen, pushed to the limit and beyond by the pursuit.

They had called him an outlaw when his bullet found another man, and the other had drawn first. Bitter resentment was in his heart now. He had not murdered and in his mind were no regrets, but they called him an outlaw and he was a hunted thing. A moment before he had drunk from the canteen and there was food. Then the sound which he had dreaded interrupted—the soft thud of hoofs—and now he saw this magnificent animal leading the wild mares, his herd. The man's eyes were wide and he rubbed them and looked again, for never had he seen the equal of this magnificent

gray stallion of heavy mane and arching neck. Smaller he was than the long-limbed range horses, but thicker of thigh and better molded. A touch of a smile was at the corners of the man's mouth as realization came suddenly. He knew, he had heard, as had every true horseman, of the lines of that breed. His glance fell and mentally he stroked the shapely limbs.

Immovable he lay watching as the small band of wild horses worked up along the edge of the flat. They were lost to sight around the flank of a sharp butte and reappeared a few moments later beyond. The man felt impotent at the surging desire for possession. All else faded from his mind. He was lifted far above the mere fears of the pursuit. It was a contemptible thing at best. Not any three of them could have stood against him had he chosen to face them to a finish, but then it would go on until they had gotten him. Now they might forget or lag in the quest.

The man left the sanctuary of rock and on the bench the mountain ram moved nervously at sight of him crawling in the direction the stallion had gone with his mares. A mile, two miles and more the man followed, creeping often, walking erect rarely, stalking with a new and consummate patience. At last came the realization that there was method in this gray leader's way.

Perspiration was thick on the man's face and it ran down unheeded. The sun mounted high until the whole heaven was brassy with the glow of it. It was an effort to follow. The antelope saw him and fled like sprites of the flats, in soaring leaps. Around the edge of a hundred-foot rock needle the man peeped cautiously. Here at the very base of the mountains was a strange place. The rocks jutted up like massive things of cardboard stuck through the dry earth, an endless maze of hardness. From the protection of the needle the man watched them again and rubbed his eyes once more. The gray stallion stood like a sentinel while the mares filed past as though in review. One by one they disappeared as if some secret door in the rock of the mountainside had opened to let them enter. The last one was gone and then the stallion followed. The man waited but they did not reappear and he advanced cautiously toward the spot where they had gone.

At last he reached it and found a narrow break in the stone, a gap with piled boul-

ders all about. Slowly he crept among them and looked through. There a broad cañon reached deep into the mountains, a secluded valley where the grass was lush and thick. Not more than a half mile wide, and level, it stretched away, narrowing gradually a mile before it ended. And abruptly the mountain rose from all sides at the edges of the flat like the walls of a castle, buttressed and pinnacled. There was the stallion and his mares and beyond them a band of mountain sheep seemed disturbed at the intrusion. As the man looked on he saw the sheep work right up to the wall of rock and then in single file mount a narrow path worn in the face of the stone by countless generations of their kind.

Along the wall of the mountain at a steep angle the trail led upward, a way from the heights to this secluded spot of plenty. One of the mares went to a little break at the base of the rock wall and the man saw that she drank, and the darker streak on the side of the stone told of water seeping its way out from the very heart of these fastnesses. Long the man lay there among the boulders peering about and at last came realization that where he lay was the only way out of this blind cañon. He smiled contentedly and the desire in his eyes burned with renewed vigor as he studied the magnificent gray stallion. Then he arose in full view and sat on one of the boulders. He saw the toss of the stallion's head as it came up at sight of him.

Even at this distance of three or four hundred yards he could discern the alert stiffening of the magnificent creature and the sudden hysteria of the mares. But for them he had no thought. The dark tips of the stallion's ears were sharply forward and his whole body seemed to stiffen. There he stood, motionless, feet placed wide apart, facing the man, and his snort was plain. Minutes passed and at last the stallion began working slowly from side to side, seeking the air that might drift through this narrow gap where the man barred the way.

Throughout the day the man sat there, moving only when the stallion was quiet too long. Longings for a rope came often but there was none. Night settled swiftly here where the heights shut out the oblique rays of the setting sun but in the glow from the night sky that found its way into the cañon the man saw that the stallion and his mares moved restlessly about. At last they settled

down in the far recesses and then the man went toward them singing and they were up and milling about nervously. A concerted rush toward the gap beyond which lay freedom and he must have given way or been crushed, but their terror of him was too great for that. Throughout the night they had no rest and morning found them up and watchful while a new purpose burned strong in the heart of the man. He advanced toward them until they fled to the far depths of the cañon, then he drank where the water trickled down from the rocks to form a tiny pool. And he was never far from the gap nor the water. In the afternoon he slept, sitting propped erect among the boulders in the gap and a blue bandanna that fluttered from a stick lent added guardianship.

That night and the following day he again harried them so that they could not rest and dared not approach the water. On the third day the mares began to droop under the strain of it. The gray stallion, too, showed signs of weariness and the man fought to keep himself from sleeping when darkness came. Now the stallion settled down with his mares at every opportunity and the man came closer with his waving arms and threw stones each time before he got them up.

The fourth morning found the mares scattered and resting undisturbed while the stallion moved slowly from place to place before the man's threatening advances that were nicely calculated to keep himself always between the gray leader and the gap. It was early afternoon when the man returned to his place among the boulders, prepared to rest prior to the nightly vigil that would prevent the stallion from sleeping. And now before he settled on the stone the man looked out through the gap and crumpled down suddenly. In the distance were small things, dark against the reds and browns of the valley. Long he looked toward them and his lips were tight. Then he sat down calmly among the boulders and rested.

One by one the mares came toward the water not more than a hundred feet from the gap and the man. The thing that impelled them was stronger than their fear of their tormentor. Slowly, fighting every instinct that forbade him approach so near to where the man was, the gray stallion approached. The man pitied him, knew what the cravings of this magnificent animal were

and was glad that the fight was nearing its end in that direction as well as another. He looked toward the north, out through the gap and up the flat that was a valley through the mountain range. Forty miles to the north was the nearest town. An equal distance toward the south from which he had come was another town, each at the end of the flat valley. And now he could discern the half dozen horsemen who were in pursuit.

He laughed and there was some mirth in it. Then he waved his arms and ran toward the little pool of crystal clear water. A dozen yards from it the stallion threw his head high and hesitated as the man neared. The sleek gray horse did not leap away like a bounding thing of steel springs now. Instead he reached his dark muzzle out searchingly toward the water and the longing for it was obvious as he trotted slowly off in a half circle.

The man did not go back to the gap to look out now. He knew that the pursuit was nearing. Here and there must be tell-tale signs and they would find them, but it would take them a long time. In the eye of his mind he could see the slow advance, the men looking down, scrutinizing every yard as they rode, pointing now and then to where a heel had sunk in on a sun-baked spot. His mouth was tight and there was an anxious look in his eyes, but no fear.

The gray stallion was not more than twenty paces distant, circling about while the man faced him constantly. The pennons of carmine that were the final challenge of the dying day unfurled across the western sky and the shadows in the blind cañon where the rock bristled like the turrets of a gigantic castle were sharp. Heavy twilight fell here in the depths where man and horse faced each other and the horse came a step nearer, his tongue heavy and thick, protruding inches from the soft muzzle where it darkened almost to black. The man saw that beyond the gap in the broad valley it was still light and he knew that they who came after him would not give over the trail yet. He took off his belt and stood quietly, holding it as a noose, tense, ready, but the stallion remained motionless, watching. The heavy breathing of the horse came to his ears, labored as though it had run for many miles.

Beyond the gap darkness fell suddenly as

the last reflections of the sun were shut out by the towering pinnacles of stone toward the west. There were sounds that came through the gap occasionally, the sounds of men's voices and laughter. A faint glow of red fell across the gap, red fading to yellow and orange, merely enough of it reflecting among the boulders to let the man know that just beyond and all unaware of his proximity was the small fire over which the pursuers cooked coffee. Coffee—it was a mockery. His own food was gone and he was hungry.

The sky lightened perceptibly and directly overhead myriad stars silvered the night while the suffused glow of the moon lent a soft, mystic thing to the rock. The heat of the day was lessened and the man, too, wanted water, but he did not move. The gray stallion's dark eyes were plain now and his neck reached out toward the water, but he did not move toward it.

Beyond the gap came the heavy, pleasing baritone of one of those camped there. He sang a crude lay of heat and desert and it came faintly to the other man standing there by the water hole. Time seemed interminable. The glow that fell among the boulders died down and there was silence. Now the crescent curl of the moon was visible directly over the blind cañon where man and horse stood with the water between.

The man's body was trembling and he shifted one foot slowly, then the other, to ease the strain. The stallion took another hesitant step toward the water. Then each waited again and the moon was drooping in the west. Another step and the scent of the water was strong in those hot, distended nostrils. It was an overpowering thing, crushing resistance, overcoming fear. The stallion came forward nervously and the soft, shapely muzzle was buried deep. There was a guzzling sound as he sucked the cool water in. One step and the man was beside the powerful curved neck. A swift motion and the belt was fastened about the muzzle above the mouth. The stallion strained for one great gulp of water and leaped aside even as the man was astride him, fingers twining in the long, tousled mane. There was a wild snort of mingling fear and rage, a bursting leap as of marvelous muscles exploding and the stallion sped straight ahead through the semidarkness. Where his band of mares lay near the blind

head of the cañon he swung in a circle of terrific, stiff-legged bounds and the mares were up, whinnying shrilly.

Beyond the gap one of the horses picketed by the pursuers answered and a man arose to his elbow, listening. He was up at a bound and the others arose at his call.

Straight toward the gap the gray stallion raced wildly in long leaps, neck arching and head held low as he sought to unseat this clinging thing that held grimly and met every jolting thump. Suddenly he veered, almost unseating the man as the forms of those other men appeared dimly outlined in the opening. Around in another great circle the gray beast swung, tail straight out in back, and raced along the base of the mountain wall, back toward the blind end of the cañon, vainly seeking escape.

In the east there was a graying of the sky over the mountain peaks and a rose tint spread as the blush of day surprised. The men in the gap saw a dark shape that sped off into the black depths and there were revolvers in their hands. The thud of heavy beating hoofs was loud in their ears even after the dark shape was gone. And then it was black again, a dim, animate shadow of speed personified, a great bounding thing that came toward them and made each unconsciously lift the hand that held the gun forward slightly.

The stallion saw them and swerved again from his desperate effort for the freedom of the open valley, and as he turned back toward the depths of the cañon the man heard a surprised shout from one of those at the gap, and knew that they had discerned him flattened there on the back of this proud thing of the wild.

The day pushed on beyond the peaks and in the cañon there was a lightening. The head of the gray stallion tossed fiercely and his leaps gave way to sheer speed as he flattened out, racing along where the mountain-side joined the flat. Ahead was a break, a flat thing that ascended the steep wall of rock, a path worn into the face of it by countless generations of the mountain sheep coming down from the high plateaus to this place of lush grasses and water. Straight toward it the stallion sped. A lunging bound and his small hoofs found footing on the table near the bottom. Cold perspiration was on the body of the man and his face was drawn. He closed his eyes and

prepared to leap, then opened them and hung on grimly to the long mane. It whipped back into his face and he lifted his head slightly to look down. A hundred feet below where this wild gray thing sped along the face of the mountain were the mares looking up and he saw that from the direction of the gap the pursuers came, running, unmounted. He could feel the galvanic play of superb muscles, the gathering and unleashing of untested wells of power. There was a slight slipping, a momentary stumbling and the stallion hurtled forward afresh in a new leap, on and up where only sheep and pumas had ever dared go before. The short, compact head was straight out in front, the arching neck flattened, and death beckoned vainly and waited for the misstep that did not come. Far down in the cañon came the sharp report of a gun and the bullet nicked the rock above where the stallion had been a fraction of a second before.

The man straightened and loosened one hand from the long mane. He waved it and shouted at them. Below, the leader of the pursuers grasped the arm of the man who had fired and shook his head in unmistakable meaning. Then they watched and in their eyes was the admiration of men. Four hundred feet and more, straight up, was a break where two boulders stood like massive gateposts.

Toward this they sped on. The shelving path on which the stallion found footing in this eerie race narrowed, was less than a foot in width, lost its identity as a path and was a series of small shelves here and there a few feet apart where the sheep had jumped from foothold to foothold. A daring man without knowledge of nerves or fear might have clambered along it and reached the heights but there were places where for a full six feet or more not a bit of flat stone presented opportunity for the resting place of a hoof. Over these gaps the great gray horse leaped and bounded on, nostrils distended, a fitting mount for some Valkyrie plunging aloft above the clouds of battle with the soul of a mighty jarl.

To the man who sat astride him, who rose and fell to lessen the shock of his weight at every bound, came an exaltation. He laughed at death, felt a fierce glow of conquest, bent his head forward and shouted a harsh command. The stallion's ears were flattened, he surged over a gap that no man could pass, a gap that definitely

barred pursuit, found new footing among loose rocks that went tumbling down the steep side of the mountain, and plunged ahead, nearing the break where the boulders stood as a gate. He was laboring under the terrific strain, each breath a grunt of effort. Below the bouldered opening the path ended abruptly against sheer stone, a full four feet below.

The man's face hardened, he tensed, released his hold on the mane, grasped the belt that was a crude halter, and lifted as a rider in a steeplechase might at some appalling jump. His own thighs felt the bunching of muscles of this superb horse, answered the gathering of power and his voice rose in a wild shout of triumph as the stallion breasted the break, scrambled and fell safe on the edge of the plateau where a band of mountain sheep fled in terror.

Slowly the gray animal reared, blood flowing from the scratches at hocks and knees where the sharp fragments of rock had cut. His great back trembled and his gray flanks were dark with sweat.

Ahead the plateau rolled away, gently broken and he trotted slowly and unsteadily toward the west where for miles in all directions lay the wild, untrammelled. The arching neck hung low in exhaustion and he made no further effort to unseat the man who leaned far forward and spoke softly. His hand stroked the mane, flattening it gently. At last the stallion stopped, wavering slightly, forefeet wide apart, and the man dismounted, holding the belt that served as a halter, and walked on toward the west where for a hundred miles in any direction lay freedom and safety. He did not look back, for here there was no fear of pursuit. Only many miles away toward the south was there a way through which horsemen could follow. And that would be a roundabout route that would require many days of slow traveling.

Deliberately he turned toward the north and west. At last the labored breathings of the stallion ceased. Then the man mounted and rode on to freedom, and here on the high plateaus the morning winds were cool.

*Another story by Mr. von Ziekursch in the next issue.*



## THE REASONABLE SIGN

THE favorite story of Otis Skinner, the actor, is about—and very much on—himself. It also has to do with golf, a game in which—as Skinner frequently admits—he can be a mighty bad actor, on occasion.

Starting out one morning for a round of eighteen holes over an unfamiliar course Mr. Skinner came face to face with an ominous sign prominently featuring the first tee. The sign read:

PLEASE REPLACE THE TURF.

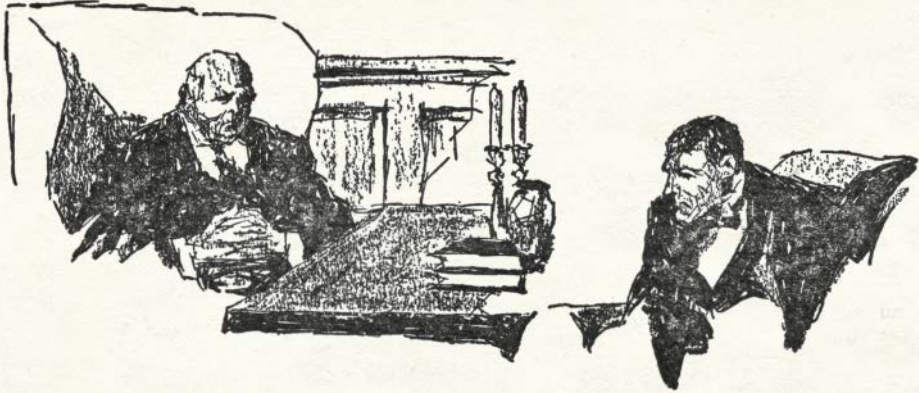
"That sign," said Skinner, "is an insult and a libel on any self-respecting golfer." He turned from the offending placard and addressed the gutta-percha ball viciously. The ball promptly dribbled off in a spurt of black earth as the great histrionist's driver gored the sod.

Skinner's first drive was an accurate index to the remainder of the game. "I hit everything in the landscape excepting the ball," he relates, "and they had to rebuild six bunkers when I was through. The licking I took was scandalous but it was nothing to the terrific beating I gave that golf course!"

Finally they reached the end of the eighteen-hole route, "and the honor of the family was splattered and blackened with the dirt of many a mangled green," according to the incomparable creator of "Kismet."

"Wait a minute," said Skinner as his victorious opponent headed for the nineteenth in the club locker room. "I want to look at that sign again."

He approached the sign and contemplated it mournfully and at length. "Please replace the turf," read Skinner aloud. Then he shook his head. "You'll have to have that sign reworded before I play here again," he commented. "It is far too conservative as it stands. After what has happened to-day it ought to read: 'Please returf the place!'"



# The Hand and the Eye

By Robert H. Rohde

Author of "Macumber's Madness," "The Laughing Lady," Etc.

**With the aid of a little magic and a deal of ingenuity the Great Macumber penetrates the secrets of the dope-smuggling profession.**

IT is a queer psychological quirk rather than any of the several concrete considerations he is in the habit of advancing that holds the Great Macumber to the profession of magic. He detests being called a detective, abhors the thought of commercializing those other peculiar talents of his in whose exercise he finds his chief diversion. In pursuit of his hobby he maintains the attitude of the amateur in more widely followed sports than the crime hunt. To the tips of his wonder-working fingers the Great One is ethical.

The rôle of amateur in criminology has its drawbacks, however. Cases presenting the qualities which Macumber sees as a direct challenge do not come to him in nearly so quick a succession as he could wish. Sometimes weeks will elapse between problem and problem—as they had elapsed when little Miss Jessica Laycroft arrived at the Rawley to beg us to rescue her father from what she tearfully proclaimed the most infamous and iniquitous and altogether inexplicable conspiracy ever woven around a helpless and innocent man.

Macumber had been in the doldrums for close to a month then; chafing all the more because the period was one during which we chanced, in the phrase of the theater, to be "resting." Morning after morn-

ing he had found the newspapers sterile. The crimes which they monotonously chronicled he dismissed with contempt, pronouncing them devoid of inspiration, hopelessly stupid.

Lacking more objective outlets the Great One had embarked not long before on a querimonious letter-box controversy with that eminent supersleuth of Scotland Yard, Sir Needham Brayne. He had begun also a correspondence with Doctor Ambrose Graham, whose discovery of a so-called truth serum had lately brought a nine-day fame to a certain small New Hampshire village. The one current mystery of diverting promise had its setting no nearer to New York than the Pacific coast. Upon this, when his letters were off, Macumber applied himself to long-distance speculation on the sole basis of press dispatches of the most fragmentary nature.

And even these slender enterprises were at a ragged end when the girl from Kansas rapped timidly at the Great Macumber's door.

Sir Needham had erased the issue with a brief and testy reply that he had been misquoted from first to last in the magazine interview and thus must decline to discuss the impressionistic criminological theories attributed to him. The San Francisco slayer



had come forward with a disappointingly full and lucid confession. And, though the bribes offered by the Great One rose to magnificent proportions at the last, not one of the Rawley's bell hops would submit to inoculation with so much as a drop of the green liquid in the vial sent to him by the obliging Doctor Graham.

So, all in all, Miss Jessica Laycroft could scarcely have complained of any lack of warmth in her reception by Macumber when she found her way finally to the hotel. Manifestly, she was taken aback. She had come with an apology on her trembling lips: before it was half spoken she found herself an honored and a thrice-welcome guest.

"If I—if we, that is—weren't in the deepest and strangest trouble," she faltered, "I'd not have——"

Macumber lifted an entreating hand.

"Please!" he begged. "You find me the idlest man in New York."

"Captain Blunt told me that if any one could help me it would be you. So——"

"It is I who am grateful to the gallant commander of the *Caronia*," smiled the Great One. "I have been wondering since you telephoned how I might be of assistance to you. It was some difficulty with the customs people, was it not?"

The girl's eyes flooded.

"It's much worse than that. My father has——"

Macumber nodded commiseratingly.

"Yes," he said. "I understood you to say he is being detained. The procedure is not unusual, however. It is a precaution quite frequently demanded by the red tape of the customs."

"But this is not a matter of red tape. It is more than mere detention. My father has been arrested. They've taken him away."

"So-o-o? And you'd just arrived aboard the *Caronia*?"

"We had not been off the ship five minutes."

"The charge is smuggling, I suppose?"

"They accused him of smuggling of the most despicable kind—of bringing some terrible drug into the country. They—they found the package in his pocket."

"That's bad," murmured the Great One. He spoke to himself, under his breath; but the girl caught the words he did not mean her to hear.

"You must not pass judgment against him

offhand!" she cried. "That is what they have done already. If you could only see my father and talk to him you would be satisfied that never in his life has he consciously done a wrong."

"Seeing and talking to *you*, Miss Laycroft," said Macumber gently, "is almost enough in itself to convince me of that."

The girl's misty eyes—eyes blue with that special blueness that the cornflowers of the prairie country seem to monopolize—gave him thanks.

"The inspectors might have known that my father told them the truth," she said. "Surely they could not have expected a guilty man to have acted as he did. You could not imagine a greater astonishment than his when they had opened the package and told him what it contained. He did not attempt any explanation. He simply told them he had never seen the package before."

"Yet it was in his pocket?"

"It had been placed there, Professor Macumber. Father is not the kind of man who makes enemies and I did not think until this morning that he had one in the world. But some one must——"

"Let me understand exactly what has happened, please," the Great One interrupted, "from the time you left the *Caronia*."

"I am afraid there is nothing I can tell which will explain how the drug came to be where it was found. My father and I were among the last to come ashore. We had stopped to say good-by to Captain Blunt, for we had sat at his table on the voyage over and had become quite friendly with him.

"Father attended to our baggage, which had been passed quickly by the customs inspectors. As we were about to leave the pier he had a sudden thought that he had forgotten the checks. In searching his pockets he came upon the flat package containing the drug—it was cocaine, they said later. I heard father say, 'That's funny!' and saw the package in his hand. He slipped it back; but one of the inspectors had been watching. He stepped over and asked a question. Father hesitated.

"What's in it?" the inspector demanded.

"I can't tell you," father replied. "I really don't think I've a right to open the package. I don't know whose it is or where it came from."

"The inspector smiled. 'It's enough for me to know where it is now,' he said. 'I'll take the chance on opening it!' He did so.

"That was the beginning of the trouble. Other inspectors came. They called a man in civilian dress. When I heard him tell father he was under arrest a moment later I hurried to Captain Blunt, the only friend either of us had this side of Emporia.

"The captain seemed almost as greatly distressed as I. I waited aboard the *Caronia* while he went to investigate. When he came back he was very grave. He told me what the charge was and said he was sure there had been some tragic mistake. Then, when he had heard all I knew, he advised me to come to you."

"Captain Blunt and I had been friends for years before he took command of the *Caronia* last summer," nodded Macumber. "But did Blunt not tell you to get a lawyer interested?"

The girl found a card in her purse and handed it to the Great One.

"He referred me to a Mr. Peabody, whom he called on the telephone himself. This is his address."

"You've seen him?"

"Yes. After father had gone with the customs men I took a taxicab from the pier to his office. He made two or three telephone calls and learned that some sort of court proceedings had been held already."

"A preliminary hearing before a United States commissioner, undoubtedly," Macumber told her.

"I think that is what Mr. Peabody said."

"What was the upshot? Were bonds fixed, do you know?"

"Mr. Peabody said the surety demanded was preposterous. A hundred thousand dollars! Father could not command half as much as that even if he were in Emporia."

The Great One was obviously startled by the amount. In the shadow that rested for a moment on his face I read his thought that the situation into which Mr. Alonzo Laycroft of Emporia had fallen might be more serious even than his daughter realized.

"And this had been your father's first trip abroad?" he asked.

"Oh, no," said the girl. "It was the first time he had taken me. Father does the foreign buying for one of the biggest department stores out home. It is the only store in Emporia—the only one, I think, in all Kansas—that sends its own buyer abroad.

Father goes to Europe at least once a year, and sometimes twice. He makes the purchases, you see, for all departments."

I could see that the girl's reply was disappointing to Macumber and I could guess why. Men making business voyages overseas on more or less regular schedules, I happened to know, too frequently fall into fellowship with smugglers; the promise of easy money for small risk proves irresistible to many of them. The Great One made no comment.

"Has Mr. Peabody seen your father yet?" he queried.

"He said he would arrange to see him this evening."

"Then," decided Macumber, "I shall attach myself to Peabody in the capacity of associate counsel. My own experience with the Federal authorities is limited. I'd not be sure that——"

The Great One's eye had fallen on the tiny vial of the Graham serum which lay on his reading table. He picked it up.

"Here, Miss Laycroft," said he, "might be the means of clearing your father of the charges which they have chosen to lay against him—or of inducing a guilty man to bear witness against himself."

She didn't understand.

"This green fluid is Veritasol," Macumber explained. "Have you not heard of it?"

Miss Jessica Laycroft shook her head.

"Probably you wouldn't have. It is a very recent discovery. The headline writers of the newspapers, with their happy faculty for brief and expressive descriptive phrases, have referred to it as the 'truth serum.'"

"I believe I did read something about it in the Paris edition of the *Herald*," said the girl. "But I did not regard the article as serious. The claims made for the serum sounded like impossibilities."

"They are not. It has been definitely and positively proved by many tests made in the last few weeks that Veritasol will bring the truth to the most reluctant lips. I've been denied the privilege of experimenting with the serum myself, owing to the disinclination of those whom I selected as subjects to oblige me, but I still cannot doubt its efficacy."

"It sounds like magic."

"It is magic—the magic of science, Miss Laycroft. Veritasol robs the person inoculated with it of part of his intelligence and yet permits the rest of the mind to function

normally. One might say that it kills the imagination. It halts the lie not at the lips, but at the point of conception in the brain. The impulse to dissemble, to evade, is deadened. At the same time the impulse to speech is accelerated. The tongue wags under the stimulus of Veritasol. When questions are asked of the subject truth comes promptly in the answers. A score of prison physicians and police officials have demonstrated that to their satisfaction."

"It is actually being used?"

"In an experimental way only. There are fine questions involved, legal and ethical. It is debatable whether inoculation of a suspect without his consent—or even with it—would not infringe upon his constitutional rights. Certainly the great burden of proof which constitutionally rests on the shoulders of the law would be lifted were Veritasol to be brought into general use. That, from my personal viewpoint, would be deplorable. It would mean in large measure an end of the battle of wits that breakers and upholders of the world's laws have been fighting since the beginning of time. The idea represented by Veritasol, in other words, is scientific—but not sporting."

"But in father's case!" the girl burst forth. "If all this is true, could not they use the serum to convince themselves of his innocence?"

"That," said Macumber, "is the thought I had in mind. I'd not thought of Veritasol as a boon to the man falsely accused until a moment ago. Do you think your father would consent to the test?"

Miss Laycroft hesitated.

"Are you certain there is no danger?"

"Not a bit of it," the Great One assured her. "There's not even the soreness or the fever that sometimes follows ordinary vaccination."

"Then there is nothing," said the girl, "for an innocent man to fear. You may be sure that father will offer no objection once he understands that you are trying to help him. He must appreciate by now what grave trouble he is in and will be terribly worried through fear that news of it will get back home in some distorted form. But do you really think you can——"

Macumber dropped the vial into his pocket.

"I'd not attempt to prophesy what the government people will say to my sugges-

tion," said he, "but nevertheless there'll be no harm in making it. Probably I shall find them not unacquainted with the quite well-established properties of Veritasol. In that event I'll do my best to persuade them that in the case in hand the stuff might serve them well."

## II.

Within an hour after the Great Macumber had engaged accommodations for Miss Jessica Laycroft in a hotel which caters exclusively to women, not far from the Rawley, the government's chief prosecuting officer for the southern district of New York was listening to what he declared the oddest proposition ever laid before him in connection with a Federal case. He was at first incredulous, then amused.

"I can't imagine you are serious," was his comment.

"But I am," said Macumber. "If it would be fair in one case, then——"

"This particular case," said the district attorney, "is a far graver one than you perhaps think. The quantity of narcotics smuggled into the country has more than quadrupled in the last few months. We keep a rather close check on the traffic, you know. Peddlers of the dope are arrested almost daily. They are small fry. The smugglers are harder men to trap."

"You're making a mistake with Laycroft," protested the Great One. "He is a reputable business man. You can easily establish that."

"I've no doubt he could produce any number of character witnesses from his home town. But that does not alter the fact he was caught red-handed. We're certain of one thing. The people being used to flood America with narcotics are men like Laycroft, people whose business takes them abroad at intervals and who are too willing to pick up a few hundred dollars on the return trip to be overscrupulous. If we make an example of one of them there'll be some hope of keeping the traffic in bounds. I've heard what Laycroft has to say and I've no hesitation in telling you it's absurd. You can trust a man to know what's in his own pockets."

"Ah, but can you?" smiled Macumber. "I do not entirely agree. For instance, I suppose that if I were to tell you that one of *your* own pockets contains a wallet which I can easily prove to be mine you'd be

righteously indignant. You'd deny it with utmost vigor, of course. Yet I assure you that is the fact."

The prosecutor stared at him.

"And am I to take you seriously now?" he demanded.

"I am always serious when I smile," said the Great One. "Hadn't you better investigate? Unless my eyes deceive me there's a bulge to your left-hand coat pocket that's somewhat suspicious—if you'll pardon the word."

The district attorney shifted the cold cigar which he had been twirling between his fingers into his right hand and patted the pocket. The bulk spoken of by Macumber was there. Into the pocket went his hand. It came out clutching a wallet I recognized as the Great One's. His face reddened.

"This isn't mine!" he cried. "How do I come to have it?"

Macumber regarded him soberly. "Were not those almost the very words of Laycroft?" he asked.

"The devil with Laycroft! This is your wallet, you say?"

"You'll find a few of my professional cards in it—along with a sum of money which I will grant is inconsequential to a man like yourself, sir. No; I'd advise you not to hand it over until you have satisfied yourself I am the rightful owner."

The puzzled frown on the district attorney's face cleared a bit as he inspected a card from the wallet.

"Oh, that's the Macumber you are—the Great Macumber! This is a sample of magic, is it?"

"Hardly magic," replied the Great One diffidently. "No large amount of technique was required to transfer the wallet from my possession to yours. I'd merely planned to demonstrate how simply and easily the thing might be done. You have my thanks for bringing up the subject of men and their pockets and my humblest apologies for having taken the liberty of taking you for a lay figure in my illustration."

Macumber's grin was disarming. It evoked a grin in return.

"But," said the prosecutor, "you've as far to go as you had before to convince me that cocaine which would bring several thousand dollars on the New York dope market was planted in Laycroft's pocket. What would be the object of that?"

"I can't answer you offhand," the Great

One replied. "Such criminological experimentation as I have found opportunity for has been more in the line of proving guilt than of establishing innocence. All I can tell you is that Laycroft's daughter believes him to be the victim of a conspiracy."

"Bosh!"

And the interview ended there. The district attorney reached forth a blunt finger and pressed a buzzer button.

"I'm afraid, gentlemen," he said, "that I will not have time this afternoon to continue our interesting discussion."

"But you've given me no direct answer on the matter of the Veritasol test," protested Macumber. "The suggestion was made in all seriousness, and I can supply the serum. Laycroft, I am assured by his daughter, is the man to agree. Consider that the experiment may mean much to you if the man has guilty knowledge. If it is proved that he has not, then surely you will be only too glad to give him his freedom."

The district attorney smiled faintly and put his finger again to the buzzer.

"You must excuse me," he said. "I am conducting neither a chemical nor a psychological laboratory here. We shall make our case without the aid of serums or savants. Laycroft, I can tell you, can look for no mercy at my hands. Should he choose voluntarily to give us a line on those associated with him in the narcotic smuggling he may do so with a reasonable expectation of clemency. Otherwise it will go hard with him. Washington is determined to force the drug traffic down to the absolute minimum and the smugglers will suffer to the limit of the law as we get a grip on them."

### III.

We had no notably cheering news for Miss Laycroft that evening after visiting the Tombs in company with Thurston Peabody, the youngish and rather pessimistic criminal lawyer whom she had retained in her father's behalf. Macumber could only tell the girl that in his brief talk with him he had become morally certain that Alonzo Laycroft knew no more about the drug responsible for his predicament than he had told. He did not reveal to her the doubts voiced by Peabody.

"It's ten to one," the lawyer had said when we left the city prison, "that Laycroft was paid well for bringing in the cocaine. If he continues stubborn and refuses to open

up I don't think I'll be able to do a great deal for him. Absolutely the best we can hope for is to get the government to accept a plea. That the old fellow has any intimate connection with the drug traffic is out of the question, of course. Possibly he didn't know what the package contained but you can bank on it that he knew it was something worth far more inside the country than outside. My guess is that it was the first time he'd tried his hand at smuggling—that some one he'd met on the other side talked him into it so thoroughly he didn't get cold feet until he was safely past the customs and leaving the pier. If he hadn't got flustered then the package would have stayed out of sight and he'd be on his way to the corn belt by this time with the reward promised him for the small accommodation. There's more smuggling done in that way than you'd imagine, Macumber. The customs people must have pretty solid reason for suspecting a man before they search him, you know."

All this the Great One had heard in silence accepted by Peabody as tacit acquiescence. Not until we were back at the Rawley did he allude to the lawyer's discouraging analysis of the case of the United States vs. Alonzo Laycroft.

"Innocent or guilty, lad," he said, "I'd not care to have an attorney in Peabody's frame of mind defending me."

"Is there no question in your own mind, maestro?" I asked him. "Aren't you being carried a bit far by the quixotic consideration that Laycroft's daughter is——"

"It's for the girl's sake, of course, that I'm interesting myself," said the Great One impatiently. "But because she is pretty and innocent is no argument that her father may not be an unscrupulous old rascal. I'd not deny that Peabody and the district attorney are right. Laycroft may have been tempted and have fallen. We should be able to get at the truth to-morrow, I'm thinking."

"To-morrow! How?"

"By taking counsel with a man who should know. We'll call on Doctor Redmark."

The name was unfamiliar.

"Who is Doctor Redmark?" I demanded. "Never heard of him."

"The doctor," replied Macumber, "is a man with more knowledge of the dope traffic in New York City than you could find in

all the files of the narcotic division at police headquarters."

"How does he come by it?"

"One might say he creates it. Redmark, unless my information and observation be all off, is the dope traffic—the financial power and the brains behind the organization which controls the importing and distributing trade in narcotics."

"You know him?"

"We are not unacquainted." The Great One smiled reminiscently. "At present we are in a state of armed neutrality. Redmark will see me, I am sure. I suspect he thinks I know more about him than I do."

"And if he does see you?"

"It may be that we can get a line on Laycroft. If he was bribed to run the stuff in, chances are that it was Redmark's money he got or that he was to get. The doctor is a marvel at detail, I've heard. His agents do little that he's not in personal touch with. If the man had not gone in for a medical career—in which he did none too well, I understand, until he discovered the vast commercial possibilities of narcotics—he might have been an outstanding figure in industry or finance. It's a queer old world, lad."

"But Redmark doesn't sound as if he'd be an easy man to pump," I remarked. "Is he an addict himself?"

"Ah," said Macumber, "that is exactly the point. The doctor was a user of narcotics before he became a trader in them, and so he continues to be. We'll drop in upon him shortly before five, by preference. Then in a few minutes we'll be sure to find him in a royal good humor."

"You seem to know him thoroughly."

"Aye, he's an interesting study. As a man of science Redmark has conformed his addiction to the clock, I happen to know. It is invariable that in the late afternoon—at the beginning of what used to be the cock-tail hour—he seeks solace with his needle."

I shuddered. "That's something I wouldn't care to see, maestro."

"The doctor would not in the least object to showing you how the thing's done," grinned the Great One. "He has no feelings of false delicacy on the subject. I have not forgotten that on the occasion of our own first meeting he felt the need of new life and gave himself a jab without suffering the conversation to languish for an instant. He did not even turn his back, but looked me

coolly in the eye and remarked that I was missing more than I knew. To be sure, Redmark is a merchant who believes in what he sells!"

#### IV.

Five o'clock was still nearly a half hour away when the Great Macumber and I turned off Central Park West into a block in the Eighties the following afternoon. Over the street hung an atmosphere of somber and almost oppressive respectability. Except for two tall flat buildings standing sentinel beside the elevated railroad tracks the houses which lined it were almost all high-stooped brownstone fronts, citadels of moneyed middle-class Victorianism.

"This is the street of Doctor Redmark," said the Great One. "You will observe he is fond of quiet rather than of ostentation. The man could have a palace on the Avenue if he would. New York is good to him. It is a city that turns a hundred new-made clients to him each day."

Macumber glanced at his watch but neither slacked nor hastened his pace.

"Enigmatic faces that these brownstone fronts present to us, are they not, lad?" he observed. "There is no style of dwelling so expressionless, none so sedate. You'd be surprised to know that this place we're passing has become the home of the most heavily played roulette layout in town. Redmark spins his web not far from the wheel. It is fitting. The wheel helps trade. Ah, here we are!"

The Great One ran lightly up the steps of a house that differed in not the tiniest detail from its neighbors to east and to west. A deep-toned bell, sounding within, awoke a succession of echoes so soft that I was prepared for the thick carpets and heavy hangings of the lower hall before the door opened.

It was a strange sort of servant who admitted us, a giant Mongol who towered a half head even over Macumber and greeted us with a face as blank as the dwelling's own. Yet he seemed either to recognize the Great One or to have anticipated his visit. He said no word but led the way up the wide staircase, motioning to us to follow.

We came to a halt before a curiously carved door on the floor above. There, when he had rapped, the huge house boy deserted us. Without a backward glance he fled swiftly and soundlessly down the stairs.

From behind the carved door came a high-pitched voice carrying a hint of cholera.

"Walk in, Macumber. Walk in!"

The Great One turned the knob and we stepped into a vast room which for all the daylight streaming through the windows at the rear held an air of chill austerity and gloom. The light rays, as they flooded in, seemed to be swallowed up in the dull old tapestries that covered the walls. The massive furnishings were uniformly of a lack-luster black.

Behind a great ebon table between the windows, facing us, lounged a man of Falstaffian bulk. His head was round and almost hairless and he was the possessor of a rippling series of chins that seemed in ceaseless agitation. A shadowy smile played at the corners of his puffy mouth.

I had been prepared to see a man gaunt and withered—not, certainly, such a gargoyle as this. Before I had recovered from my amazement our host had motioned us into two stiff chairs drawn beside his table.

"Well, Macumber," he wheezed, "what is this business you chose to be so mysterious about over the telephone? And your young friend—who's he?"

"My assistant on the stage and off," said the Great One. "Did I not mention that he would be with me when I called? An oversight, I assure you."

Doctor Redmark reserved comment. He sat with his small gray eyes fixed unwinkingly on Macumber's face, giving me no second glance.

"I thought," spoke up the Great One presently, "that you might be in position to provide me with some information concerning a man in whom I chance to be interested."

"Yes?"

"A man of the name of Laycroft—Alonzo Laycroft."

"I can't. Anything else?"

"He's not on your books?"

"I keep no books, Macumber. You know that I have retired from practice. We've thrashed that out."

"Of course. But you still have certain interests—business interests if not professional. It was in that connection I thought you might have dealt with Laycroft."

Redmark's moon face showed no change of expression.

"I have securities which return me a comfortable income," he said. "That's a for-

tunate thing. I'm a sick man, Macumber. It would be impossible for me to get about. My sufferings would be insupportable if I were denied the means to alleviate them. You know what it is that holds me up—and that grows costlier every day. Business! I have none."

"I beg your pardon," murmured the Great One mildly. "But I don't see why the narcotic market should be bullish, doctor. I understand that importations have been much heavier than usual recently. The man Laycroft was bringing cocaine in from the other side when he was nabbed."

"Eh? What should I know about him?" "I wondered."

"I'm sorry. I can't help you. O—o-o-h!"

Doctor Redmark clapped a puffy hand to his side.

"An attack?" queried Macumber solicitously. "We're here at a bad time."

"No, no. That's all right. You understand. Just sit where you are. I'll be fit as a fiddle in a minute."

As casually as the Great One might pour himself three fingers of Scotch at the close of a hard day Redmark transferred a silvery hypodermic needle from an inner pocket to the table and began to roll back his left coat and shirt sleeves.

"Ah, Macumber," he sighed, "you've no idea what a change my medicine would work in you. As you are you're inclined to be harsh and intolerant, I fancy. *This* would brighten your whole world."

The Great One picked up the needle and examined it curiously.

"Is it loaded, doctor?" he asked.

"I always have it ready. My spells have begun to come upon me at odd times. I can afford in my condition to take no chances." He laughed squeakily. "Perhaps it's a survival of the hunter's instinct. I did a deal of shooting as a young man and I learned then that the most futile thing on earth is an unloaded gun."

I, too, was curious about the needle; but Macumber folded his big and supple hands over it and it was lost to my sight until, a moment later, he surrendered it to Doctor Redmark.

The doctor was still gently massaging his forearm around the tiny new puncture when the Great One asked:

"Feeling better?"

I had been watching Redmark closely. His eyes had not brightened, as I had sup-

posed they would, but were if anything duller.

"I won't be getting the effect for a minute or two," he said. "Just—just let me be. There's something wrong with me, Macumber. I'm not well, and that's the fact. I'm—dizzy."

Redmark's many chins multiplied as his head sagged forward. Macumber sat in silence. Presently he took his eyes from the doctor to glance at his watch. I was in the grip of a horrible fascination. A number of actors who had been on the same vaudeville bill with the Great Macumber and me at one time and another had been pointed out to me as drug addicts, but what I was seeing was new to my experience.

"I'm not well, Macumber," repeated Redmark. His voice, thickening like a drunkard's, had lost some of its shrillness.

"You'll be coming around grandly before long," said the Great One. "I know how the stuff acts."

Somewhere below us a clock struck five. Almost like an echo the doorbell sounded. I thought I heard some slight commotion in the lower hall and the next moment was sure that some one was at the carved door leading into the dim sanctum of Doctor Redmark.

"Had we not better go, doctor?" spoke up the Great One.

Redmark raised his head with an effort.

"It would be as well," he said. "I'm out of patience with your snooping, Macumber. You may come here once too often."

"Are you getting relief yet?"

"I—not yet. My dosage is getting out of all bounds, and yet I don't react as I used to. It's—I guess it's good stuff to keep away from, Macumber. It's all right for a few years, but your soul's not your own once you start."

The Great One pushed back his chair but did not rise. He seemed to be sensing that Redmark's condition gave him an advantage, I thought.

"Before I go, you're sure you've never heard of Alonzo Laycroft?"

"I never have. Now please go. I'm not right. Send up Ling—my chink—on your way out. And don't come back. You know too much. I might be tempted, as I've been before, to have you knocked on the head and put in the furnace. You'd burn well, Macumber."

"I know perhaps more than you think I

do, doctor," said the Great One quietly. "I learned a great deal from that poor Wiloughby girl a year ago and I've picked up plenty since. You hold the dope trade of New York in the hollow of your hand. Come; am I not right?"

Redmark stirred uneasily between the chair arms that gripped his bulging sides.

"I have control. Now, is that enough for you? Go away. Send Ling. I can't stand this talk."

"And the smuggling end?" Macumber persisted. "Your organization extends into that, too, doesn't it?"

"Yes," groaned Redmark. The agony in the man's face was almost more than I could bear to see. I nudged Macumber, but he went on relentlessly:

"You're getting in several times as much as formerly, aren't you?"

"Yes. Don't keep after me, Macumber. I can't stand it. For God's sake go."

"I'll be going in a minute. How are you getting the drugs in, Redmark?"

"Stewards. Cabin stewards on the boats. The stewards put the stuff in the pockets of passengers. Always the left coat pockets. Men don't put hands in their left coat pockets once in a day, Macumber. You never thought of that, did you?"

"And pickpockets ashore collect the stuff as the passengers come off the piers?" demanded Macumber. "It sounds impossible."

"Works like a charm. We don't miss a package to a ship. The boys know their business."

"Aye, Redmark, you should know," Macumber conceded. "But tell me, how do your pickpockets know which passengers have the drugs upon them? Surely not all the men passengers are loaded up? Surely your steward confederates do not persuade them each to wear a rose?"

Doctor Redmark's eyelids were drooping heavily. He blinked owlishly.

"No need for roses," said he. "We use the men wearing glasses."

An explosive chuckle escaped Macumber.

"By Godfrey, lad!" he cried. "And did I not tell you the good doctor was a genius for organization?"

He dropped a hand on one of the massive shoulders of the merchant prince of dope.

"Good-by, doc, and thank you," he said. "I hope you haven't talked too much. Yes: we'll send Ling!"

## V.

For the colossal Ling we did not have to look far. He was just outside the door of the room of Doctor Redmark. He was standing with his back to us as we stepped into the hall and against the small of his back was pressing the muzzle of a pistol firmly held by a thickset man with a black mustache who greeted Macumber with a grin.

"This is Sergeant Nolan of the headquarters narcotic squad, lad," said the Great One. "I prefer the city's men to the government's in matters of delicacy. You heard it all, Nolan? Good! Then you might as well run down to the Federal Building and explain to the district attorney why he owes Mr. Alonzo Laycroft a genuflexion. I'll make no suggestion concerning the proper manner in which to use the rest of the information you have gathered. You'll know that yourself, Nolan, as well as you know that it would be a waste of time to arrest friend Redmark on his own drug-mulled say-so. Better leave him where he is. And that reminds me. Ling! There's some one inside who wants you!"

We parted from Nolan in front of the house. The detective strode off toward the "L" station at the west end of the block, while Macumber and I walked back to Central Park West and flagged a taxi.

"The Hotel Margharita in East Forty-ninth Street, and don't loiter," ordered Macumber as we stepped into the cab. "We're going to take a beautiful young lady to meet her long-lost father, so let the pace be lively."

He sank back and elevated his feet.

"Well, lad," he wanted to know, "what did you think of the performance?"

"I was chiefly surprised," said I, "that cocaine should have such a decidedly unpleasant effect on the user."

"It doesn't." He beamed upon me. "What do you suppose I was doing while I had Redmark's needle hidden in my hands and held his eyes with mine?"

"You didn't——" I shouted.

"Quite so," said the Great Macumber. "The doctor's 'shot' was Veritasol!"

*More Great Macumber stories in early issues.*



# *A Chat With You*

LOOKING from this side of the Atlantic over at Europe, it is a comforting thing to remember that the United States are united and not divided into little and great ententes. We are fortunate in our mountain ranges which are few and far apart and also in the fact that we speak the same language. Europe has suffered from being divided too much in a physical way. If traveling had been better in Greece, and the different little city-states had been more accessible, there might have been no Peloponnesian war. It was this war between north and south that ruined Greece and spelled death for what appears to have been the most beautiful civilization the world ever knew.

\* \* \* \*

IT is also perhaps just as fortunate for us that the Alleghenies had not been crossed and the great West opened when the United States became a nation. The nature of the civilization of one hundred years ago and the limited means of communication would hardly have stood the strain. There would have been one nation east of the Alleghenies, another in the great central valley and a third on the Pacific slope and it is likely that these three nations would have gone to war with reasonable frequency. We had one war which decided that this was to be one country from the Rio Grande to the Canadian border and that one war was plenty.

\* \* \* \*

IF Columbus had been born and set out on his voyage a hundred years or so earlier it might have been a bad thing for our modern democratic civilization. What

saved the day was the fact that science and invention were ready to follow the trail blazers and pioneers. The steamboat, the railroad, the engineers, bridge builders and road makers came just in time to prevent another Europe with jealousies and animosities, with royalties, nobilities and class distinctions, on this side of the ocean. Imagine another European war staged on this continent. We may thank the inventors for being just in time. Perhaps of all the inventions the one which will be ranked as the most notable in this era is the rotary press, the instrument which makes periodicals cheap and available to every one. The magazines which are read regularly on the same day from Maine to California have quite as much to do with holding us together and keeping us well acquainted as have the railroads.

\* \* \* \*

WARD G. REEDER of Ohio State University has made a survey of the American reading public as judged by the circulations of the magazines in the various States.

California leads the list in the consumption of reading matter. One might suppose that a wonderful outdoor climate, a devotion to sport and athletics of all sorts and the ownership of more automobiles per capita than is at all common would keep people from reading, but the result is the opposite. The pleasures of life do not come singly, apparently. If you have a good time reading magazines you are likely to have a good time in other ways as well. Mississippi, which partly owing to a lack of good roads

and partly owing to the vagaries of the Father of Waters, has been held back a little in various ways, ranks last in the number of magazine readers. Altogether, the West leads the East as to reading, eight Western States being ranked among the first ten. Connecticut and Massachusetts have honorable mention. Of all the Eastern States they stand the highest.

The District of Columbia, that is to say Washington, our most typical American city as well as our capital, stands higher even than California, as over thirty-one per cent of its population reads magazines.

The Pacific coast, including Washington, Oregon and California, leads all the other groups. Idaho and Ohio stand fairly well while Illinois and Pennsylvania stand twenty-third and twenty-eighth.

\* \* \* \*

**W**ERE it not that the Southern States which rank low in the list have a big percentage of native American whites, we could say that the places where there were the most foreign born were the places that ranked lowest in the list. It is undoubtedly true that the States in which wealth is more evenly distributed, in which there are no extremely poor people and no slums, stand

highest. Magazine reading and a well-diffused general prosperity go hand in hand. Perhaps the prosperity causes some of the reading but we think that the relation of cause and effect goes more in the other direction. Magazines, in consideration of the lasting satisfaction they give, are about as cheap as anything money will buy to-day. Anybody can afford to read a magazine and anybody who reads regularly is likely to open his mind a little and in consequence get on better in a material sense. At any rate the more magazines of national circulation read, the better for the country. Useful as some of our great newspapers are, they are bound to be provincial and center too much interest in the locality where they are published. The great service of the national periodical is to make the East and West, the North and South acquainted.

\* \* \* \*

**MR.** REEDER reports that the ranking of the States on reading as shown by his survey is about the same as their ranking on intelligence reached by army psychologists during the World War.

This seems to us a most interesting fact, as it proves statistically what we have always believed.



# What is Your Mark ?

IF you have ever laughed over that delightfully whimsical story of Frank Stockton's — "Rudder Grange"—you will remember the tramp who climbed the apple-tree to get away from Lord Edward, the ferocious watch dog.



The man of the house, you recall, came to see what the trouble was all about and the tramp promised "if you'll chain up that dog, and let me go, I'll fix things so that you'll not be troubled no more by no tramps." It was a bargain. The next day a curious mark was discovered cut in a tree at the end of the lane. No tramps appeared that summer.

Weeks later the man noticed another tramp looking at the mark on the tree. He bribed the hobo to tell him what it meant. And he learned that he had been branded as "a mean, stingy cuss, with a wicked dog" and it was "no good to go there."

\* \* \* \*

Every shop, every factory, every business has its mark—so that those who know the signs may read. It is the mark given it by its employees. Be sure of this: there is no way to escape the mark that is deserved—whether good or bad.

What makes the difference between the two? What gives one a bad mark and another a good mark? The difference

is in the business vision and the human kindness of the men at the helm.

\* \* \* \*

Business today is undergoing a great change. In this new-day business outlook wise employers do not grind work out of their helpers as though they were machines. A new art has entered business—the art of coöperation.

The employer knows that every single one of his employees has four sides—physical, mental, social and financial. He provides better working conditions. He enables them to earn enough to live decently. He helps them to save. He enlists their intelligence as well as their skill. He knows that they need recreation. He sees that these wants are met and he goes still further by insuring their lives.

It is the dawn of a new tomorrow in business—the day when employers and employees begin to understand each other and plan together for mutual good. Men at last are learning that Humanics plays as great a part in business as Mechanics and that *happy workers* are the big concealed asset in many a business enterprise.



The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company has searchers constantly at work in all parts of the United States and Canada, gathering data concerning various businesses. It is a giant magnet of business information—a great clearing house of better business ideas.

Every day the Metropolitan receives inquiries from employers for information on what industry is doing to bring employers and employees into closer sympathy by making business more *human*.

One phase of this new concept of business is the importance assumed by Group Insurance. It is life insurance at wholesale rates carried by an employer under one policy covering his employees.

A fine thing about Group Insurance is that it enables people whose physical condition will not permit them to pass a regular examination to be insured without medical examination. Think of the weight of worry this lifts from the men and women who need insurance most and without it must leave their families unprotected for.

Our Policyholders' Service Bureau has prepared reports covering many of the present day business problems—factory management, safety devices, stock purchasing and profit-sharing plans, housing, sanitation, factory routing, etc. Valuable information of this kind is at your disposal and will be mailed on request.

HALEY FISKE, *President.*

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**DURABILITY:** A rugged flashlight. The sturdy aluminum case, and fewness and simplicity of the parts safeguard it against accidents. No delicate parts to break. Nothing to get out of order.

**CONVENIENCE:** Light, slender, short, it fits comfortably into a pocket, and slips easily in and out of it. Requires little space in automobile pocket, traveling bag or camping kit.

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