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October 1916

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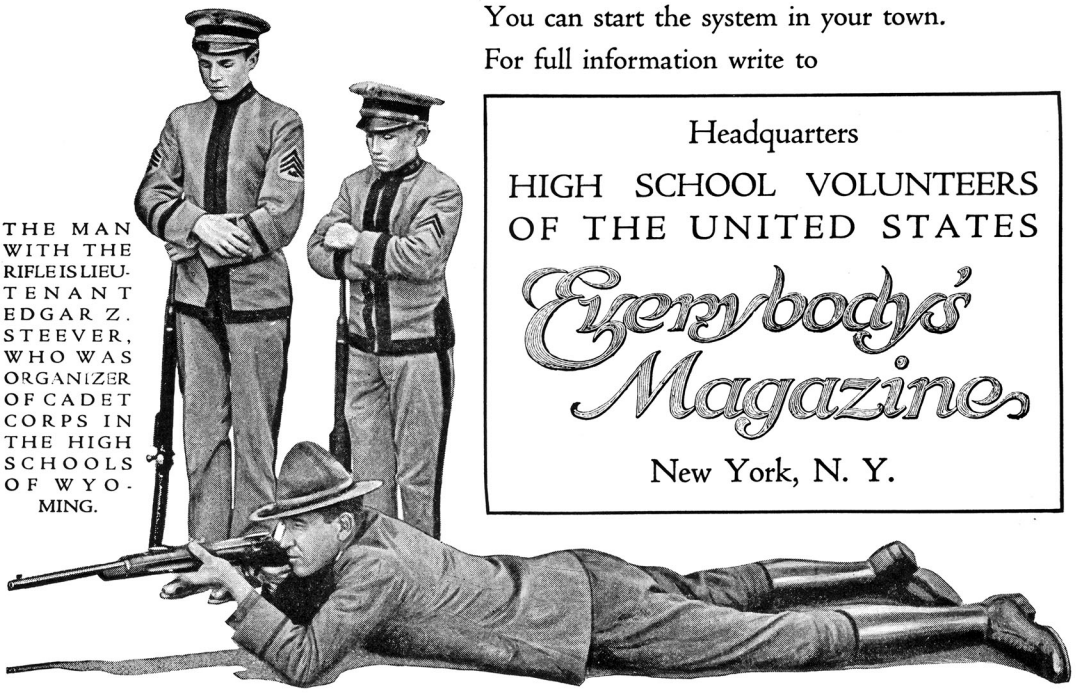

THE MAN WITH THE RIFLE IS LIEUTENANT EDGAR Z. STEEVER, WHO WAS ORGANIZER OF CADET CORPS IN THE HIGH SCHOOLS OF WYOMING.

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Oct. 1916 Vol. XII No. 6

THE MILLIONTH CHANCE

A COMPLETE NOVEL

by Arthur Somers Roche

Author of "For Bravery," "Figures Can't Lie," etc.

THE subway express in which I rode slowed down as it rounded the curve at Times Square. It stopped. It lurched forward, stopped again, then went ahead at a jerky crawl. Swinging from a strap, the uneven pace of the train jolted me against a pliant figure hanging beside me.

"B—beg pardon," I said.

She inclined her head slightly. Then, as she lifted her free hand to straighten the hat which my clumsiness had knocked askew—my elbow had jarred its wide brim—her eyes opened widely as she looked at me. I read surprise, mingled with a sort of pitying contempt in them.

I let go of my strap and pushed madly toward the door of the car. It was bad enough to be the victim of a non-explainable fear without having a slip of a girl notice it.

Muttered oaths, and some not muttered, followed in my wake. But I did not care that I trod on pet corns, or jolted protuberant stomachs. I only wanted to get near the exit, and I did so. There, finally, with no one between myself and the door, I waited for the train to slow down at the Grand Central. I had intended to ride to Brooklyn Bridge. Down in Park Row the city editor of a morning paper awaited me. He had made me a most flattering offer—an offer that contained not merely an assurance of considerable money in return for scant labor, but a promise of advertising to which no author should have been averse.

Yet, as I swayed before the door, with a cold sweat standing out on my forehead, and my teeth chattering, and my whole body so limp that it was only by a mighty effort of will that I kept from collapsing, I thought not at all of the waiting city editor;

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I thought only of the snail-like progress of the train, and wondered if I could keep from screaming if it should, as it so many times threatened, come to a full stop.

Once I glanced over my shoulder, with an affectation of unconcern that pride compelled—I did not want the passengers to guess at my terror—and met again, far down the aisle, the eyes of the slim girl against whom I had swayed. She looked immediately away, but not before I imagined I read again an expression of scorn upon her face.

It was a face, too, that a week ago, before dread had possessed me, I should have liked to see light up with friendliness at sight of me. Oval of shape, with a firm chin, a not-too-small, curving-lipped mouth, at whose corners twin dimples lurked, a strong nose, straight save for a slightly impudent, slightly inquiring tilt at the end, large brown eyes that, I thought, could be filled with fun, a broad, low forehead beneath masses of brown hair, her face was lovely enough to make any man not an anchoret want to be friends with her. And as she looked away from me, and bent over the elderly man seated before her, I remembered her, and him.

They were the couple who had sat next me at the theater last night, and past whom, in the very middle of an act, I had been compelled, by my driving fear, to climb.

Probably the girl recognized me, too. She must have seen my face when they entered the theater, before the lights were dimmed. This made the second time, then, that she had seen me acting in a fashion that I knew was not normal and that she must have considered strange. For without a word of warning I had risen from my theater seat and forced my way by them without giving them a chance to rise and make my passage less inconvenient to them. And just now she had seen the panic in my face and had watched me, probably, imitate my performance of last night, and crash past people in a fashion that would be employed only by a boor or by a maniac.

A boor or a maniac! The first, I think, I was justified in not considering myself. But the second—I forgot about the girl down the aisle. A fear even greater than the nameless panic which mastered me gripped me now. A maniac! I felt my lips move in unaccustomed prayer. Not that, not that!

Then the train ground to a halt. Whatever had impeded its progress below Forty-second Street, it had reached the Grand Central at last. I plunged through the door and almost staggered up the steps to the kiosk that gave to the open air. Through a swirl of snow I crossed the street and descended into the café of the Belmont.

"Whisky," I said to the bartender.

"Want it hot? Look like you've got a chill. Cold out, eh?"

I gripped the rail. I did my best to master myself and tried a smile.

"J—just give me a drink. Never mind making a hot one."

"Better take a big one," he counseled. "A man can get pneumony awful easy this weather."

He slid bottle and glass toward me and I took his advice. I poured myself a big drink and gulped it down. A moment later I felt my nervousness subside, my teeth ceased chattering. I poured myself a second drink. I swallowed it. Not being much of a drinker, the liquor had swift effect. I addressed some mental remarks to myself.

"Now, look here, Sid Wrenham, this simply *must* stop! You're a grown man, thirty-two years of age, five-feet-ten, weight, a hundred and sixty-eight, not a sickly infant or an hysterical woman. Now, then, the *Star* has made you a bully offer. You'd be insane not to go right down there and take it up. It's a snowy, blowy day; the subway is the only proper method for getting down-town. You aren't a bit afraid of riding in the subway. You've ridden in it thousands of times and never been hurt. Well, what's the matter with you? You aren't crazy! Go on down-town!"

I BUTTONED my great-coat tightly about me, paid my check at the cashier's desk and darted up the stairs. I entered the subway and bought my ticket. I advanced across the platform. A train came in; I took one look at the crowd already aboard it and another at the snow-dusted throng waiting to pile aboard. I turned abruptly away.

Not for the annual royalties of Rudyard Kipling would I have boarded that train! And with the shame and fear that possessed me came another thought to harass me: not even the potency of liquor would longer avail to banish my fear. Unless I wished

to become intoxicated—I turned back from the Belmont. I had some pride and some common sense. If two drinks of raw whisky were of no help, then two dozen would do no real good. The reaction would be worse than the abnormal condition that had begun to seem normal. I stepped into a taxi drawn up on the Park Avenue side of the hotel. At least, and I crimsoned at the thought, I was not afraid to ride in that.

"The *Star* office," I told the chauffeur.

I leaned back in my seat. The commission which the *Star* had offered meant attending court. I had not considered that. But I did so now as we rolled slowly downtown, impeded by snow-drifts. And court meant throngs of people, meant physical contact with crowds; meant locked doors! Again, despite the cold, I felt sweat on my forehead.

I threw my arms out convulsively, as if those crowds were pressing upon me now. My hands struck the walls of the taxi. I was confined in a space not much larger than a cupboard. Suppose the thing should tip over. Suppose——

I lifted the speaking-tube to my lips.

"Let me out," I called. "I—I've forgotten something. Let me out here!"

Before my surprised chauffeur could alight from his seat, I had opened the rear door and sprung out upon the sidewalk. I handed him a bill that covered the full fare to Park Row and dashed down a side street. I had walked clear to Fifth Avenue before I was able to compose my fevered brain. I heard myself saying,

"My God, Sid, this'll never do, this will never do! You can't keep this up! Take a brace, old man, take a brace! You'll be in a strait-jacket if this keeps up. Get a grip, Sid, get a grip!"

I stopped on the corner of the Avenue and leaned against the iron fence that bordered the patch of lawn belonging to some plutocrat. First the theater, then the subway, now a taxi! What next? And whisky was of no avail. Not unless I wished to stupefy myself with it. But some sedative —of course. My stomach was bad. A little medicine for that and I'd be all right in a couple of weeks; a couple of days more likely. And in the mean time some mild drug that would settle my nerves so that I could get rid of this hysteria.

Billy Odlin, college class-mate who had taken up the study of medicine when I went to work on a newspaper, had his office on Madison Avenue. I hadn't seen Billy for a couple of years, but Billy had known me well, had been my chum in the old days. Billy would know how to straighten me out.

I retraced my steps along the cross-town street and looked at the numbers of the houses on Madison Avenue. Billy's office was only two blocks away. Head bowed against the storm I made my way to his place.

A neat maid admitted me. There happened to be no patients ahead of me, and I was admitted at once to Billy's presence.

"Well, how's the famous author, Sid?" he greeted me. "Look as husky as ever, don't you? No use looking for business from you. Some of the cranks that inveigh against the deadly fourth mile ought to take a look at you. You're a living example of the fact that a man can sit in three varsity crews without ill after-effects. Smoke?"

I shook my head and sank into a chair. It was a relief to be with Billy. Big, brawny, too heavy for the crew, he had captained the college football team and starred in the weight events. He was just the sort of man to inspire confidence in a nervous person. And aside from his physical presence, Billy had brains. Though I hadn't seen him in so long, I'd heard about his wonderful success as a nerve specialist. If any one could fix me up, Billy could. But pshaw! All I needed was a nice little dose of something or other and I'd be right as a trivet.

"Billy," I said, "I may look well, but I feel like the very devil. Nerves. I want you to give me a shot of something that'll quiet me."

His eyes narrowed slightly.

"Morning after, Sid?"

I shook my head and essayed a laugh that sounded feeble.

"Oh, no, just a little touch of nervousness." Even to Billy Odlin, pal and physician, I was ashamed to confess the truth.

"I see," he said slowly. "Let's feel your pulse."

He stood over me while he held my wrist. Suddenly he pushed my head back and looked keenly into my eyes. I heard him sniff slightly. He released my head and wrist and walked back to his seat behind a flat-topped desk.

"Murdered anybody, Sid?" he asked quietly. "No? Robbed a bank? No?

Committed plagiarism? No? Then what the devil are you so frightened about? And if it isn't a case of morning after, what do you mean by drinking whisky before luncheon? How many drinks have you had today, anyway?" he demanded peremptorily.

"Three," I replied shamefacedly.

"How many yesterday?"

"Six or seven, I guess," I answered.

"Been doing that long?"

"Only a couple of weeks."

"What started you?"

"Why—er—I don't know that anything started me. I don't think half a dozen drinks a day are criminal, are they?"

"Depends on whether or not you consider suicide a crime."

"Oh, look here, Billy," I protested, "I'm not a drunkard, and you know it. I have a little touch of nerves."

"A little touch of fright, you mean, don't you, Sid? Been running amuck today?"

I gasped.

"How did you know?" I asked.

He smiled gently.

"The pulse tells a lot and the eyes tell more. You've been drinking this morning. Your breath announces that fact. But you haven't been drinking heavily—to intoxication, I mean, at any time. Nor have you been using drugs. Your eyes tell me that. Yet you come to me and want some sort of drug. You say that you're nervous. I've seen a lot of your kind of nervousness in the past few years. Now, then, suppose you tell me the whole business. What are you afraid of?"

"God knows, Billy," I groaned.

I hadn't meant to tell him, but I felt that I must. I drew my hand across my forehead. Suddenly the fear that had possessed me in the subway train, the fear of insanity, came back to me. My whole body shook. I buried my face in my hands; I heard him move about; in a moment he held something to my lips. I drank and the nervous chill left me. He placed the empty glass on his desk and sat down again behind it.

"Now, then, Sid, fire away. When did this fright first come on? How does it affect you?"

I wet my lips.

"Tell me this, first, Billy. Am I going crazy?"

He laughed loudly and his merriment was not forced.

"Not yet a bit, Sid." Then his voice grew grave. "I'm not saying what may happen if you don't obey orders, but—tell me."

So I told him the miserable story, inexplicable even to myself. I told him how, within the past month, I'd found myself always choosing a table near the door of the restaurant where I happened to be dining. I told him how crowded elevators had begun insidiously to affect me until I found myself unable to enter one that held more than two or three people; how I dreaded visiting editors whose offices were more than four or five stories above ground; how, last night, sudden panic, fear of what I knew not, had assailed me in the theater, so that I was compelled to flee from it immediately; how this morning I had entered the subway express at Seventy-second Street, felt all right until the thing began to slow down, and then became afflicted with panic.

"H'm," he said at this, "subconscious fear of what the slowing-down portended. Accident might come. Affected conscious actions. Yes, what else?"

I told him of the taxicab incident.

"And now, Billy, for Heaven's sake do something for me. The *Star* wants me to write the Lublin trial. Wants me to write it from the standpoint of my fiction detective, Weatherbee Jones. To have my character weigh the evidence, draw conclusions—you know. Balderdash, but—two hundred a day and unlimited advertising for me—and my character. Give me some dope or other that will enable me to stand the crowded court-room and——"

He looked at me almost sternly. He picked up the telephone on his desk.

"With whom are you doing business on the *Star?* City editor? What's the phone number?"

Compelled by his manner, I told him. A minute later he spoke into the receiver.

"City editor of the *Star?* This is Dr. William Odlin. One of my patients, Mr. Sidney Wrenham, wishes me to phone you. He is unable to do the Lublin trial for you. . . . No, not seriously ill, but he has to get out of town."

He hung up the receiver and asked me—

"Any other contracts with publishers?"

I shook my head.

"All right, then. Now don't put up a roar, Sid," he went on, as he noted my anger-flushed face. "You came to me for treatment. I'm not giving you the kind

you want, but I'm giving you the kind you need. Tell me, any financial troubles? Any troubles of any sort?"

"No," I said shortly.

"Been worried much about money ever?"

"Two years ago, when I quit the *Planet* to do magazine work," I answered, "I fretted quite a bit."

"Do you still fret over your work? And do you worry about the Great War, as too many Americans are doing?"

"Some," I admitted reluctantly.

"Quit it!" he ordered. "Quit everything. Sid, you're leaving for Maine tonight."

"Oh, come off, Billy," I protested. "I'm just a little nervous."

"You have psycho-neurosis," he said. "If you don't leave town—and work—you'll end by being afraid of everything. You'll fear your own shadow."

He smiled gravely at my incredulity.

"Sid, you've made Weatherbee Jones the realest character in detective fiction. That's because you put yourself into his creation—too much of yourself for your own good. You've made money and fame at nervous cost. You've got to forget Weatherbee Jones. You've got to forget your work; you've got to forget yourself.

"If you don't—Sid, psycho-neurosis is as real a disease as any ailment doctors know of. You've got it. Not so bad as some, but worse than others. It's the disease of fear. It grows on the victim. By and by, in sheer fear of living, you'll—well, you'll hurt yourself. You'll keep on imagining terrors that don't exist until you can't stand it any longer. Unless you go away.

"You must go where there are some people—loneliness would prove as bad as a crowded city. But to a place where there are only a few people. Where there is absolutely no excitement. Not even the excitement of cards, automobiling, any of the sort of thing you'd find down South or abroad. Where there's plenty of fresh air, a chance for long walks, maybe some fishing through the ice, and long evenings built for sleep.

"I know the place. Folly Cove, an hour from Portland, where I sometimes go in the Summer. There's a big hotel there, practically empty in the Winter, save for a few guests who fish through the ice. I want you to go down there, leaving your typewriter behind you, and forgetting that Weatherbee Jones ever existed in your fertile imagination.

"You're not to take a drink and you're to smoke not over three times a day. You're to go to bed at nine and stay there until seven. You're to walk at least five miles a day at first and ten or fifteen later on. Now, then, go home and pack a suit-case or two and catch that eight-o'clock train for Portland tonight."

"But look here, Billy," I protested. "It's absurd. I'm just nervous."

"You're psycho-neurotic," he snapped. "You have the disease of fear. Why, Sid, I doubt if you can ride on a sleeper tonight! Can you? Think—the train going hell-bent through the darkness, through tunnels, in the storm."

I felt myself go white.

"My God, Billy!" I gasped. "I—I don't believe I can."

"That's what worry does for a man, months after he's able to quit worrying," said Billy. "Well, if you're as bad as that, Sid, don't you think you need what I prescribe?"

I could only nod my head, dumb.

"Buck up," he said. "You needn't be ashamed. You're no coward, Sid. If a crisis came you'd meet it. Indeed, it would probably cure you. But crises can't be obtained in a physician's office. You must go to Maine. At least, I say Folly Cove. If you've got any better place?"

But I shook my miserable head. I hadn't.

"Then Folly Cove it is—and tonight, just before you climb into your bunk, take this. It's the only drug you'll ever get from me, Sid. It will make you sleep on the train. Now, then—" and he gave me the little envelope containing a morphine pellet—"go home and pack your things and write whatever letters you must. And let me hear from you. Let me know how you progress. In six months——"

"So long?" I gasped.

"You're lucky if it isn't six years," he said. "Of course, if you got some great shock — well, by - by, Sid. Write to me. And don't think of work, and don't fret! And don't talk about the Great War too much; don't think about it. It's making nervous wrecks of lots of people. Forget about it!"

With which last injunction he ushered me out of his office.

II

I SENT my bags to the station at six. Upset by Billy's diagnosis of my nervous trouble, and so unable as yet to obey his injunction not to think about myself, I could not trust my disobedient nerves aboard cab or street-car. The subway was a horror not to be considered for a moment. So I walked from my apartment on West Seventy-fourth Street, through the still swirling snow, to the Grand Central Station.

That I hated and despised myself for my cravenness goes without saying. If a man may be pardoned for referring to his courage, I think I may honestly state that until recently no one, not even myself, had had any cause to doubt mine. A man with a yellow streak might make one varsity crew; he would never make three.

I knew perfectly well, even as I endured the discomforts of the storm rather than face the intangible dread that the cars held for me, that if some gangster were to attempt holding me up now I would tear into him with both hands. I felt my shoulders square involuntarily at the thought. I would like such an opportunity to regain my self-respect.

But the thought of being herded into a train with scores of other humans—I had read something of psycho-neurosis, the disease of fear. I knew that the ailment had two rough subdivisions, agorophobia, the fear of the open places, and claustrophobia, the fear of being shut in. It was this latter dread that had come to claim me as its victim. I knew that it was a disease whose victims became more numerous every day. Heretofore, I had laughed at the new ailment. I had thought it some invention of the physicians to comfort the self-respect of patients who were natural-born cowards. But now, as I plunged through the drifts, my laugh was bitter.

The grinding years on Newspaper Row, with their irregular habits of eating and sleeping, plus the worry, financial and otherwise, that had been mine when first I withdrew from newspaper work to create Weatherbee Jones, had suddenly taken toll of me. Outwardly as strong as ever in my life, apparently perfectly fit, to the casual eye at least, my nerves were water and my will was milk.

It was this very reading about the disease that made me so meekly accept Billy Odlin's orders. I knew that my claustrophobia, my fear of the shut-in places, would, unless checked, spread. Soon I would become nervous about my food. I would dread that the cook had been careless and used unfit ingredients for my meal. I would become nervous about little scratches, always dreading infection. I would begin to fear any sharp instrument. Even now, I remembered, I had acquired a distaste for letting a barber cut my hair. How soon before I would become afraid to shave myself?

Oh, Billy was right and I was doing the sensible thing to try and nip my ailment in its first beginnings. But it was hard to be young and successful and doomed to exile from the city I loved best. Yet that exile must end sometime. I would not forever be a prey to fear. I must get well!

It was with this thought that I shook the snow from my great-coat and pounded my checked cap against my thigh, ridding it of the encrusted ice. I entered the Grand Central and glanced at a clock. Ten minutes of eight. I had just ten minutes then in which to buy my ticket and claim my bags in the parcel-room.

I walked swiftly to the ticket-agent's window. I stopped a yard away, waiting for a young woman to gather up gloves, change and tickets from the little glass counter before the window. Evidently she had heard my approach, for she made haste in sweeping her change into a hand-bag.

She moved aside, giving me room before the window. As she did so, she half-turned and I recognized her. It was the girl of the theater and the subway, the witness to my panic on those two occasions. I felt my cheeks burn with shame. I turned quickly away and shoved a bill hastily under the grating that protected the agent.

"A ticket to Folly Cove, Maine, *via* Portland," I said. "And a section as far as Portland."

He selected a strip of pasteboard from a rack, stamped it with that deftness of hands that is common to ticket-sellers and soda-clerks, and shoved it, with my change, across the counter.

"Get your section at the next window," he told me.

As there were windows on either side of him, I drew back to read the signs above them, for, like every other long-suffering

New Yorker, I dislike asking the wrong person for whatever it is that I need. Those who have experienced the superciliousness of those supposed to serve in Manhattan will understand.

And as I backed away from the ticket-seller's window, the girl flashed across my line of vision again. I could not help but see, in my brief glance, that she was looking at me, only now her glance was not as it had been in the subway. Instead of a wondering contempt, her expression seemed to be that of puzzled chagrin.

That she recognized me I could readily understand, having drawn her attention to me rather forcibly twice in the last twenty-four hours. But that she should be alarmed —alarm fitted her expression better than chagrin—at seeing me, I could not understand. I noticed, too, that the white-haired, elderly gentleman who had been with her at the theater and in the subway, still accompanied her, and that she had drawn his attention to me, as witness the gloved hand on his arm and his keen glance at me.

Then, out of the tail of my eye, as I continued to the Pullman ticket-window, I saw him pat her hand reassuringly. My flush became more vivid, I felt.

I guessed at why her features showed alarm. I had seemed like a crazy man to her twice before. She felt uneasy at the close proximity of a man not normal. I cursed the ambition that had made me work so hard in the years gone by; I cursed even Weatherbee Jones, the fiction character that had brought me a bit of fame, and a not inconsiderable income. What good was fame, what use was money, when the two had been traded for one's self-control, lack of which made one appear a dangerous maniac in the eyes of a most charming young lady?

Hastily I purchased my section to Portland and with my eyes rigidly fixed upon the clock high up on the station wall—I would not meet the eyes of the girl again—I passed by them and hurried to the parcel-room. As I turned a corner of the mammoth station, I let my eyes fall. Thank God I was going away to be cured of the ailment that made me an object of fright to lovely young girls.

There was some delay in getting out my two stout suit-cases, tightly packed, and I feared that I would miss my train. But I didn't. I dodged between the train-gates, just as they were being closed, and started down the platform.

No station-porter had been handy, so I carried the suit-cases myself. One of them swung forward and struck my knee. I stumbled and dropped it. As I picked it up a commotion at the gate through which I had passed attracted my attention.

I glanced over my shoulder and saw a man expostulating with the gate-tender. Then a cry from the train-porter, impatiently awaiting my arrival, made me forget the belated traveler at the gate. I hurried down the platform.

"Portland, boss? Jes' in time," grinned the porter. "Hustle abo'd, boss, she's goin' staht dis blessed minute. I'll toss yo' bags on."

But I clung to one of them and scrambled up the car steps. As I reached the top I felt the train start. I looked back; the grinning darky with my other bag swung aboard.

"That was a tight squeeze, boss," he chuckled. "What's yo' car?"

"Seven," I told him. "Section nine."

"You struck de right car, den, boss. Dis is seben. But I don't think yo' section is made up yet. Does yo' wish to go to bed right away?"

"As soon as possible," said I.

My more than two-mile tramp through the storm, added to my nervousness throughout the day, had about exhausted me. I felt tired and, though not yet sleepy, had no doubt but that Billy Odlin's morphin pellet would bring sleep.

"I'll wait in the smoking compartment," I said. "Let me know as soon as my berth is ready."

"Dat I will, boss," said the negro.

He passed into the car, swaying beneath the burden of my two bags and the slow motion of the train. He pushed through the swinging doors that partitioned off the wash- and smoke-room and disappeared within the body of the car. I walked to the window and sat down upon the narrow leather-cushioned seat between two wash-basins. As I did so I heard a clamor outside. I looked through the glass.

There, on the platform, by a desperate effort keeping pace with the train, ran a man, shouting at the top of his lungs. It was, I guessed, the man who had been late at the train-gate. Evidently he had persuaded the guard to let him through, but

the argument had used up too much time.

The train had started before he could pass by the three cars and engine of another train, probably destined later to Commuter-Land, that had been occupying the first stretch of the track on which had stood the Portland train.

I had time merely to notice that the man wore a rough blue greatcoat, somewhat like my own, and a checked cap similar to the one on my head, when the train gained headway. His desperate spurt had availed him nothing. Either no porter had heard his cries, or, hearing them, had refused to let the man risk life and limb by opening the vestibuled doors and letting down the steps.

The running man seemed to slip back. He disappeared. I felt sympathy for him. He had made a good fight and deserved to win.

But there were other trains to Portland; other days on which to travel. I didn't waste much thought on him. My own troubles were too close at hand. In a moment we must begin passing through the tunnel, and all my fears, forgotten in the haste of getting my tickets and bags and making the train, came back to me. I knew that the next ten or twelve minutes were to be fraught with terror for me. And the only way to lessen my silly dread of passing through the tunnel was to occupy myself with something, if possible.

I WAITED until my car entered the tunnel. Then I withdrew pipe and tobacco and matches from my jacket pocket. As deliberately as possible I filled the pipe. As fussily as might be I tamped the tobacco down into the bowl. Then, with the greatest concentration and care, I applied a lighted match to the tobacco. I had used up three minutes.

But I will not dwell on my torments during the next seven or eight minutes. Only those who have suffered from my ailment can possibly understand it; others will only jeer. Suffice it to say that the train emerged unscathed from the tunnel.

My hands ceased shaking and the perspiration dried upon my forehead. Of course, the long dark night lay ahead of me, but the tunnel was the thing I had dreaded most. I could endure the rest, especially as I hoped to sleep through it.

I finished my pipe and looked at my watch. It was twenty after eight. I decided to smoke once more before turning in. And I was half-way through this smoke when some one pushed through the swinging doors.

For a moment I did not look up. Then that queer feeling that tells us that we are spied upon, that hold-over from primitive instincts, made me look up. The elderly gentleman who was the companion of the brown-eyed girl was looking at me.

He looked immediately away and sat down on the seat across the wash-room. He pulled out a cigar and lighted it. I looked out the window. Yet every now and then I drew my glance inward, letting it roam about the car, falling upon him. And each time I had the impression that he had been studying me from beneath his shaggy white brows and had turned away as I moved my head.

Slowly I became impatient of this scrutiny. Yet the man was indubitably a gentleman and I had not actually caught him spying upon me. And if I had—what then? I had made myself absurd in the eyes of himself and his daughter—I could not conceive it possible that she was his wife—twice already. Why shouldn't he, considering me not entirely sane, perhaps, eye me once in a while. For all he knew I might become violent. I could not blame him, yet I could not remain and feel his eyes upon me. I knocked the dottle from my pipe and rose.

And as I pushed through the doors I heard him rise, too, and follow me. I was angry enough to turn and assure him that I was entirely harmless, but, of course, did nothing of the sort. Indeed, I felt ashamed, apologetic. A fine state of affairs, when my entrance into the sleeper was enough to cause an elderly gentleman to throw away the half of a cigar whose aroma suggested that it had cost at least twenty-five cents!

I could only fervently pray, as I stumbled past bulging draperies of made-up berths, that I would never see him again after tonight. Then, as I reached my section, and beyond it saw two sections not made up as yet, in one of which sat the elderly gentleman's companion, I retracted my prayer. I did want to see her again, some time when my nerves were well, and I could explain to her why I seemed so queer. But until that longed-for time, I hoped our paths would not cross.

At my section I remembered that I had not yet taken Billy Odlin's pellet. I turned, squeezing myself against the curtains of my berth, to let the old man pass. He did so without looking at me, and I walked back to the wash-room. There I put the morphine pellet on my tongue, washed it down with a glass of water, and came back to the car.

I stepped inside my curtains, drew them close, buttoned them and drew off my clothing. From one of the suit-cases I abstracted pajamas; then I managed clumsily to shove both of them beneath my berth. My pocketbook, which contained money and several newspaper clippings, about crimes which had interested me because I thought that they might be put to fiction uses and serve as mediums for further adventures of Weatherbee Jones, I placed beneath my pillow. There were no cards or other papers in it.

I settled myself in the narrow berth. The train jolted through the storm.

To keep myself from thinking of anything that might happen, to get my thoughts away from my almost ever-present fears, I tried to think up an unique plot for the Weatherbee Jones story that must not be written for at least six months, if I were to obey Billy Odlin. Of course, it was against his orders for me to work, but tonight, traveling, my cure not yet having been begun, I thought it would do no harm.

But soon Weatherbee Jones drifted out of my head. Scenes in which I played the hero's part, with the brown-eyed girl as heroine, silly scenes of valor such as might fill the drowsy brain of a callow youth, formulated, morphin-induced, I imagine, in my brain.

IT WAS light when I awoke. It had ceased to snow, as I saw through the window at my side. I looked at my watch; it said ten o'clock. With a gasp of amazement, I sat upright and began feverishly removing my pajamas. Then I quieted down.

The train was moving, so, though it was past the hour when we should have reached Portland, there was no occasion for alarm. We were evidently quite late, doubtless because of the blizzard, and the considerate porter had permitted me to sleep as long I chose.

I dressed, with the exception of shirt and collar, leisurely. Then, stepping into the curtains, I reached under the berth for my aisle, but shielded from sight by my bulging suit-case, to pull out a fresh shirt and collar.

It seemed to me that the bag for which I reached was not in the same position as I had placed it last night. True, it was still on top of the other bag, but seemed placed at a different angle. Slightly puzzled, I lifted it to my berth and opened it. It was not locked, as I had not bothered to lock it after removing my pajamas from it last night.

I stared down at its contents. Everything was neatly arranged, but, it seemed to me, not arranged as I had seen them last night. Unless recollection entirely failed me, my hair-brushes had been on the side nearest the lock, not at the farther side, by the hinges of the cover. Yet nothing was missing. I shook my head, puzzled.

Then I smiled at myself. My shoes were freshly shined. In reaching under the berth for them the porter had probably knocked this suitcase off the other one. In replacing it he had tilted the bag, causing the brushes to slide over.

"Weatherbee Jones himself couldn't have done better," I chuckled.

I placed my pajamas inside the bag, also my discarded shirt and collar and tie, and took out fresh apparel. Then I slipped my jacket on, gathered up the fresh linen and unbuttoned the curtains preparatory to going to the wash-room. But I remembered my pocketbook. I reached under the pillow for it. In a purely mechanical fashion I opened it to note if its contents were intact.

They were; but once again I noticed something queer. My newspaper clippings were not folded exactly as they had been last night. At least, the corners of them were bent over as if they had been hastily placed in the pocketbook. But I had not placed them there in a hurry. I had put them in most carefully.

I counted my money. It was all there. And yet, I could not rid myself of the feeling that some one had been at that pocketbook during the night. Then, for the second time, I laughed at my suspicions. I had slept with the thing beneath my head. What more natural than that movements of my head during the night had pressed the contents of the pocketbook, had rumpled them?

Good Heavens, was my mental condition to take an added twist? Was I to become old-womanish, suspicious of every little thing? I say, I laughed at myself. But the scornful, self-directed mirth died away as I glimpsed, upon the pillow on which my head had reposed during the night, something that assuredly I had never dropped there.

I put the pocketbook inside my coat, unbuttoned the final fastening, and stepped out into the aisle. Evidently I was the deepest sleeper of all, for every other berth had been turned into a seat, or folded, if an upper, into the angle between wall and roof of the car.

Right next to me, back to me, sat the girl of the brown hair and eyes. The elderly man, who was talking quietly with her and facing toward me, lifted his eyes as I emerged from the curtains, then looked incuriously away. But I looked at the girl's hair and saw what, somehow, I had expected to see there, from the moment I glimpsed the object on my pillow.

But I stood there only a second. Then I turned and made my way to the wash-room.

The porter entered just as I had finished my toilet.

"Yo' sure got a easy conscience, sah," he greeted me. "Yo' certainly am the finest-sleepin' gemman ever I see. Jes' fo' yo' sake, sah, because you was havin' sech a fine rest, I'm glad the train's late. I'd hated to wake yo' up, sah."

I smiled.

"I did have a good rest, thank you," I told him. "And how late are we?"

" 'Fraid we won't get in much befo' noon, sah. Big storm, sah."

"Is there a diner with us? Any chance for breakfast?"

"I can make some cawffee, sah. I've made quite a bit already, and people has had to get along with that, sah. Sorry, but dat's de best I can do."

"That will do nicely," I assured him. "Oh, by the way, porter," I said, as he started from the compartment, "is the linen on the berths changed every trip?"

"Why, mos' certainly, sah," he answered aggrievedly. "Was yo' thinkin' things wasn't clean, sah?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter," I replied. "I was just curious."

"Yes, sah, you jes' bet dey's fresh every single trip. Make de cawffee right away, sah."

The train was not crowded. The only man I had seen on my way to the wash-room was the elderly gentleman. All the other passengers were women. And there were only half a dozen of these, not one of them, I judged, being younger than middle-age.

A writer has to be somewhat of a judge of character. Meager as had been my glimpse of these passengers, I yet felt that I could safely assume that not one of those women was other than she appeared to be, a travel-weary woman, harmless, inoffensive, capable of not a single impulse more powerful than to scold the grocer about the last dozen eggs. Certainly not one of them could have it in her to play a part, the part, in the drama which, from cells of either recollection or of dreams, pieced out by what Weatherbee Jones would have been made by me to call "suspicious circumstances," or "clues," was in process of construction—reconstruction—in my brain.

I remained in the wash-room until the train reached Portland at about noon. There I drank my coffee and smoked the first of the three smokes Billy Odlin had allowed me—it was a cigar—while I put the drama together. I was undisturbed by any one. Doubtless the elderly gentleman didn't smoke before luncheon. Over and over again I puzzled what the thing might mean.

Grant that the recollection inspired by the finding of the little object on my pillow was but the remembrance of a dream. Grant that I had not been awakened from my morphin-induced sleep during the middle of the night, to glimpse, in the light of the electric lamp that I had left burning by my head all night, the face of the brown-haired girl, only, morphin-stupefied, to go back to sleep at once. Grant that I had not even dreamed that she bent above me, but, in some curious fashion understood by psychologists, had, upon finding the little object upon my pillow, imagined that I dreamed her nocturnal visit.

Grant that the porter's clumsiness accounted for the disarray of my suitcase; grant that my own head had pressed the corners of the newspaper clippings in my pocketbook, and not the hasty return of them to the wallet by another hand. Grant all these things and still remained the vital

fact. Some one, and that some one a woman, had dropped upon my pillow the object which I now held in my hand, as we lumbered toward Portland.

That object was an amber-colored hairpin, of the sort known, I believe, to women as "bone hairpins," though made of some composition. How, unless dropped from a woman's hair, had that hairpin got there? And the brown-haired girl wore this kind of pin. I had noticed that on leaving my section.

Into the mouth of Weatherbee Jones I had put this maxim—

"Look with suspicion upon too many coincidences!"

The finding of the hair-pin was the last of several coincidences.

I tried to dismiss the matter from my mind. The previous suspicious circumstances I had explained—the disarray of the bag, the pressed-down corners of the clippings. The dream, or recollection, might yield to the psychological explanation I have hinted at above. And the hairpin? Well, it might have remained, from some previous woman passenger, somewhere in my section. It might have fallen upon my pillow during the night. It might have done so. And yet, there was the logic of my own creation, Weatherbee Jones—

"Look with suspicion upon too many coincidences!"

Yet why should the brown-haired girl have rifled my bag and pocketbook during the night? How would she dare take such chances? Especially as financial gain could not have been her object, as witness my intact cash?

I was absurd, an utter idiot, suspicious of everything. I prayed that after the train got to Portland I'd not see her again. That is, not until I was better, and—but why did I want ever to see again a girl who was a potential thief? For I did want to; I could not deny it, although I was trying to when at last the train stopped.

III

I WAITED until, from the washroom window, I saw the girl and her elderly companion pass along the station platform and through the station door. If I were silly enough to hold some desire to meet again the girl whose beauty attracted me, despite my unwilling conviction that she had searched my effects last night, that desire was of the future, not the present.

Accompanied by the porter, who carried my bags, I finally left the train and entered the station. I sighed with a relief that, against my common sense and will, was tinctured with regret, when I found that the waiting-room did not hold either of them. I tipped my ebon attendant, grinned involuntarily at his display of teeth, left my bags upon a bench, and strolled over to the ticket window. I had no time-table beyond Portland.

"When's the next train for Folly Cove?" I inquired.

"Two o'clock," was the answer. "The one due to leave at nine-thirty waited a couple of hours for the New York train. You came on her?"

I nodded. "Too bad," he said. "Still, you'll get there for supper. Two o'clock," he repeated.

I thanked him. It was only a little after twelve and, hungry as I was, I was glad that the easy-going Folly Cove schedule had not been too elastic, and that the morning train had gone. I should not have relished continuing my journey without food. I took my bags to the check-room. Leaving there, and starting for the restaurant, water dripped from the visor of my cap. Though it had ceased snowing, a tiny drift piled upon the station roof had broken off as I followed the porter from the train and some of it had impinged upon my cap. The heat of the station had melted it.

I took off the cap and brushed it with my sleeve. Because some of the moisture had somehow got on my forehead I drew a handkerchief from my left-hand pocket. Having dried my forehead, and having discovered that the left-hand pocket was rather crowded, containing keys, matches and pencil, I replaced the handkerchief in my right-hand pocket. I mention these trivial details because of what immediately followed. For, as I resumed my way toward the restaurant, a man blocked my path. He seemed to have done so deliberately, for when I looked up at him he was grinning. Swiftly, before I had time to grasp his rudeness, he drew a handkerchief from his left-hand pocket, wiped his forehead, and replaced it in his right-hand pocket.

"Not that it's really necessary," he said,

"but a guy can't be too careful, can he? You're twenty-seven, aincha?"

Later, of course, I learned that he had given me some sort of signal; was, indeed, returning what he thought to be a signal of mine. But at the moment, embittered at having to leave New York, disgusted with my mental condition, worked up by my efforts to decide whether or not I had dreamed the visitation of last night or really remembered it, angered that I, so long immune to feminine attraction, could not refrain from dwelling on the girl's beauty, hungry and irascible. I thought that he was merely an ignorant boor, possibly slightly intoxicated, mocking my action.

I tried to move around him, but he sidestepped with me and still blocked the way.

"Say, you're twenty-seven O. K., aincha?" he demanded again.

"I'm thirty-two," I answered angrily. "Also, I weigh one hundred and sixty-eight pounds and pack a punch in both hands. Do you care to sample one?"

"Aw, say, don't get hot," he cried. "'Sall right. I'm eight, from Portland, and——"

"And why the devil do you think that I'm concerned in what you are or where you come from?" I raged. "If you don't let me by you I'll walk over you! Do I make myself perfectly clear?"

He drew aside.

"Oh, shush," he said angrily. "If that ain't just like you swell-headed New Yorkers! Think you can——"

But the rest of his words died away in an indistinguishable grumble, for I had passed by him on my way to the restaurant. And as I gave my order to the waitress, I enjoyed the pleasantest moment of several weeks. For the man who had accosted me was at least my height and so much broader and stockier that he must have outweighed me by at least twenty pounds. Nor was he fat; husky was the word that fitted him. Yet I had meant my threat to him, and had even thrilled at the prospect of carrying it out. It gave zest to my breakfast-luncheon to know that my fears did not include dread of combat with a man bigger than myself. This was some salve to soothe my self-respect.

I had finished my steak and fried potatoes and was draining my second cup of coffee when the stranger accosted me again. He came to my table.

"Look here," he began, "what's the use of trying to go it alone? You'll likely need some one and it might as well be me as any one else from the office here. Maybe I done wrong in butting in outside there; maybe you wanted to be alone, but how could I know it after you tipped me who you was?"

"Would you mind very much," I inquired politely, "going away from here? You annoy me, and I don't propose to be annoyed by any one this January morning. Now, then, if you want me to take hold of your pink ear and throw you in a snow-drift, I'll do it. But if you don't, please disappear."

"Oh, shush," he said. But he turned on his heel and left me.

He had shown no signs of intoxication, nor of insanity either. Nor did his manner bear out my first impression: that he was some sort of practical joker. Evidently he mistook me for some one else.

He lumbered across the room and sat down at a table. While I read the Portland paper the waitress had brought me, he ordered something to eat. And every now and then, as I looked up over the sheets, I would notice that he was looking curiously at me, as if awaiting some belated sign of recognition, of invitation. Not receiving it, he would shrug his shoulders, shake his head and resume his attack upon his food. And finally, having finished his meal, and cast a glance that was almost imploring at me, to which I returned a stony glare, he left the restaurant.

"And a stubborn gentleman he is, too," I smiled to myself.

I wondered what he meant by asking me if I were "Twenty-seven" and by his statement that he was "Eight" from the Portland office. But it was none of my business that he had taken me for some one else. In truth, he did not interest me. My thoughts, when I had finally put aside the newspaper, insisted on being concerned only with the brown-eyed damsel. I wondered how she'd look when she smiled; how she'd look if—when, I changed it—she smiled at me. And now, fortified by food, I went over again my discoveries of the morning and tried again to decide whether I remembered awaking in the night and seeing her, or whether I had dreamed the scene, or whether I had imagined it on finding the bone hairpin. And I couldn't decide.

Restless, annoyed with myself for letting

my mind dwell on what was, after all, a matter of unimportance—I'd missed nothing from my effects; and I was thirty-two years of age, slightly beyond the love-at-first-sight period—I left the restaurant. It still lacked somewhat over half an hour to train-time. My mood would not permit me to remain idle. So I went for a walk.

The snow was deeper, I imagined, here in Portland than in New York, but it had been cleaned from the sidewalks and the footing was not bad. It had been a long time since I had seen sleighs, and the sight of the laughing people scudding along, and the feel of the cold upon my face did me good.

I turned back to the station with the belief that Billy Odlin had prescribed wisely. Surely fantom fears could not exist where the winds of Maine blew. Surely the peace of the country in Wintertime, the cold quiet, would heal the fever that had begun to burn my brain. I felt no apprehension at all about taking the train again. Now that I remembered, in the hours of the forenoon when we stumbled toward Portland I had felt no nervousness. Could it be that the mere fact of leaving the hurly-burly of New York had begun to cure me already? I prayed so as I walked briskly back to the station.

I had not been gone long. The Folly Cove train would not leave for ten minutes yet, the station clock assured me. I thought I'd let Billy Odlin know that I'd arrived safely in Portland. A rather unnecessary assurance, but I suppose I had a touch of that peculiarly American mania for sending messages, usually picture post-cards, home. Only mine was a telegram.

I got a blank at the operator's window and hastily scrawled a few words. I shoved it through the window. The operator looked at the address. He shook his head.

"Can't guarantee delivery today," he said.

"No? Why not?"

"Wires down between here and Boston. Between here and Worcester, too. Message came through from Philadelphia, *via* Chicago, Montreal and Quebec a while ago, saying that all wires near New York were down. I could send it around that way, to Philly, and it would be mailed to New York. That do?"

I laughed.

"Oh, it's not as important as all that. Never mind it."

I crumpled the message up. Not an especially tidy man, I yet have an aversion for throwing waste-paper carelessly about. I saw no waste-paper-basket around, so I put the unsent message in my coat pocket. Then I got my bags and, finding a porter, started on the last leg of my journey to Folly Cove.

The porter conveyed me to a most dingy-looking train. It consisted of an engine of ancient vintage, a mail and baggage coach, a smoking-car, and one ordinary day coach, between the other two. To this car the porter took me. He took my bags to the middle of the car, threw over the back of one seat to give me more room, placed the bags on one of the seats, accepted my tip and withdrew.

I took off my coat, hung it on a hook, opened one of the bags, drew forth a magazine and settled back in my chair to try and kill time. A noise across the aisle drew my attention. It sounded like a snort of indignation.

I had noticed, as I entered the car, that two people occupied the seats across the aisle from where the porter had deposited me, but in the most casual fashion. I had given them not the slightest attention, and could not have told of what sex, even, they were. But now I looked at them.

It was a snort of indignation, and it emanated from the nostrils of the elderly gentleman with the white hair. Beside him sat the brown-eyed girl whose relationship to him had so pleasantly intrigued my interest, and about whom were woven incidents and suspicions that were not so pleasant.

I felt myself flush beneath the glare of the old man. He stared at me as if I were some criminal, not a mere maniac, as I had felt, heretofore, that he considered me. He snorted again, and my flush deepened. If he did have any suspicion that I was an offender against the laws, as his glare indicated, surely that guilty flush, which I could not restrain, must have seemed to him added evidence of my criminality.

He started to rise from his seat. I saw the girl's hand snatch at his sleeve, and saw him detach her fingers. He was shaking with what could only be anger, yet, I noticed, his unfastening of her fingers, while firm, was gentle. Indubitably a gentleman, as I had mentally commented once before. Then he spoke.

"My dear, I must speak to this person!"

She sank back helplessly as he stepped into the aisle and towered above me.

"Sir," he said, "may I ask what you mean by following us?"

IV

PEOPLE often say:

"Mr. Wrenham, how do you think of such things? How do you think of such apt retorts for your characters to utter? Especially Weatherbee Jones!"

To such remarks I make answer that I try to put into the mouths of my characters lines that fit the situation. Which, as you'll notice, leaves the question unanswered. For I don't know how I think of my characters' conversation. No author knows how. Story-writing, and the conversations in stories, are merely matters of discarding. There is the whole world to choose from; all the things that have ever happened to write about, all the things that have ever been said to have your characters say. You discard the things you don't need; that's all. But how . . .

I wish that I did know how. For then, in real life, some of the easily pertinent retorts that have helped make Weatherbee Jones fairly well known, would come to me, and in an embarrassing situation such as outlined above I would not be compelled to give an imitation of a fish out of water.

For that's all I could do. I merely gasped at the angry old gentleman standing over me. Possibly I looked amazed; I felt amazed, I know. But I suppose that my flush and my inability to make any sort of answer but confirmed whatever absurd suspicions he held regarding me. Doubtless I looked as guilty as a chicken-carrying negro twenty feet away from a hen-house. The anger in the old gentleman's eyes became imbued with contempt.

"You are a most clumsy spy, sir," he said. "I should think your employers would have had common sense enough to engage a man who would know enough to employ ordinary secrecy, but you—" Again he snorted, this time without rage, but with measureless contempt. "You will do well to understand, sir, that I will not endure too much of your impertinent prying!"

With that he turned and sat down beside the girl. For a full minute longer I sat in silence. They suspected me! Whereas I had been suspecting them! At least, I had been suspecting one of them. With not altogether trifling cause, either.

It was my turn to become angry. I was still amazed. Why on earth any one should think my inoffensive self a spy; why they should fear a spy; these were enough to amaze me. But above surprise was anger. And then a sense of the absurdity of the scene drowned both amazement and anger.

I reached up and from the outer pocket of my coat drew forth the ticket which I had bought in New York, and which plainly showed that it had been bought there. The telegram which I had not sent to Billy Odlin tumbled to the floor of the car, drawn forth by my pulling out the ticket, but I paid no attention to it, but let it lie.

In my turn I rose and stood over the old gentleman.

"Will you have the goodness, sir," I requested him, "to look at this?"

I rather imagined, by his pursed mouth and squared shoulders, that he had expected something less mild than this request. Its unexpectedness, when he had been prepared, I suppose, for indignant denial, expostulation and what-not, made him grant it. He took the ticket and looked at it.

"You'll notice," I said, "that that ticket is part of a continuous ticket. The part entitling me to ride from New York to Portland has been torn off."

"Well?" He was puzzled.

"May I ask if you bought a through ticket to wherever you are going?"

"No," he said slowly. "I bought tickets to Portland only."

"Do you believe in telepathy?" I asked, with a smile.

He bristled.

"I don't understand you."

"How could I know, without reading your thoughts, that you intended taking this train? How could I have known it, I mean, back in New York? Yet, as you see, I bought a ticket through to Folly Cove, in New York."

"But we're going to Folly Cove," he said.

"But how did I know that?" I asked. "I have my ticket, bought in New York, to prove that I intended going to Folly Cove long before I met you on this train. Does that prove that I am not following you?"

He flushed.

"Why—er—if I've made a mistake——"

But the girl interrupted what might have been apology.

"I can't see that your possessing a through ticket proves anything at all," she said coldly. "You might have known we were going to Folly Cove even though, when you spied on me at the station in New York, you saw that I bought tickets only to Portland."

"Then you do believe in telepathy?" I asked, the coldness of my tones rivaling hers. I addressed myself to the man. "I assure you, sir, that not only am I not following you, but I can't conceive of any reason why I should be. Furthermore, please accept my assurances that I did not spy upon either of you in New York. I have not the slightest imaginable interest in either of you."

Now, no woman likes to be told emphatically, even under such circumstances as these, that a man whose age is not too remote from her own, has no interest whatsoever in her. Especially if the man who tells her so puts an indescribable emphasis upon his words, making it seem clear that she doesn't even possess the slightest sex appeal for him. Her brown eyes darkened with anger.

"May I inquire, then," she said, "why it was that on two occasions, in the theater and in the subway, you got away from us as soon as we discovered how near you were? Why you made every effort to avoid being seen by us?"

"I happen," I told her, "to be afflicted with nervousness; which is why I am going to Folly Cove—for rest. If you thought I was trying to avoid you I am sorry that such a thought gave you alarm. I'd hate my avoidance to cause suffering."

It was impertinent, grossly so, but to my surprise the old gentleman laughed.

"He has scored, Ruth," he said with a chuckle. He looked up at me. "Forgive my display of nervousness. I have—reasons."

He broke off short. He turned to the girl.

"Ruth, I do not believe in telepathy. This gentleman could not possibly have known our destination, as we told no one, not even——"

Again he broke off.

The girl looked unconvinced. Yet her common sense must have told her that unless I possessed the powers of wizardry, and had read their thoughts, it was sheer accident that caused me to be bound for the same place as they.

"But you don't look nervous," she said.

"Yet for the last minute I've been suffering agonies," I told her, "fearing that my rudeness would be unforgiven."

"You were justified," she said. But she said it with a hint of reluctance that made me certain that all her suspicions had not yet died.

The old gentleman had been fumbling in a pocketbook. He drew forth a card which he handed to me.

"Major Samuel Penrose, U. S. A." was the inscription.

I bowed.

"Major Penrose——"

"Retired," he said. "May I present you to——"

He paused suggestively. I hesitated until I saw the ever-ready suspicion forming in the girl's eyes again.

"Randall Brant," I told him.

Now here I must insert an explanation. Everywhere I go I find that fame has its penalties. Mention that I am Sidney Wrenham and every one begins to talk about Weatherbee Jones. All sorts of questions are hurled at me. Did I draw Weatherbee Jones from life? Has he really a prototype on some police force, or in some private detective agency? Do I get my plots from the criminal notes in the papers? Could I solve mysteries myself? Why couldn't I? My character, Weatherbee Jones, solves the most impossible problems; why couldn't I have him tackle real-life mysteries? Will I read one of my stories to a gathering of ladies? Will I, in short, consent to show off?

So, then, when I accepted Billy Odlin's advice, I made up my mind that no one at Folly Cove would know that I was Sidney Wrenham, the author. I would avoid all discussion of Weatherbee Jones. In my efforts to forget my work I would not be hindered by the curiosity of the people I might meet. But, while I had decided to discard temporarily the name of Sidney Wrenham, I had not determined what other name to adopt. "Randall Brant" popped into my head. From where I do not know, unless the fact that I know two newspapermen, one named Randall and the other Brant, suggested it. Anyway, thus was I rechristened, as the train lumbered along through

pine woods. And if the girl thought anything of my hesitation, I am sure that Major Penrose did not.

"I haven't a card," I said. "Not with me."

He waved my apologies aside.

"Let me present you, Mr. Brant, to my niece, Miss Ruth Gilman."

She bowed. But she said nothing. Nor did her uncle volunteer any explanation of the strangeness of their conduct.

For a moment or two we spoke of the violence of the storm and then, not being urged to remain—indeed, the girl seemed to have forgotten my presence, and the old gentleman plainly did not wish any conversation; he had given me his card and presented me to his niece only as a sort of *amende honorable* for what he felt had been insulting suspicions—I soon bowed again and left them.

From my seat I picked up my magazine, and, finding that I had a cigar in my waistcoat pocket and so did not need my pipe, I removed myself to the smoking-car. But it was not so much because I wished to smoke that I went there; it was rather because I wished to mull over the whole affair. I wanted to know why a girl with the frankest, honestest brown eyes in the world should search my pocketbook and suitcase in the dead of night. I also wanted to assure myself that she'd done nothing of the sort. Further, I wanted to try and figure out some reason why they should dread the curiosity of a spy. And I did not feel that I could do these things sitting just across the aisle from them.

That is why I went back to the smoking-car. And there, grinning at me in apparently admiring welcome, was my friend of the Portland railroad station. He was alone in the car. Indeed, the four of us, Major Penrose, Miss Gilman, myself and this man were the only passengers on the train. People don't travel to Summer resorts in Maine very much in the Winter.

"I hand it to you, friend," cried the burly gentleman. "Smooth as they come, flossy as they make 'em. As slick a case of getting next as I ever saw. I take back what I said about New Yorkers a while ago. You are there, friend, you are there!"

"And you," I said chillingly, "are unfortunately here. May I ask why?"

"Oh, shush!" he said. "When I'm willing to let by-gones be by-gones— There's no professional jealousy in mine, friend. I couldn't hear what they said, but I saw enough! I saw that you let the old bird make the first advances. You didn't stumble against 'em and apologize, or any raw stunt like that. You let the old bird brace you; then, after he leaves, you gets up dignified, goes over and speaks to him with a butter - won't-melt-in-my-mouth look, and the second after that you're all little pals together! It was candy, friend, it was candy!"

He beamed upon me. Then, with a certain humility, he said:

"It was a lesson to watch you, friend, and I'm always willing to learn. Won't you tell me how you pulled him over to you? He looked sore, then. And how did you come all over him when you spoke to him?"

He looked at me eagerly, as I have seen pupils look at a teacher whom they admired.

Now, I have my fair share of conceit. I hate to destroy illusions about the author of "Weatherbee Jones," the "American Sherlock Holmes," as reviewers have been kind enough to term my creation. As I have intimated before, people are inclined to credit me with as much cleverness as my fiction detective. At any rate, I know, from the compliments I receive, that people believe me very quick of wit.

As a matter of fact, my mental processes are really rather slow. The Weatherbee Jones stories do not flow trippingly from my pen. I sweat them out. Therefore, I am forced to confess that as yet I had no idea of the business of this man. My readers, of course, have guessed it already. But it is easier to make deductions from cold type than from words or events. Which may explain and condone my stupidity in not connecting this gentleman with the fear of being followed of the couple in the day coach.

"What do you think you're driving at?" I asked.

He grinned, unrebuffed.

"Great stuff," he commented. "The stage lost some actor when you took up this game. Innocent as a babe unborn, eh? Don't suppose you know anything at all about the New York office wiring Portland that you'd be on the night train from New York, wearing a blue greatcoat and checked cap, and that you might not be able to come up to the office, so for us to have some one at the station to help out? Don't suppose

you knew that the chief had wired that you'd give the old handkerchief signal in case there was any one else dressed like you? This is all news to you, eh?"

"Yes," I told him flatly, "it is."

He shook his head wonderingly.

"I don't get you at all," he said. "Why the New York office should wire to help you when you don't want it— You're kidding me, eh? Trying to see just how wise the Portland office turns 'em out, eh? All right, friend Twenty-seven, hop to it! I can stand being kidded by a regular guy. I ain't stuck on myself. When a classy worker wants to josh me he's welcome to do it. Just come down to Maine for the January bathing and tennis, eh? Sure you did! And you got next to those people in the next car just for sociability's sake, didn't you? Sure you did! I'm some kidder myself, ain't I?

"Of course you haven't trailed those people in the next car all the way from Washington, have you? Certainly not! It's all accident, your meeting up with them. Oh, of course!"

He favored me with a merry wink and drew a fresh cigar from his case. He cocked it between his lips at an acute angle, shoved his derby hat far back on his head, leaned back in his seat and crossed his knees, and favored me with a glance that assayed one hundred per cent. wise.

And now glimmerings of understanding came to me. That he had mistaken me for some one else had been evident for some time. That that some one else was a detective seemed pretty obvious now. And it was equally clear that that some one was supposed to be shadowing the couple in the next car.

I thought I understood why I had been mistaken for the shadower. I remembered, now, the man who had arrived at the train-gates in New York after they had been closed. I remembered seeing him run along outside the car. I remembered that he had worn a checked golf-cap not unlike my own and that our greatcoats were of the same color.

I thought I could see the whole business now. That man who missed the Portland train had evidently been following my new acquaintances in the car ahead. He had watched them buy their tickets to Portland and had then, probably, slipped off to send a telegram to the Portland branch of the agency for which he worked. And as there were only two great detective agencies who maintained Portland branches, as I happened to know from my newspaper work, this wise individual and the man who had missed the train must be employed by either the Greenhams or the Healy agency. My curiosity was deeply aroused. I visualized the actions of the man left behind in New York.

For some reason—possibly because he had had experience with railway porters and knew that sometimes they pocket the money and fail to send telegrams entrusted to them—the man had preferred sending the telegram himself, from the Grand Central station.

No, I was wrong there. "Eight," who sat cheerfully smoking his cigar, had spoken of the office wiring from New York. Then my friend of the outer apparel similar to my own had probably telephoned his New York office whither he was bound. That had delayed him longer than he had expected and he had missed the train. And his failure to notify the Portland office of his not being aboard the train was simple: the first telegram, probably forwarded by the New York office as soon as his telephonic message was received, had got through to Portland safely. Any telegrams filed after that had not gone through, because of the storm with its wreck of telegraph wires. Accordingly I, dressed as the New York, or perhaps Washington operative had been dressed, and unwittingly giving the handkerchief signal, had been mistaken for him.

There may have been minor flaws in this deduction, but I have never discovered them. I was proud of it then, and I am fairly proud of it now. I think that it would have done credit to Weatherbee Jones.

And the beauty of it was that I deduced it all in about ten seconds, while I stood teetering in the aisle of the smoking-car, as if undecided whether or not to sit down beside "Eight." But I wasn't undecided; as soon as I had connected his strange actions with the equally strange manner of the couple in the car ahead, I made up my mind to try and pump him.

Strangely enough, the fact that I now knew, from what "Eight" had told me, as well as from the admissions conveyed by the suspicions of me held by the major and his niece, that the elderly gentleman and

the girl were being followed by detectives, aroused a great sympathy in me. While, in common with most people, I have the feeling that any one followed by detectives is not a desirable acquaintance, and while somehow the fact that they were followed seemed to lend substance to my dream, or recollection, or whatever it was, of the girl searching my effects, I felt, nevertheless, allied with them. I would help them if I could.

If they had broken the law, were criminals—well, Major Penrose was a gentleman! His niece was a lady. Any crimes they might have committed could not be half so offensive to me as the mere existence of the coarse, leering, wise brute who denominated himself as "Eight." And anyway, every one is assumed to be innocent until proved guilty. To ally myself with the major and his niece meant to obey the wise injunction of the law.

But I may as well admit right here that a pair of brown eyes, a mass of brown hair, and the loveliest face in the world, had all to do with my sitting down beside "Eight." The legal maxim was not thought of until later.

"Eight" had turned over the back of a seat so that I was able to sit down opposite him. He removed his cigar from his mouth and expectorated with great fluency. I smiled admiringly upon him.

"Well, there's no use trying to fool you," I said. "I had an idea that I'd run up against some hick down here and I wanted to try you out. I was afraid you might butt in and queer the game, you know."

"I guess I ain't that dumb," he said. "Second I saw you getting close to them in the next car I pussy-footed back here. Thinks I, he'll loosen up when he gets ready, and if he thinks I'm left-handed with my face I'll prove I'm not by not horning in. I'm ready when you want me, friend."

"You're all right," said I with heavy flattery. I lighted my own cigar, and without, I hope, a trace of eagerness in my voice, said, "Now tell me all you know about the case."

"Just what you tipped the New York office when you came on from Washington. They mailed us a copy of your report, and it reached us yesterday. A-course, what happened while you were trailing them in New York——"

"They mailed you my report?" I asked.

"Why, sure! You said you had a pretty good idea that they were headed for Maine from things you'd got out of the old boy's servants. So of course your report was mailed to us."

"Of course," I agreed. "And what else did I say in that report?"

He took his cigar from his mouth and stared at me.

"Say, ain't you through yet?" he asked.

"Through what?"

"Kidding me."

"Why, I'm simply asking you to tell me what was in my report. Is that kidding?"

"Oh, shush!" he exclaimed. "I can stand a little of it, but a whole lot makes me tired. When you get ready to act sane, instead of keeping up the josh, let me know and I'll talk business. I ain't going to be a goat for any one, I don't care if he does come from the Washington office!"

"Don't be fresh," I said severely. "You're under orders, you know," I hazarded. "It won't do you any good to buck up against me. If I should wire the Portland office to take you off the case and put some one else on——"

He sat bolt upright and threw away his cigar. He leaned forward and tapped me on the knee with a pudgy forefinger.

"Go as far as you like," he said harshly. "I ain't stuck on shadowing at three per day and expenses when I got talent in me for bigger things. I know who's retained us in this case. I know how much there is in it. Now, then, when you're ready to work with me, and give me a show to prove what's in me, I'll be ready. But don't try to scare me by threatening to report me. I guess the people that retained the agency would be just as willing to pay their piece of change to Jim Ravenell as to the chief! I guess that if I hand 'em what they want and tell 'em that they've got to come across to me, and not to the chief, they'd do it. I'm willing to stick by the firm if I'm treated right. But I don't have to. The people who retained the chief ain't fussy who delivers the goods, so long as the goods are delivered. Put a pin in that!

"You go ahead and report me the second you want. It'll simply mean that I'll go after this job on my own!"

"You'd be disloyal to the chief, then," I said.

"Disloyal, my eye! I'd be loyal to the only thing worth being loyal to—myself.

I been held back by people that's jealous of me. If I turn this trick myself I'll get coin enough and rep enough to start an agency of my own. The chief ain't never worried about me; I ain't worrying about him. Now go 'way and leave me alone.

"When you get ready to climb down from your high horse and treat me right and quit making a goat of me maybe I'll talk business. But you might as well understand right here and now that I'm looking out for Jim Ravenell. The people that retained us ain't the only people that want what that old bird in the car ahead has got. Other people will bid for it. This is my big chance. I intend to grab it. You'd have to find it out sooner or later; you may as well know it now!"

"A crook, eh?" I sneered.

He grinned.

"Oh, shush, you can't make me mad with that sort of talk! Anything there's half a million in ain't crooked. It's business! Now mull that over!"

With which injunction he lifted his feet to the vacant part of the seat on which I sat, settled comfortably back into his seat, and closed his eyes. I had played my hand badly. I smiled ruefully as I thought of how much more cleverly I could have made Weatherbee Jones act in such a situation. But then, I'd have had days, weeks, if necessary, to plot the genius of Weatherbee Jones.

I got up and went forward to the day coach. Coldly as the brown-eyed girl had treated me, she had some justice on her side. She had thought me a spy. And if she had rifled my effects it was probably to get proof that I was one. I could not blame her. With half a million at stake— What on earth could it be that Major Penrose, officer and gentleman, and Ruth Gilman, beauty and lady, could possess that was worth half a million to the unknown employers of either the Greenhams or the Healy agency? Was it something that they had stolen? If so, why weren't they arrested?

Of course, crooks were sometimes allowed to go free because it was hoped that they would lead their pursuers to their booty. Weatherbee Jones often did that! But even if the major and his niece were crooks— well, Jim Ravenell cheerfully admitted being one himself. As between the crook in the smoking-car and the couple ahead, there was only one choice.

I walked swiftly into the day-coach to inform the major and his niece that their suspicions were justified, though not by myself; that there was a spy upon their trail.

"Major — and Miss Gilman," I said breathlessly, "I want to tell you that I've discovered——"

He raised his hand and cut me short.

"We have made some discoveries ourselves, Mr. Randall Brant!"

He emphasized the name in a way that made me color guiltily, as I seemed to be doing so frequently of late. He lifted his other hand. In it he held a telegram-blank which I recognized as the one I had not sent to Billy Odlin.

"There are times," said the major, "when the ordinary canons that guide a gentleman's conduct may be ignored. I have never before read a missive not addressed to me. But under the circumstances, my niece and myself feeling that there still remained reasonable ground for doubts about you, I picked up and read the telegram which I hold here and which, evidently because of the storm, you had not been able to send.

"You are a spy and liar, sir! I will not even give you that satisfaction which one gentleman should give another upon such an accusation, and which, thank God, no fears of the law against dueling has ever made me forego offering to a gentleman! But you—if you presume to address either my niece or myself again, I shall cane you, Mr. Sidney Spy!"

He placed the telegram in my limp fingers. I should have known what to do had he been nearer my own age and physique. But he was a slender, elderly man, not at all my equal in strength.

There was, of course, the other alternative. I could endeavor to explain. But one becomes tired of explanations. I saw no reason why I should offer another to people so ready to suspect me, and who themselves were under some cloud of suspicion that caused detectives to take undue interest in them.

I drew myself up. But it is hard to look haughtily indifferent and proudly innocent when a handsome old gentleman and a lovely girl look at you with eyes of contempt. Especially is it hard when in your hand you hold the evidence that has damned you. I could not be the hero that Weatherbee

Jones, when misunderstood, sometimes is. I'm afraid that I slunk to my seat, where I read the telegram that was so innocent, but that yet must seem so patently guilty. It read:

William Odlin, Madison Avenue, New York City. Case progresses already. Expect results shortly. Am on the right trail.

It was signed by my first name, "Sidney!"

How could I, in the face of this ambiguous writing, which meant one thing to me, but something entirely different to the major and his niece, do otherwise than slink to my seat? I'm afraid that Weatherbee Jones would have had difficulty in looking proudly conscious of his rectitude under such conditions.

Maybe the train was not very late in reaching Folly Cove. But the journey seemed of years' duration to me.

V

SUPPER that night, at the Folly Cove Inn, was a dreary enough affair. We four who had been conveyed to the inn, half a mile from the village of Folly Cove, in the hotel's huge sleigh, were, so far as I noticed that night, the only guests in the place. We ate at the same table, but Ravenell wasn't speaking to me, I wasn't speaking to the major and his niece, and this last pair were evidently tired from their journey and exchanged only the ordinary courtesies of table-talk.

Immediately after the meal—and it was a good one, with broiled live lobsters as the *pièce de résistance*, and some mince pie that would have tempted the most crabbed old dyspeptic to remember that we live but once—I went to my room, leaving Ravenell engaged in easy gossip with the landlord, Captain Noah Perkins. The major and his niece had preceded me up the flight of stairs that led from the hotel office, and I could not but notice that they had adjoining rooms at the end of the second-floor corridor midway of which was my room.

I did not go to sleep for some time. Yet, though my brain puzzled over the mystery surrounding the major and the girl, and Ravenell's connection with it, and though I flushed with angry shame every time I remembered the major's final words to me, and the look in the eyes of the girl at that moment, I did not, as I noted just before falling to sleep, have any recurrence of the mental symptoms that had driven me away from the city.

The train-ride from Portland had not alarmed me in the slightest, although twenty-four hours ago it would have bothered me considerably. Perhaps, I thought, the fact that I had given my trouble a name, had recognized being troubled, and had started away in search of a cure, had had its good effect already. I hoped so, and that it would continue. Anyway, I had the best sleep, natural sleep, that night that I had had in months, and felt fresh as a trout when I went down-stairs in the morning.

The major and the girl were already at breakfast. But I noticed, with a chagrin that I trust was concealed, that they were at a smaller side table. Ravenell came into the dining-room a moment after me. He grinned covertly as he noticed the transference of the other two.

"You didn't make such a hit after all, did you?" he said, as he sat down at the long table, across from me. "Shook you right off, eh? Well, that gives me a chance to make a hit. What happened, anyway? How'd you gum the game?"

"Captain Perkins says it's going to be a cold day," I answered.

He stared at me.

"Still the little josher, eh? Oh, well, keep it up! I guess when I've taken the lady skating once or twice she'll tell me how you happened to put your foot in it."

I smiled bitterly.

"You take her skating? My dear Mr. Number Eight, don't you realize that she's a lady?"

"Well, what of— Oh, I get your meaning! I ain't good enough for her, you think. Well, I won't rush into a throw-down the way you seem to have done, anyway. And as for being good enough for her, why, I guess she ain't so——"

He caught my eye and stopped short.

"Yes?" I encouraged gently. "She isn't so——"

"Oh, shush!" he growled, averting his eye.

He spoke no more to me at breakfast. Afterward he disappeared. I did not see him again until luncheon or, dinner, as it was at the Folly Cove Inn.

Major Penrose, vouchsafing me not a glance, mounted the stairs to his room immediately after breakfast, accompanied by

his niece. And even though I had hoped for no social intercourse with them, their departure from the down-stairs precincts, leaving the place devoid of guests, threw a pall of gloom over me. For lack of anything else to do I engaged wheezy old Captain Perkins, our host, in conversation.

The captain was as ready to impart information as he was anxious to acquire it. After I had answered all his questions, telling him that I was a quasi-invalid and had come down to his place on hearing of it from friends, naming, when he pressed the point, Billy Odlin as one of them, that I had formerly been a newspaperman but was at present doing nothing—that was true; was I not refraining from work?—and that I expected to remain with him several weeks, if not months, I got him to talk. But not, I was happy to note, about the Great War. Captain Perkins, while not really conceited, thought himself more interesting than the war in Europe.

He was a retired ship-master and had been all over the world. His savings he had invested in the Folly Cove Inn. He had hoped to make a Winter resort of it as well as a Summer resort, believing that the place had as many natural advantages as Poland Springs, or other places where city people go for Winter sports. But somehow the tide of Winter travel had never set in toward Folly Cove Inn.

"But I make a good living off it in the Summer," he stated. "And I got no home besides this. Why not keep it open? I lose a bit of money, a-course, but I give work to a few people, and them what comes down here to board acts as society-like, for me. Why shouldn't I keep it open? If those gossips in the village say I'm foolish, well, it ain't no skin off their noses what I do, is it?" he wheezed.

As I could not see how the nasal cuticle of the Folly Covers was affected by his action, I said so.

He knew nothing about the major or the girl, I soon learned, save that the old gentleman had stated that he was not in good health, and the doctor had recommended a bracing climate for him. As for Ravenell, the captain guessed that that worthy was a sportsman, come down to Folly Cove for some fishing through the ice.

"Leastwise, he says so," stated Captain Perkins.

I did not enlighten him, but let the captain ramble on about the natural advantages of Folly Cove for both Summer and Winter sports. And they were many.

Fronting the hotel was the "Head," a sort of promontory that jutted into the sea. It was heavily covered with pine growth, through which ran the "Indian trails" to be found at every Maine resort. At the base of its steep sides were great rocks against which, at high tide, the waters pounded in a fury that cast the spray scores of feet in the air. And at low tide the swirling currents made it dangerous for a boat to come too near.

At the left of the promontory the land ran almost straight for miles, affording little protection for storm-tossed ships, of which there were many at this time of year. But at the right of the promontory was the deep cove which gave the village and the hotel their name. This cove, according to the captain, was a favorite boating, bathing, and salt-water fishing place in Summer.

At its head stood the little village, in the center of which a little bridge spanned the creek that emptied from Rider's Pond. This Rider's Pond was quite a large body of water, in places not much more than a quarter of a mile from the sea, yet so much higher that its water was absolutely fresh. It was four or five miles long, and somewhat over half a mile broad, slightly winding, but, on the whole, running fairly parallel with the sea. In places its shores were covered with a reedy growth that extended into the water, forming a favorite place for the village duck-hunters. It was here, too, that fine pickerel could be hauled through the ice, and at other seasons it was supposed to teem with game fish. Several unpretentious camps and bungalows were to be found around it, but none of these, complained the landlord, were occupied in Winter.

Indeed, judging from what the captain told me, and from what I observed myself, Folly Cove must be an ideal Summer resort. But I do not know, for I have never been there in the warm months. But as a Winter resort I am forced to confess that it is decidedly dull. With the right crowd, and with toboggan slides and all the other outdoor things that make Winter pleasant, I imagine it would be all right. But Captain Perkins had delayed erecting toboggan slides until the register of his hotel justified such an expenditure. And it never had.

Indeed, it seemed to me that the place was to prove frightfully dull. I knew, of course, that Billy Odlin did not consider Folly Cove the only place for me to go, and I think I should have left the Inn on the day after I arrived were it not for the fact that my interest had been so tremendously intrigued by the major and his niece and Jim Ravenell.

Certainly there was nothing or no one else to entertain me. The captain was a good-natured old gossip, but he failed to interest me deeply. There were no other guests besides those with whom my relations were strained. And among the "help" was one who played the violin.

Now I am willing to admit that properly played the violin is the most wonderful of instruments. But I insist that improperly played, it is likewise the most wonderful of instruments. As I chatted with the captain a wailing, eerie, almost incredible moan came from the second floor. I almost leaped from my chair.

"What's that?" I gasped.

"Ain't it wonderful?" cried the captain. "Don't he make that fiddle sound just like a lost soul? That's Tony Larue, my Portygee. He—he's a puffick wonder on that fiddle. You don't object to him playing, do you?"

"Why, no," I said reluctantly. "But does he have to murder it? Can't he play something cheerful?"

"He can do anything with it," said the captain proudly, "but just now he's tuning up, I guess. Want he should come down and play 'Turkey in the Straw?' "

"Oh, no" I said hastily. "I wouldn't disturb his practise for anything. Tell me, does he practise often?"

"Not much so folks can hear it," said the captain. "Usually he keeps his door closed. You can't hear it, then. But if it annoys you——"

There was such an appeal in his voice and eyes that I assured him I loved the violin. Which was true enough. I do. I didn't necessarily mean that I would enjoy the playing of Tony Larue. But the captain evidently thought that I did, and after he had discoursed a while on Tony I had not the heart to do otherwise than express great delight at the prospect of hearing Tony later on.

Captain Perkins had picked up Tony Larue in the Madeira Islands on his last voyage. The boy was an orphan and the captain had taken a fancy to him. He had brought him to America and had brought him up as a son. But Tony—and the captain's eyes were misty as he told me this—had not developed as his youth had promised. There was something wrong with his brain. What it was the captain did not know. Some fall, possibly the typhoid fever the boy had undergone at twelve, something at any rate had dulled the lad's intellect during adolescence. Now, a grown man of thirty, he had the brain of a boy of sixteen.

"As good a boy as ever breathed, too," said the captain. "I've left him all I got, in trust so he can't be robbed of it, and I do my best to see that he has a good time. I don't ask him to do no work less'n he feels like it. But he's a good boy and likes to help around. Here he is, now," he added in an undertone.

The wailing of the violin had died away while we talked and its owner now descended the stairs, carrying the instrument under his arm. He approached us with a flash of white teeth, but as he came nearer I noted that his eyes were dull. I felt a great pity for the handsome young man for whom, so the captain said, the best doctors in Portland had been able to do nothing.

Captain Perkins presented him to me and he shook my hand cordially. But as he opened his mouth to say something, Major Penrose's voice, raised and irascible, floated down from the top of the stairs.

"Landlord!" he cried angrily. "Has that —— caterwauling ended for good? In the name of all things how may a man work with that noise?"

I saw the eyes of Tony fill with tears, child-like. He turned appealingly to Captain Perkins. The landlord's lips tightened.

"Sorry, Major Penrose," he said coldly. "The—the person playing forgot to close his door. It won't happen again."

"I hope not," growled the major, and we heard him walk along the corridor.

Tony Larue brushed his hand across his eyes. "I—I didn't mean to forget, Captain," he said. "I—should have closed the door, but——"

He spoke without dialect.

"It's all right, Tony," said the captain. "Some people ain't got no musical ear, Tony. I wouldn't pay no attention to them. But I'd try and keep the door closed when you're practising."

"I will," promised Tony.

It was pathetic to hear a grown man promise obedience as might a child. Then a flash of his Portuguese blood showed. His lips curled back from his white, even teeth. His fists clenched and he shook one at the stairs.

"He called it —— caterwauling," he said with a snarl. "I'll kill him!" He lost the correctness of his pronunciation. "I'll keel heem!" he cried.

The captain shot a glance of alarm at me.

"Now, now, Tony, you mustn't talk that way. The gentleman here won't think you're a good boy."

"But I *am* a good boy," cried Tony; contrition was in his voice and eyes now as he looked at the captain.

"'Course you are, and you didn't mean that killing talk, did you?" said the captain.

Again the Portuguese's eyes flashed anger. But they softened quickly.

"No, Captain, I did not mean it."

He walked behind the desk and placed his violin inside the heavy, old-fashioned safe that held the Folly Cove Inn valuables.

"I'm going down for the mail now, Captain," he said.

With no more words he left the office. The captain turned apologetically to me.

"He's queer, like I told you, and he's a genius, too, at the violin, which accounts, mebbe, for his temper. But he don't mean nothing. He wouldn't harm a fly, Tony Larue wouldn't."

He made the statement with a certain anxiety in his voice, as if he would like my reassurance on this point.

"Of course he wouldn't," I said encouragingly, though, as a matter of fact, it seemed to me that the half-witted Portuguese might prove a very dangerous person if his mood were right. Or wrong.

I went up-stairs shortly after that, to remain there until luncheon. It was not a long wait, but, in addition to my other puzzlement, I had time to wonder what work Major Penrose was engaged upon.

I lunched alone. I overheard the waitress say that the major and the girl would eat in their rooms; that the old gentleman was not feeling well. And Ravenell did not come back from wherever he had been until I was pushing back my chair from the table.

Afterward, in the office, Captain Perkins told me that the wind had blown the dry snow away from a considerable area of Rider's Pond and that if I cared for skating I had a fine opportunity. He offered me a pair of skates, but I found that they would not fit, so I went down to the village. There I bought skates, and spent most of the afternoon upon the smooth ice.

I was exhausted beyond anything since I had rowed on the 'varsity when I finally reached the hotel. So tired, indeed, from the unaccustomed strain I had placed upon legs and lungs, that I stumbled up-stairs to bed as soon as I had finished my evening meal. I noticed however, that the major and Miss Gilman did not come down to the dining-room. Ravenell did, but beyond a sneer in my direction, to which I paid no attention, he did not notice me.

And this night I did not bother about the mystery that was in the air. I only smiled cheerfully at the thought that a few weeks of this would heal my nervous malady, made up my mind to forget all about things that didn't concern me, and went to sleep.

IN PURSUANCE of this laudable intention, next morning, I left the hotel immediately after breakfast, with a pair of skates, an ax, and fishing tackle and bait which Captain Perkins had given me. I skirted the hotel and immediately descended the path through pine woods, not over a hundred yards or so in length, that wound down from the rear of the Inn to Rider's Pond. Today even more of the ice was visible.

Wet though the snow had been in New York, it had been perfectly dry and powdery in the neighborhood of Folly Cove, and the high wind of last night—through which I had slept but which Captain Perkins had commented on this morning—had blown more of it from the ice.

Of course, there were huge drifts here and there, but there was plenty of room for all the skating I'd care to do.

I made my way, lamely at first, but more easily as the stiffness got worked out of my limbs, across the lake and then southerly along the opposite shore for about a mile and a half to a little cape off which, the captain assured me, the pickerel fishing was good. Here I chopped a hole in the ice with my ax, and here I remained for a couple of hours, until I had gathered a string of six fine pickerel.

Then I skated about the lake for another hour, until I felt that it was time for me to get back to the hotel if I wanted my pickerel for dinner. I came to a stop near the path behind the hotel and took off my skates. As I rose I thought I heard voices in the woods, thought I recognized Miss Gilman's tones, raised, so it seemed, in expostulation, in fright, perhaps.

I walked swiftly up the path. As I rounded a turn I came upon the girl. I had not been deceived about her tones. She was badly frightened, and with good reason, though now indeed, she no longer cried, but fought for possession of a muff which had been wrenched, partly wrenched, from her grasp.

Indeed, as I dropped my fish and skates, retaining only my ax, the muff was entirely wrenched from her fingers by a man whose back was to me. But the other man, who seized her shoulders and forced her back against a pine tree while the other backed away, bending over the captured fur, was Jim Ravenell. I saw him though he, intent on restraining the girl, did not see me at first. But the girl saw me.

"Don't mind—me!" she cried, as I advanced upon Ravenell. "Get the muff!"

It was very easily done. Before the stranger had guessed my presence I had torn the muff from him and was facing him, ax in hand. As he sprang forward I took a step toward him, my left fist clenched. He backed away and I recognized him, aided by the checked cap and great-coat like my own. It was the man who had missed the train in New York and for whom I had undoubtedly been mistaken by the precious Ravenell.

Neither he nor Ravenell had as yet uttered a word, but Ravenell released the girl, and his hand dropped to his coat pocket. The stranger did likewise, and in his hand gleamed a revolver.

"Hand me that muff," he demanded harshly.

I took a quick step by him, surprising him who had evidently believed that the sight of his weapon would cow me. I pressed the muff into the girl's hand and when Ravenell would have snatched at it I drove my left fist against his jaw. As he reeled against the tree to which he had just pinned Miss Gilman, I shoved her up the path.

"Run for it," I cried.

Without a word she turned and fled up the path, around a turn, and was hidden by the trees.

It all happened very quickly. She was gone, and I stood in the path above them, before they quite realized that she had escaped. Then Ravenell, his eyes glaring, whipped a revolver from his pocket and leveled it at me as I stood there, ax raised, barring pursuit.

"Get out of the way," he cried thickly, "or I'll blow——"

"And hang for murder?" I sneered. "Or is it life imprisonment down here? With Miss Gilman to testify to what has happened? Put up your gun, Ravenell, and don't be an ass!"

Beyond a tremor of the nerves, slightly pleasurable if anything, I felt no alarm, even though Ravenell looked angry enough to carry out his threat. I wondered, as I stood there facing them, if this were the sort of crisis which Billy Odlin had said would cure my claustrophobia. (I was to learn later, I may state here in parenthesis, that it was not.)

However, I did not know that fact then, and was rather grateful for the opportunity of convincing myself that my nervous fears were not those of a coward. I didn't fear a weapon held by an angry man.

But it wasn't held long in Ravenell's trembling fingers. The stranger turned upon him contemptuously.

"Put it up, Ravenell," he snapped. "You can't bluff one of Healy's men."

I made a note of that. If my deductions were correct—and this man's presence seemed to bear them out so far—these men were employed by the Greenhams, inasmuch as they thought me a Healy man, and, as I have said, there were only two big, national detective agencies with branches in Portland: the Greenhams and the Healy agency. So these must be Greenham operatives. The stranger looked at me.

"It's a wonder to me," he said slowly, "that you didn't keep her muff yourself. Say, can't we do business together?"

"Maybe," I said cautiously. If I could learn what the business was! "What do you propose?"

"Aw, don't listen to him, Minot," cried Ravenell. "He's too crooked to do business with! Didn't he try to kid me into thinking he was you, the liar?"

He rubbed his jaw while he glared venomously at me, and I laughed at him.

"Tried to kid you?" I jeered. "I didn't have to try! You were too easy."

Ravenell cursed, but the stranger silenced him with a gesture. He spoke to me.

"What'll you take to pull out of this?" he asked. "Or will you come in with us and split fifty-fifty? Or maybe, if your people will give more than the people we're working for——"

He eyed me shrewdly.

"You'd sell Greenham out, like your friend, eh?" I asked.

"Huh?" He turned upon Ravenell. "You planning to sell the chief out?" he cried savagely.

"Aw, I was trying to string him along," protested Ravenell.

"That's an unhealthy sort of stringing," snapped the man Minot.

"H'm," said I, enjoying the situation. "Then you didn't mean it when you just suggested selling out your chief? You were trying to string me. But go on scrapping with your friend. When thieves fall out, you know——"

"Oh, there's no use getting sore, any of us," said Minot. "We're both after the same thing. Though why, when you had it in your hand— I get it! It wasn't in her muff and you knew it and planned making a hit with her. Very clever!"

He eyed me admiringly.

"Wasn't it?" I smiled. "And now—suppose you gentlemen retire down this path and get to the village along the lake-front? I'll have Captain Perkins send your bags down to the station."

"What's the big idea?" queried Minot.

"Simple, isn't it?" I retorted. "Miss Gilman will hardly care to see your faces again. I don't know whether she'll have you arrested or not. I hope she does. I'll cheerfully testify against both of you. But anyway, it will take time to get a sheriff up to the Inn, and I don't propose to have her annoyed by the knowledge that you're around. So run along."

Minot's eyes widened.

"Say, you don't really think you can run a blazer like that, do you? She'll have us arrested? Well, where do you get that from?"

"Well, why won't she?" I demanded.

"Why won't she? Oh, this is rich! She's dead crazy to have us tell in court why we —oh, look here, Brant, if that's your name. Do they teach you Healy men that we Greenhams are boobs? If they don't, what makes you act as though you thought we were?"

He turned to Ravenell.

"Come on down the line. I want to talk to you." Over his shoulder he spoke to me, spoke menacingly, harshly. "We don't want trouble with you, Brant. But we won't dodge it! And when trouble comes I guess two Greenham men are worth one Healy."

"Think so?" I jeered. "I'll continue to bet on this Healy man."

Then I shouldered my ax, and with a sudden determination to force some sort of explanation from Miss Gilman—after what I had done for her she could hardly refuse to listen to my explanation of the telegram—I started up the path. Around the first turn I came upon the girl. She held an automatic pistol in her hand. Also she still held her muff, proof enough that she had not gone to the Inn, but had been in hiding, prepared—I thrilled at the thought—prepared to aid me if I needed it.

White-faced, firm-lipped, most determined-looking despite the slight tremors that shook her slim figure, she was pathetically lovely as she stood there. I wondered, with sudden anger, how Major Penrose could drag such a lovely young thing into whatever dangerous mystery they seemed involved.

"Don't be frightened," I said, "they've gone."

I held out my hand to assist her into the path, but she ignored it.

"So," she said, "you are a Healy spy!"

VI

I WAS taken aback. I wasn't conceited enough to imagine that I'd done any more for her than any other red-blooded man would have done, but still *I* happened to have been the man who did it. I trust that I am chivalrous enough to consider that the privilege of aiding a lady is a reward in itself, but still there is such a thing as *noblesse oblige* and its rules are applicable to either sex. She had fractured them.

For another time she had cruelly misjudged me, had listened to my assumption of the rôle of a Healy operative, and had accepted it as fact, when her common sense should have told her that I was playing a part. She had undoubtedly overheard my

conversation with Minot and had accepted his interpretation of my rescue of her muff and herself. I wanted to shake her; and then my sense of humor came to my rescue. My anger left me in a laugh at this comedy of errors in which I had so misunderstood a part.

"Miss Gilman," I said with a smile, "don't you think it's high time that we had a little explanation party? If you'll listen to me for just one minute——"

Her lips curled with a most maddening scorn.

"I have no doubt," she said, "but that you are as clumsy a liar as you are spy! I don't care to listen to you."

This from the girl who had waited behind a tree, armed with an automatic pistol, prepared, I had no doubt, to use it in my behalf, but a moment ago. Then, for a moment at any rate, she had trusted me, had let my actions speak for my honesty.

I bit my lip. The anger that mirth had swept away surged again within me. But I controlled it.

"Still," I said, "if you'll give me a moment——"

"You look like a gentleman," she blazed. "For a moment, in spite of everything, I believed you to be one. But I heard you admit to those men that— Oh, go away from me. Let me alone!"

Let my readers here become witness to an author's high resolve. In the past I have sinned deeply. I have permitted the keys of my typewriter to evolve "cave-men" who, confronted by such a situation as this, have seized the objects of their primitive loves in their strong arms and crushed away the ladies' doubts. But I shall never evolve such a character again. I have experienced, in real life, the situation which, too often, I have vicariously experienced in the pages of my manuscript. And I know that no matter how thrillingly such a situation may read, it doesn't act well.

Never again shall my hero clasp the angry girl in his arms. For I know that no man, be he ever so misunderstood, be he ever so much in love, would dare put his arms about the pliant figure of a girl who confronted him with such a blaze of anger in her eyes as Miss Gilman held in hers. If this were fiction I could sweep away all doubts, all misunderstanding in one paragraph. But this is real life, and in real life—once again, I state emphatically that it can't be done.

For a moment I met her fiery glance. I heard her foot stamp the ground.

"Go away," she said again.

Meekly, humbly, I did as I was told, leaving behind me a girl on whose lips trembled sobs. Weatherbee Jones, master detective, master hero, master man, would have known how to meet such a situation. I can imagine his scorn of me for letting myself continue to be misunderstood, for continuing to play such an ignoble rôle. But if no man may be a hero to his valet, how much less possible is it for an author to be a hero to one of his own characters. Let those who will puzzle this out.

IT SO happened that today, at dinner, was the first time I had ever eaten pickerel. And despite the fact that I had caught them myself, which should have flavored them, I never ate so tasteless a meal in my life. To enjoy dinner, one's thoughts must be of dinner. Mine were up-stairs with the flashing-eyed girl to whom, it seemed, I was doomed ever to appear in evil light.

What was it that Ravenell and the new arrival, Minot, had thought was in her muff? Why were they so confident that she would make no charge against them?

I came to one conclusion: neither the major nor the girl was involved in anything criminal. For Minot thought me to be a Healy operative, and that he thought the Healy agency had been retained by some one, and was not working on its own initiative, was evident from his remarks. And from Ravenell's, too. Of course, private detective agencies never do work on their own initiative: they are always hired: but Minot had suggested that "my people" might pay better than his.

It was clear, therefore, that the major and his niece were believed to be in possession of something worth a fortune, but that that possession was not criminal. Otherwise, how could it happen that Minot believed two detective agencies were both striving for the same object, neither invoking the law? If the major and his niece were criminals, and possessed something which did not belong to them, how did it come to pass that two people, with interests evidently opposed, were seeking this something with the aid of detectives?

There could not be two rightful owners to this something. Inasmuch as Minot

thought that my mythical employers might pay better than his own—or had, at least, to pump me, suggested that—it seemed clear to me that Minot believed that other people might have as much right to the something as did the person or persons who had retained the Greenhams.

If others, then, could hire detectives to get whatever the major and his niece possessed, the right of the Greenhams' employers to that thing didn't seem very well defined. If the major had stolen something and Minot believed that I was a Healy man, and if Minot's employers really owned the something, why didn't Minot, fearful lest I should obtain it, have the major arrested? The theory that the Greenhams delayed arrest in the hope that their quarry might lead them to his booty no longer applied.

Moreover, Ravenell had stated that the employers of the Greenhams weren't the only ones who wanted "it." And he had spoken of half a million dollars. Was this the value of Major Penrose's possession, or was it but the fractional part of the something's value offered for its capture?

What could the thing be? It must be small, to be capable of being carried in the girl's muff. Was it jewelry? It didn't seem possible that the major or the girl would have brought hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of jewelry down to a country hotel where burglary might prove so feasible.

Moreover, it was not possible that well-known detective agencies would take any part in the forcible abstraction of jewels. One agency, to avert possible scandal, might do so, but both Ravenell and Minot had admitted the right, so to speak, of another agency to be employed, by different employers. Not jewels, then. Before the Greenhams or the Healey agency accepted a case like this, they would have to be shown a mighty clear title to the jewels. And two clear titles could hardly exist. This was not a case, then, where detectives were hired to regain possession of stolen goods without police aid, in order that scandal might not cloud some fair reputation.

But, if criminality were not involved, why was Minot so scornful of my threat of the police? Only guilty people fear to invoke the aid of the law. Yet he seemed certain that the girl would fear to do so.

I was back to first principles again as I finished my lonely dinner. The puzzle was too much for me, and I strolled out into the hotel office to try and soothe my ruffled mentality with the first smoke of the day. As I was filling my pipe Ravenell and Minot entered the hotel and went directly into the dining-room, without so much as a glance at me.

Mine host of the Inn came over and dropped into a chair beside me. He stuffed tobacco into a battered old pipe.

"Pickerel good?" he inquired. He didn't wait for an answer. "No food like the food a man catches for hisself. Tastes the best. Hunger makes it taste still better, and good comp'ny makes it better still."

"I didn't have much of that," I laughed.

"For a fact you didn't," he said. "With Major Penrose and the young lady eatin' in their rooms—now it's too bad she ain't more sociable-like. She'd make mighty nice comp'ny for a young man like you."

I felt myself color and immediately found something wrong with the draft of my pipe. But he had not meant anything by his remark. What was there for him to mean, when it comes to that? And he lazily continued—

"And them other two fellers—somehow they don't seem your stripe."

Mentally I thanked him for not cataloguing me with Ravenell, the burly and coarse, or with his new-found associate, the rather too cunning-faced Minot. I straightened up and tossed away the cleaner with which I had supposedly remedied the fictitious stoppage of the pipe-stem. The captain had not noticed my flush. He lowered his voice and nodded toward the dining-room.

"Cur'ous about them two fellers," he said.

"Yes?" I encouraged him.

He nodded.

"Uh-huh. This here Ravenell, he said as how he come down here for the fishin' and that sort of thing. Well, he didn't bring no tackle nor nothing with him. A-course, he can buy it down to the village, but still, while he's big and husky, he don't have the look of a sportsman to me, somehow. And then this feller Minot. He come in on the late train last night, the one that leaves Portland at eight o'clock. He went straight to bed after registerin'. Well, he come down late to breakfast this mornin', after you'd gone out and after Ravenell had eaten his.

"After Minot gets through he comes out

into the office and looks around. He sees Ravenell sitting here but for a moment he don't speak. He just looks at Ravenell and Ravenell looks at him. They don't act like they knows each other. Yet Ravenell gets up and walks over to Minot and in a minute they're thick as two thieves. They get off in a corner with their heads together and stay there an hour or more. Talking quiet-like, too, and as though they don't want no one to overhear them.

"A-course, there's nothing wrong with that, but it kinda makes me think. It's a cinch they didn't know each other, when first they caught sight of each other. And yet inside of five minutes they're gossiping like old friends.

"It looks to me as though they had a date to meet down here, and that's funny, two strangers meetin' in a out-o'-the-way place like Folly Cove. And this Minot tells me he's a sportsman, too, which he certainly don't look to be, with his peakish face and soft-looking body. And like Ravenell, he ain't brought no gear with him, nothin' at all. It looks funny to me. Don't it to you?"

I said nothing, but puffed on my pipe. But the captain needed no words from me. He loved to talk, did Captain Noah Perkins of the Folly Cove Inn.

"And the way they eyed that girl! I dunno as it's any of my business, and yet again it is. She's a young, unprotected female, her uncle's sick, and she's stopping at my hotel. She come down-stairs and told me that while her uncle wasn't very sick he'd like his meals in his room for a few days more and she'd have hers with him. Then she says she's going for a walk. And all the time, over her shoulder, I could see Ravenell and Minot starin' at her and tryin' not to let me know it. But I got eyes in my head, I have. I see them!

"And a little after she goes out they sort of saunter out, too. Careless, but it looked to me like the carelessness was put on, and they was about to follow her. Well, it was none of my business and I guessed she wouldn't come to harm, but when she come back—it was a little after you come in—I calls her over to the desk where I'm doin' some figgers and I tells her that while her uncle is sick to look upon Captain Noah Perkins, what's sixty-eight years old and never harmed a woman yet, as her guardeen. I says to her:

" 'Mentionin' nobody, Miss Gilman, there's a coupla stowaways aboard this craft what I don't like the riggin' of. If they crosses your bows fly a signal from the main-top and I'll sink 'em!'

"She smiled kinda frightened-like and told me that nobody had annoyed her.

" ' 'Sall right,' said I, 'but if they do, just tell Captain Noah Perkins, ma'am.' "

He knocked the ashes from his pipe and rose heavily to his feet.

"They're guests in my hotel," he said, "and while they behaves themselves everything is O. K. But the second they mutinies I stretch 'em with a belayin'-pin. I don't like the cut of their jibs and that's a fact."

"Neither do I, Captain," I told him, "and I'll keep my eyes open, too."

"I knew you was a regular man," he said. And I was flattered by the compliment.

Of course, I could not tell him of the incident of the path leading to the lake. That Miss Gilman had kept quiet about that showed her wishes in the matter, and angry though I tried to be with her, her wishes, even though unspoken, were law. But I would have liked to talk longer with the captain, to suggest to him that he see that the rooms of the two detectives were placed far from those of the major and his niece. But I could hardly do that without telling him what little I knew of the mystery that surrounded these people, and that I felt I had no right to do.

But the entrance of Tony Larue, bearing letters and newspapers, definitely ended the confidences which the captain's rising had interrupted.

"Train's late again, Captain," said the Portuguese, with a flash of his white teeth. "Wires are still down, and I guess the trains from New York and Boston have to crawl. And the train down here waits for them, so——"

He hurled the bundle of papers upon the desk without further explanation

"Are there papers for sale in the village?" I asked.

"Sure," said Tony. "No New York ones, though. Just Portland and Boston."

"They'll do," I said. "What store?"

"You don't need to bother about going down, Mr. Brant," said the captain. "I won't be wantin' these until tonight. You're welcome to look 'em over. Take 'em up to your room if you choose."

I didn't feel much like walking down to the village. My skating had pretty well exhausted me. So I accepted his offer and, as I felt like lying down while I read, I took the newspapers up-stairs to my room.

The light was bad, the snow from the storm of two days ago having become encrusted upon the window. And as I read by artificial light only when I have to—writing fiction, needless to state, entails sufficient strain upon the eyes without one caring to endure that which is unnecessary—I crossed the room and threw open one of the two large windows that opened upon a balcony that ran along the front of the hotel on the second floor, and half-way around the sides, where it ended, as I had seen this morning, at French windows at either end of the corridor that bisected the second floor.

The window did not open easily. It was of the sort common in the country; the kind that stay open only by the loosing of a little rod that may be inserted in holes in the frame at intervals of six inches or more. This little rod, part of the window itself, is controlled by a spring. When the window is closed the spring thrusts the rod into a hole at the bottom of the frame and the window is securely locked against intrusion from outside.

One opens the window by pulling upon the knob in the window-sash until one has overcome the spring's resistance and the rod comes free of the hole. Then one slides the window up until the desired height is reached, and then releases the knob, which causes the spring to loosen the rod, which slips into the hole and secures the window. I mention the idiosyncrasies of the window for the benefit of those who have not met with one of the kind, in order that they may better comprehend the predicament in which I shortly found myself.

For I found it difficult to remove the snow from the outside while I remained inside. Evidently the heat of the room had melted the first few flakes that adhered to the panes, causing the later flakes to freeze solidly to the glass. So I climbed through the window, thinking to remove it better from the balcony.

It came off rather easily from outside, especially after I put my pocket-knife into play. In a few minutes I had one window sufficiently cleared. But as I gave it the last finishing touch it crashed to.

Doubtless I had not fastened the catch firmly before climbing through and my work upon the glass had tended to force it downward. Anyway, whether due to the wearing away of the hole in which the little rod should have been fastened, or to my own carelessness, I was locked out upon the balcony. For I soon found that the window could not be opened from outside. Nor could the other one.

However, it was not a serious situation. If the French windows at either end of the hall would not yield to me, I could call for help. Meanwhile, I could do what I had set out to do. I cleaned the other window. Then I started along the balcony.

It was pure accident that made me take the right-hand course from my room. I hope it is not necessary to assure my readers that I had no desire to spy upon either the major or his niece. Yet, not realizing that I was spying, I glanced into the major's room as I passed it. He was seated, as I could see plainly enough, at a table in the center of the room. About him were strewn papers, and he was busily writing.

I had not intended to glance into his room. I had not thought anything at all about the fact that I must pass his windows. And the moment that I caught myself looking I dropped my eyes and passed swiftly on.

I hoped that the major's niece would not see me. Were it not that in my shamed flurry at finding myself unconsciously spying, I had passed by the major's room, I would have retraced my steps and tried an entrance at the long, door-like windows around the other side of the hotel. But to do that I would have to pass his windows again.

It may be argued that I took just as much risk of discovery by passing Miss Gilman's window, but I did not stop to think of that. Indignant with myself for being idiot enough to let myself be placed in an equivocal position, I thought only of the swiftest extrication from it. The French windows at which I had originally aimed were the nearest now; I stumbled swiftly toward them. And as I passed the room next to the major's, the room which was Miss Gilman's, I knew, I turned my head outward, staring toward the wooded Head.

If she should see me, which I prayed heaven she might not, she could not, at any rate, be able to state certainly to her uncle

or herself that I had looked into the room. My averted head would be some slight defense for me, but mighty slight, after all that had happened, and I realized that.

But she didn't. At least, no cry came from her, nor any sound at all from her room. With a sigh of heartfelt relief I rounded the balcony turn and came to the French window. It was not locked. I opened it softly and stepped into the corridor. On tiptoe, for I did not wish some clumsy noise to attract a suspicion which I felt that I had thus far avoided, I made my way down the hall and into my own room.

It had been cold out on the balcony, yet I knew that I was wringing wet from perspiration. I listened at my door for a moment. No noise came from the rooms down the hall. I was safe. I breathed deeply. I felt like any criminal who has just achieved a masterpiece of villainy and who has come clear of pursuit. For I knew that while all that had gone before might some day be susceptible to explanation, to have been caught just now, apparently spying, would defer that "some day" almost to the confines of "never."

As I stripped off my outer things and lay down on the bed to read I made up my mind that every word I uttered, every action I performed, from now on would be said or done with the utmost caution, with a guarding against any double meaning. For I would not give Miss Ruth Gilman further cause to suspect me. And as each minute passed without an irascible old gentleman hammering on my door, demanding an explanation of my spying, I breathed more easily. Heaven be praised, I had avoided one error, at least, in this most embarrassing comedy.

I must have slept, worn out by the war news and my own unwonted exertions. I remember, as my paper slid from my listless fingers, that the screeching strains of Tony Larue's violin issued from his room opposite the major's and sifted through the crack in my door. I wondered dreamily if the major would protest again; if Tony's door were open.

Then, suddenly, I found myself seated on the edge of the bed, the newspapers scattered about me, and in my ears ringing the sound of what had seemed to be a shot. Then, as my brain cleared from the haze of what had been a heavy doze, if not sound slumber, I knew I had heard a shot. Also, I knew that I had heard, just after the shot, while my feet were swinging to the floor and my brain was becoming alive, the patter of stealthily running feet past my door.

I listened. I heard cries from down-stairs. Then, above those, I heard a shriek which my instinct, rather than my ears, told me came from the throat of Ruth Gilman.

I leaped across the room to the chair on which lay my outer garments and hastily began pulling them on. There was no repetition of the cry from the girl, but there were the sounds of heavy feet and hoarse breathing from people running past my door.

VII

I OPENED my door and stepped into the hall. I saw at a glance that all the "help" of Folly Cove Inn, that I had thus far seen, were before the major's door.

And as I hesitated one second, with that involuntary pause the sense of tragedy sometimes compels, the heavy figure of a woman servant, the only one I had not seen before, the cook as I learned later, panted past me. With a touch of shame at the hesitation that had been borne of sleep and shock, I raced down the hall, reaching the group by the door before her.

Counting myself and the cook who arrived a fraction of a second later, five people craned their necks, endeavoring to see all that there was to see in the plainly furnished room that had been occupied by Major Penrose. The slim, young waitress who answered to the name of Polly, Myra, the heavier chambermaid, Tony Larue, the clouded-brain Portuguese, Nelly the cook, and myself, all jostled in the doorway, the women whimpering, Tony Larue breathing heavily, and myself feeling that sense of constriction, that desire to get away, that claustrophobia brings to its victims. But this was one occasion when very shame was greater than my neurotic fears. I stayed with the others, gazing fascinatedly into the room.

A moment ago I used the words, "the room that had been occupied by Major Penrose." The room still was occupied by his body, but that first glance had told me that the body was no longer occupied by his spirit. For though I had seen little of death, I recognized it this time.

Sprawled upon the floor, his face looking

upward, his feet under the table-desk at which I had seen him writing not so very long ago, one hand at a right angle to his body, the other beneath one hip, he looked grotesquely as though he had been tossed there by some giant hand, to lie inert. But the overturned chair by the desk, its legs but an inch or so from the major's side, was proof that the only fall that the dead man had sustained was the tumble from his chair. And the reason for that tumble lay on the floor between the table and a wash-stand against the wall for all to see. It was a short-barreled thirty-eight caliber revolver.

Evidently, I thought in that first glance, in his death-throb the major had hurled the weapon from him, so that it lay on the floor on the other side of the table-desk from the body. For the patter of stealthily running feet past my door that I had heard just after the shot was fired was temporarily forgotten in my immediate assumption—the assumption of the others, too—that the major had killed himself.

For Ruth Gilman, white, trembling, stood just inside the door, saying in a monotone:

"Why did he do it? Why did he do it? Why didn't I take his revolver from him? It's my fault, it's my fault; I should have taken it from him."

Captain Perkins knelt beside the body. He looked up and his eyes met mine.

"Oh, Brant! Keep them nosy critters outa the room. See if you can't get Miss Gilman to go to her room."

I touched the girl on the arm, gently. She stared at me, blankly at first, then with frightened recognition. She shrank from me.

"Oh, you—you——"

Her voice rose suddenly and broke in a shriek. Instantly the fat and motherly old cook was inside the room, despite the captain's wishes, and had her arms about the girl.

"There, there, darlin', you mustn't give way. You mustn't give way."

She patted Miss Gilman's shoulders with fat fingers. She drew her toward the door.

"You can't do anythin' here, darlin'," she said soothingly. "Come, now, into your room with Nelly."

For a moment I dreaded an outburst of hysteria from the girl. But, though her rounded figure shook with sobs, the shrieks that I feared did not come. Instead, she burst into heart-rending tears. I knew that they were a safety-valve; at present she would not lose control of herself. Indeed she suffered the motherly cook to lead her from the room.

Captain Perkins wiped his forehead with the back of his hand.

"I thought she'd break down," he muttered. "Thank God — Tony," he cried sharply, "telephone Dr. Reese at onct! And — and — Sheriff Carney. Get him, too. Quick! The rest of you people git back from that door. Git outa here. I ain't goin' to have a single thing disturbed. Git back. Git down-stairs and 'tend to your business. Hear me?"

He was most truculent, and the frightened waitress and chambermaid, weeping, drew back from the door. Once out of the room, away from the sight of that which lay upon the bedroom floor, they gathered their skirts about them and ran swiftly down the hall, to place themselves as far as possible from the presence of death.

"Ain't this tough on that pore little girl in there?" sighed the captain. He nodded toward Miss Gilman's room.

"It's pretty tough on the old man, too," I said.

I could not lift my eyes from the figure on the floor, with the mark on the temple where the bullet had entered.

"It is," agreed the captain. "Why the pore old feller should want to do a thing like that——"

He shook his head mournfully.

"Let's wait outside," he suggested.

I took to the idea with alacrity. We left the room and the captain locked the door behind him.

"Want things should be exactly as we found 'em," he stated. "It's a plain enough case, but still—the pore little girl, the pore little girl."

My heart warmed to the old sailor. Not a whimper from him as to the possible ill-repute the tragedy would give his hotel.

"I better stay right here until the doctor and Carney git here," he announced. "If you don't like to stay so close——"

But I shook my head, impatient at the suggestion. True, at first glimpse of the tragedy my nerves had tried to run away with me, but that phase had passed. I was only possessed now with a tremendous sorrow for the old man and his niece. Also I was occupied with the hope that the repugnance the girl had shown toward me was

but a symptom of hysteria. For it was possible that the fear of spies had hounded the major into his act. If the girl adopted that theory I would always be repugnant to her, though I convinced her a thousand times that the major's suspicions of me were unjustified. A selfish trend of thought, and I soon realized it.

The captain got chairs from a vacant room and I got cigars from my room. We sat down a few yards from the locked door behind which lay the major and waited the arrival of the physician and sheriff, whose promised coming Tony Larue announced a few minutes after the captain had sent him to telephone.

"You better go down-stairs and stay with the girls, Tony," said the captain. "They're cranky craft and might capsize if there ain't a firm hand at the hellum. Git down-stairs and chirk 'em up a bit."

The Portuguese did as he was bid. At least, he disappeared down the stairs. A little later Nelly, the fat cook, came out to tell us that Miss Gilman was quieted.

"I found some brandy in a medicine-chest she had and I gave her a drop of that. She's a brave darlin' and she'll be all right soon," said the cook.

Then she went back to her charge and the captain and I puffed at our cigars. Reminiscences of gory scenes at sea and in sailors' boarding-houses came to him. He regaled me, during the half-hour it took for Dr. Reese to arrive, with accounts of murders he had witnessed, mutinies he had helped put down. I was not at all ungrateful for the arrival of the physician, even though it cut short a most dramatic account of the time when a Swede bo'sun had run amuck on the bark *Sarah Jane Tomkins*.

Reese was a short, stout, energetic-looking little man. He was coroner as well as physician, and seemed most capable. He entered the major's room, took a glance about it with sharp eyes that seemed to comprehend everything, and then knelt over the body.

Shortly he announced that the bullet had pierced the major's brain and that death had been as nearly instantaneous as could be conceived. Also, he picked up from the floor the bullet that had caused death. It had passed completely through the skull. At least, only the skin at the back of the head had held it, and this had been broken through by the weight of the bullet when Dr. Reese lifted the major's head during his examination.

Reese looked at the bullet.

"A thirty-eight caliber," he announced. He picked up the revolver lying on the floor. "Also a thirty-eight," he said. "One chamber exploded. H'm."

He looked about the room. Splintered glass on the wash-stand caught his eye. It was a tumbler that had been shattered, and it had formerly fitted into a sort of socket, such as retain glass on ships' tables. Indeed, the wash-stand, which directly faced the table-desk at which the major had been sitting, at a distance of about fifteen feet, had several of these circular depressions, some large and some small.

These depressions, or rather sockets—they are formed by putting a false top on the stand, in which holes are cut to fit whatever it is intended should go on it—are common to country hotel wash-stands. They are built so that no jogging of the stand will upset water-pitcher, basin or glass.

This particular stand had four sockets: one for the wash-basin, one for the water-pitcher when the basin should be in use, and two for glasses, at either end of the top. One of these last still held a fairly thick tumbler; the other held only the bottom of a tumbler that was split in twain, while parts of the rest of the glass were at the socket's edge, and some splinters had fallen to the floor. I noticed it in detail because Reese stared at it a moment or two.

Then he turned to Captain Perkins.

"Well, your guest won't complain about this broken tumbler, will he, Captain?"

Both the captain and myself frowned at this ill-timed levity. I think the captain would have uttered some rebuke but for the arrival of Carney, the sheriff. He was a tall man, lean but jovial of countenance, although the joviality was hinted at by the wrinkles about his eyes and the corners of his mouth, rather than by his manner, which was solemn.

"What's wrong here?" he demanded. "Your Portygee, Cap'n, was so excited telephonin' me that I only knew somebody was hurt." He looked at the major's body. "Murder or suicide?" he queried softly.

Before the captain could answer, Dr. Reese spoke.

"By virtue of my position as coroner, Captain," he said, "I'm going to ask you

to leave the room. Suppose you round up all the servants and guests of the hotel, will you?"

"Well, sink me, Doc Reese," snorted the captain, "if that ain't a fine note! Orderin' me out of my own hotel! I don't care a hoot what your position is. I'm skipper of this Inn and nobody else gives me any orders."

He blew his nose and glared angrily at the physician. But Reese was a tactful man.

"When you come into port, Captain, you turn your ship over to a pilot, don't you? He's responsible from then on, isn't he? Well, you see, Captain, this is a sort of strange port for you, and I'm the pilot and I'm responsible. You wouldn't make things unpleasant for a pilot, would you?"

Captain Perkins was instantly mollified.

"The craft's yours, Doc," he said. "Will you want to bother the young lady what's his niece?" As he said "His" he nodded toward the body still lying on the floor.

"Every one in the hotel, Captain, please," said the doctor.

Wonderingly I followed the captain from the room. I waited while he knocked on Miss Gilman's door. There ensued a whispered colloquy between Nelly and her employer, broken by questions addressed to the girl in the room. Then the captain joined me.

"She's a brave girl," he announced as we descended the stairs to the office. "Lots of young women would be about crazy, but she says she'll be down-stairs in half an hour. Though why Doc Reese wants to bother with any questions, when it's plain as anything that the old gentleman killed himself, and the gun he did it with is lying on the floor—still, a pilot's orders is final."

Ten minutes later Reese and Carney came down-stairs to find all who had seen the major's body, save only Nelly and Miss Gilman, awaiting them in the hotel office. They sat down in chairs by the blazing logs in the fireplace.

"Now, then," said Reese briskly, "who found the body?"

"Miss Gilman," said the captain. "You needn't look for her," he continued, as Reese's quick eyes roved about the office in search of the girl. "She'll be down soon's she's able. Anyway, I guess I can tell you as much as she can."

"Go ahead," said Reese. "Begin at the beginning, please."

"THERE ain't much beginning," said the captain. "I was sittin' behind the desk, doin' some calc'latin' on next Sunday's menoo. I'd been hearing Tony's violin for the last ten minutes and I'd made up my mind to go up-stairs and ask him to quit, thinkin' maybe he'd forgotten about closin' his door. You see, Major Penrose didn't have a ear for music and kinda objected to Tony's playin'. Not that I could see why he shouldn't been tickled to death at the chance of hearin' him play, but he was mad about it yesterday, so I thought I'd tip Tony to quiet down a bit."

"Major Penrose was angry yesterday?" queried Reese interestedly.

"Uh-huh, called it —— caterwaulin', he did. Didn't he, Tony?"

The Portuguese's eyes, that had been dull, flashed with anger.

"He did," he cried. "He insulted me!"

"Oh, is that so?" asked Reese. "And what did you say to him?"

"Tony didn't say nothing at all to him," said the captain hastily.

"So? Didn't you, Tony?" queried Reese.

"I said nothing to him," replied the Portuguese.

"I see," said Reese apparently contented. Yet I could see that his sharp eyes scrutinized the flushed face of the Portuguese interestedly. "Well, go on, Captain."

"Well, I shoved my book what I was lookin' over—it's got menoos of other years in it—back, and clumb off my chair. As I done so I heard a shot up-stairs. I stood, dumb-like, for maybe half a minute. Couldn't 'a' been much longer, and then I heard a cry. It sounded like it must have come from Miss Gilman. Well, I wasn't dumb no longer.

"I went up them stairs just as fast as I could and ran down the corridor. The door of Major Penrose's room was open and I looked in. There was he, just as you saw him when you come in, and Miss Gilman was leaning against the wall, just inside the door, staring at him."

"And did she say anything?"

Captain Perkins shook his head.

"Not then; I guess she was too scared, after that first shriek of hers, to open her mouth. Too scared and horrified-like. I bent over the major to see what was wrong. I see right off that he's dead. By the time I looked up again, every one in the house was in the doorway. I see Mr. Brant here,

and I ask him to take Miss Gilman to her room. But Nelly, that's my cook, she done it. Then I scatted the two girls down-stairs and sent Tony to telephone for you and Dan Carney. After that Mr. Brant and I stayed outside the major's door until you come. And that's all I know about it."

"Thank you, Captain," said the doctor. He looked at Tony. "And you?" he asked.

The Portuguese colored. But his eyes met those of Reese fairly.

"I was playing the violin in my room," he said. "I heard the shot. For a minute, like the captain, I was dumb. I couldn't understand it. Then I heard Miss Gilman cry out and I got out of my chair. But I had few clothes on. I'd been shaving before I started playing and hadn't anything on above the waist but a shirt. So I got a jacket first, and then I stepped into the hall. I saw Captain Perkins entering the major's room. Then, as I crossed the hall, the others came. Later I telephoned to you and to Mr. Carney."

"Then it took you longer to put on a jacket than it did for Captain Perkins to climb a flight of stairs and run almost the length of the corridor, eh?"

"Maybe I was dumb longer than the captain," said Tony naively.

"Maybe," said Reese.

He then questioned the two servants, the chambermaid and the waitress. But neither Polly nor Myra had anything important to tell. They had been in the kitchen, had heard the shot, had heard Miss Gilman's scream, and had heard Captain Perkins cry as he climbed the stairs.

"I guess I did holler some, I was that excited," admitted the captain, at this point in the waitress' narration.

Then the two girls had raced from the kitchen into the office, leaving Nelly the cook, also in the kitchen when the shot and scream sounded, to follow after them. Later, they had gone down-stairs, at the captain's orders.

Reese turned to me.

"And you, Mr. Brant?"

"I'd been asleep," I told him. "I had borrowed some papers from Captain Perkins and gone to my room to lie down. I had taken off my outer things and soon fell asleep. I was awakened by the sound of the shot and Miss Gilman's shriek. The rest is as the captain has told you. I rushed down to the major's room."

"Why didn't you take Miss Gilman to her room as the captain requested?"

"She seemed hysterical—repulsed me," I said.

"Did she say anything?"

"Merely something like, 'Oh, you—you,' " I replied. "I took it to mean that she preferred to be let alone. Oh, yes," I added, "she did say something else. Was saying it as I reached the major's room."

"And what was that?" queried Reese.

"As nearly as I can remember," I replied, "it was something like this: 'Why did he do it? Why did he do it? Why didn't I take his revolver from him? It's my fault, it's my fault, I should have taken it from him.' "

"H'm. That would indicate that she knew he had a tendency toward self-destruction, wouldn't it?"

"One can hardly be said to have a tendency that way unless one has made an attempt upon one's life," I retorted. "Miss Gilman may have known that the old gentleman was nervous, but I imagine that's all."

He raised his eyebrows. But what he might have said I was never to know, for Miss Gilman, supported on the arm of Nelly, the cook, appeared at the top of the stairs. They hesitated a moment there, looking down upon us, and my heart went out in pity to the girl.

Her slim figure, though prettily rounded and sturdy enough, seemed to have become fragile, an impression created, of course, by her leaning against Nelly. Her face was white, and her eyes, even at that distance, seemed to burn. Her hand shook as she laid it on the arm of Nelly. I heard the captain stir uneasily in his chair, and a low growl of protest came from his throat. It stirred me to speech. I leaned over and touched Reese on the arm. He was staring at the girl, too, and turned impatiently, angrily, to me.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"Have a little pity," I said. "Can't you see that the tragedy has almost killed her? What's the sense in making her tell her story? We know what it is. The rest of us have told you enough. Can't you wait? Surely a clear case of suicide doesn't necessitate harrowing a girl like that? Wait until tomorrow or the next day. Give her a chance to pull herself together. I suppose you want to know something about her

uncle. But all that can wait, can't it—until she's stronger? Surely it isn't important, why he committed suicide so long as you know he did!"

Reese's eyes were scornful as he looked at me.

"Suicide? My dear man, if he'd killed himself how does it happen that there are no powder marks on his face or head? How does it happen that the revolver was found a good twelve feet from him, when, unless medical science is all wrong, he didn't even have time for a dying agony before death? When there was no reflex action of his muscles after death came. Suicide? Does it seem reasonable that a suicide would kill himself in the middle of a word that he was writing? Not a sentence—a *word!*" His scorn was so pronounced that I hesitated to ask him my next question. But I did.

"Then you mean that it is a——"

I couldn't finish it.

"Murder? Of course it is!"

VIII

WHETHER or not the others heard Reese's words to me I could not tell. But a tense and expectant hush settled down upon the little assemblage as Miss Gilman, still leaning on Nelly's arm, descended the stairs and crossed the office to where we sat.

Reese rose and with a quiet courtesy that made me open my eyes, first with surprise and then with quick anger, offered his chair to the girl. For in doing so he turned it so the light from the windows must strike her face. His courtesy, coming from a man who had been able to jest in the presence of death was the cause of my surprise.

The shrewdness that made the girl face the light was the cause of my anger. Yet I could not but admire his cleverness the while I hated the motive that brought it into play. For something subtle, indefinable, about his manner seemed to tell me that he suspected the girl.

In the brief moment in which she settled herself in the chair and turned her burning eyes upon the doctor all the strange circumstances of this mystery which had culminated in tragedy passed in review before my mind. Her scornful eyes in the subway, her alarm at seeing me in the Grand Central Station, my suspicion that she had tampered with my suit-case and wallet, her suspicion of me, the incident in the path with Ravenell and Minot; in quick succession, like a movie film, these pictures flashed before my mental vision.

With my eyes half-closed, as if to shut in a picture that was mental, I enacted in my brain the scene which Dr. Reese's words suggested. I saw the girl tiptoe to the door of her uncle's room, raise and point the heavy army revolver, fire at the unsuspecting figure writing at the table-desk, throw the weapon upon the floor, wait a half-minute, and then shriek.

Against that scene, so plausible to Reese, I set the face of the girl. I put those utterly frank and courageous and honest eyes of her against the theory hinted at in Reese's words, and I felt my mouth curling with scorn for the doctor. He was absurd! And yet—Reese had not said that the girl had committed the crime. My own vivid imagination had supplied the name of the slayer. Reese had merely said that it was murder.

More, in those few words he had proved that it was murder. If my own knowledge of the candor of the girl's soul, that was mirrored in her eyes, was proof enough that she was guiltless, it was not proof that murder had not been done by some one.

I opened my eyes. All that had gone through my mind had taken but a part of a minute. Reese was just clearing his throat preparatory to questioning Miss Gilman. I took in the strange scene.

Miss Gilman sat at one side of the fireplace, and I noted, with pleasure at the failure of Reese's little plot, that the flickering flames from the open fireplace so lightened and darkened her features that it would be next to impossible for the coroner-physician to read anything in her face, despite the light from the windows that she faced.

Next to the girl sat Nelly the cook, and next to her, leaning forward, his hands upon his knees, truculence in the set of his mouth and in his fiery eyes, sat old Captain Perkins, ready, I felt, to defy the law and call a halt to any proceedings that might annoy Miss Gilman.

Next to him sat Tony Larue, flushing and paling in turn. All these were at right angles to the fireplace. Facing the blaze were Polly the chambermaid and Myra the waitress.

Carney the sheriff, Doctor Reese and myself formed the other line of the rectangle running from the fireplace out to the end formed by the two maid-servants. Reese was next to me. He cleared his throat a second time and, thoroughly alert now, with no thoughts save of the present, I noted that his hand that rested on the arm of the chair nearest to me shook with repressed excitement. But his voice was calm enough.

"Miss Gilman," he said, "will you kindly tell us the circumstances of your uncle's death? I mean, what you know of them. And I ought to tell you in advance that you do not need to answer my questions unless you choose. Anything you may say will be used against you."

A low growl came from the throat of the captain. Tony Larue's hands clenched about the arms of his chair. Low sounds of astonishment came from the others, save, of course, Sheriff Carney, who had been closeted with the coroner in the major's room and undoubtedly knew in advance the doctor's suspicions.

"Used against me?" Miss Gilman's voice was surprised. "Do you mean to infer that I am under sus——"

"There, there!" It was Nelly the cook who interrupted the ugly word. "The doctor's a good little man, Miss Gilman, and it ain't his fault that he thinks the way he does. He don't know any better. He'd think anything of any woman, and small blame to him, him that's had his experience with a bad one!"

Reese grew white. I learned later that his wife had deserted him for another man which explained Nelly's vicious thrust. But he made no response to the cook, although that worthy woman glared at him angrily. Reese possessed self-control and kept to the business in hand.

"If you will tell me, Miss Gilman, what you know."

"Of course I will! And if—if my words can be used ag—against m-me, use them!"

As she began her sentence it seemed doubtful that she could finish it. But, close to the breaking point though she seemed, she was like tempered steel, that gives and gives and does not break. Indeed, as she lifted her eyes and met the doctor's gaze, her whole body, that had been limp, seemed to stiffen. Anger showed in her countenance now.

The shock of finding her uncle's dead body and the sudden knowledge that Reese suspected her, or seemed to, which was just as bad, had bent her, body and soul. But anger threw off the weight of shock and suspicion and like a finely tempered blade she sprang back into place. Only her quivering muscles, like the quivering of a sword-blade, showed the strain she had endured.

"I was in my room," she began quickly, as if to delay speech meant to make it the more painful for her, "and had been there for something more than half an hour when I heard the shot. I was standing up. I had heard the violin being played in the room opposite my uncle's, and fearing that it might disturb and anger my uncle, I intended asking the player to close his door, or, if it were closed, to please cease playing. My uncle had lost his temper about the playing yesterday, and as he was in the midst of important work I didn't want him bothered."

"Your uncle was a mathematician?" queried Reese.

"He might be called that," she replied.

"He was doing some figuring, calculating, just before his death. I have the paper here. Will you tell me to what his figures relate?"

"I will not," she responded sharply.

If Reese were taken aback by her curt refusal, he did not show it.

"You were standing in your room?" he queried.

"Yes. I had been changing my dress, and the violin-playing became louder as I was in the midst of the change. I had just finished and was about to start for my door when I heard the—the shot." Her voice broke, but she recovered herself almost instantly.

"I seemed to know that it came from my uncle's room. I opened my door and ran to the next door—his. I looked in. I saw him lying there. I screamed."

"Did you cry out at once?" queried Reese.

"I—don't know. Not the very second I entered the room, I suppose. I was too overcome."

"The others put it at half a minute after the shot, anyway," said Reese thoughtfully. "Tell me, did you do anything in the room?"

At her look of blank surprise he elaborated his question.

"I mean, did you move anything, touch

your uncle, do anything that would have in any way disturbed the contents of the room or changed the position of your uncle?"

"I barely got beyond the threshold," she answered.

"H'm," he nodded. He was silent a moment. Then: "You said something that would indicate you feared an attempt at suicide on your uncle's part, Miss Gilman. You said that it was your fault, that you should have taken the revolver from him. What did you mean by that?"

"He had been very nervous recently. When I said that I believed that he had committed suicide."

Reese gave no sign just then of having read a meaning in her use of the past tense. One line of thought at a time was all he tried to follow.

"When had you last seen your uncle's revolver? Did he always carry it with him?"

She answered the last question first.

"Always. I saw it when I left his room to go to mine, half an hour before."

"Where was it then?"

"In the tumbler on his wash-stand."

"What!" Reese stared at her. "In a tumbler?"

"I was nervous about the weapon," she said. "I knew that it was cocked all the time. That is, all the time when he was in his room. At other times, it was in his pocket, and, of course, not cocked."

"He feared attack?"

"He did."

"From whom?"

"I prefer not to answer that just yet."

She was entirely in control of herself now and met Reese's puzzled glance steadily. He did not press her.

"But why was the revolver in the tumbler?" He reverted to the circumstance that had amazed him, and the rest of us, too, judging by my own surprise and the expressions of the others when she had made the statement.

"I have said that I was nervous about the weapon. Although accustomed to firearms all his life, my uncle was very absent-minded. I did not like the idea of his keeping the revolver on his desk. I was afraid that he would forget all about it when engrossed in his work, and might strike it, accidentally exploding it, when reaching for something. For the same reason I objected when he placed it on the bureau in his room. I really feared that he might pick it up in place of a brush and explode it. Or that there, as on the desk, he might strike it accidentally. So he placed it in the tumbler on the wash-stand. He set it butt down, the end of the revolver protruding above the rim of the glass.

"I objected to that, but he lost his temper. He reminded me that he'd been handling weapons before I was born. Moreover, he assured me that he'd hardly lift the glass to his mouth without noticing what it held. And I hardly thought that he would, absent-minded though he was. Furthermore, I knew that he had not used the wash-stand at all yesterday and did not intend doing so. Had not used it, in fact, since our arrival. He preferred to make his toilet in the bath-room halfway down the corridor, where there was running water. So I said no more about the weapon, only assuring myself that the glass was firmly set in its socket and that there was no danger that any ordinary jar would upset it."

"Any ordinary jar," said Reese softly. "Did you notice that the glass was broken, Miss Gilman?"

"When? When he put the revolver in it? It was sound."

"No, when you entered his room a little while ago."

She shook her head.

"Was it?"

"Splintered; part of it remaining in the socket, some of it on the edge of the stand and the rest on the floor. Now, then, you spoke of an ordinary jar. What do you mean by that?"

"I meant a jar such as might have been caused by some one in the room above," she answered. "Or by the moving of a trunk. Anything like that. But I am sure that nothing short of an earthquake would have caused the glass to leap from the socket."

"And of course there was no such jar as that?" He looked questioningly at her, and then around at the intent faces of the rest of us. But none of us remembered any jar at all.

Reese was silent for fully a minute. The rest of us barely breathed. What was passing in his mind we could not imagine. But that he believed every word she uttered, despite her refusal to answer certain questions, I could not doubt. Her answers rang

true; even the bizarre touch about placing the revolver in the tumbler, so utterly unexpected was it, but added to the force of her statement.

Unless it were true, why should she say it? Why should she invent it? Dr. Reese appeared to be a rather clever man; I thought him clever enough to know the truth when he heard it.

"A moment ago," he said at length, "in referring to your words in your uncle's room, you stated that when you uttered them you believed that he had committed suicide. Am I wrong in inferring that now you do not believe it?"

"I—I'm not sure," she said slowly. "I don't want to believe that Uncle Samuel killed himself. Yet I'm not sure that I didn't imagine—it might have been the wind."

"What might have been the wind?" demanded Reese.

"Since finding—my uncle," said the girl, and now she hesitated as if, I thought, she wanted to be absolutely sure of saying exactly what had happened, "I have been trying to remember everything. Every word of his, every action that might mean something. But the shock—I can't be sure. I can only tell you that I think I remember hearing some one open the French windows at the end of the corridor near my room and run softly down the hall."

Reese leaned forward eagerly.

"And when was this?"

She passed her hand before her eyes, as if to brush away clouds of doubt.

"I tell you, I can't be sure," she answered. "The shock of uncle's death has confused me about—other things. About time. But it seems to me that it was while I was standing in the middle of my room, just about to go out and ask that the playing of the violin be stopped."

"You're not certain, though?" asked Reese eagerly. "Try and be sure."

"I can't," she said. "I paid little attention to it at the time, as I say, I couldn't swear that it wasn't the wind at the window."

"But the hurrying footsteps! You can be certain of them," cried Reese.

She shook her head.

"I couldn't swear. I was thinking—of other things, at the moment. Then the shot—I can't be sure just how long it was before the shot was fired that I thought I heard some one pass through the French windows."

"But you just said that it was while you were standing in your room, intending to speak about the violin."

"I know. But I can't be certain of that. I only think so."

Reese leaned back disappointedly in his chair. But Sheriff Carney, up to now silent, though his lean face with the humorous eyes had been fixed intently upon the girl, broke his silence.

"I can easy find out," he said. "If there was any one outside that window on the balcony, his footprints will be there on the snow. It'll be up to him to make the time certain."

He pushed back his chair and rose and then I found my voice. For the last minute, while I wanted to speak, I could not. Something had prevented me, a something that was not fear, but that was more like stupefaction. But as Carney rose I knew that I could not delay speaking any longer. Indeed, and I flushed at the thought, I might have difficulty in having my speech accepted as truth even now. Whereas, if I waited until Carney came downstairs again——

Why had I been fool enough to forget to mention my walk along the balcony? Why had I been idiot enough to let the tragedy drive from me a knowledge of the importance that walk would have in the eyes of others? If I'd only confessed it at the start!

"Oh, wait a minute, Sheriff," I said nervously. "I can explain that noise. I made it. But not at the time Miss Gilman thinks. I passed through those French windows long before the shot was fired."

Carney stared at me. The others, too, and I felt my flush grow warmer. I was indignant with myself, not only for my carelessness in failing to mention the incident of the locked window sooner, but for the guilty expression which I knew was on my face now.

"You passed through those windows, eh? When and why?" demanded Carney.

"Oh, long before the shot was fired," I answered. "Fifteen minutes after I went up-stairs. What time did I leave you, Captain?" I asked the landlord.

"About half-past one," he said.

"Then it was before two that I came into the hall by the long windows," I told Carney. "And the shot wasn't fired until

three. So you see, Miss Gilman is mistaken about the time she heard the windows open."

"Maybe," put in Reese. "And why were you out on the balcony, Mr. Brant?"

I told him, while the others hung on my words. Reese's sharp eyes bored through me as I spoke, while I could feel that there was not the slightest trace of humor in the eyes of Carney.

Reese kept looking at me for several seconds after I had finished. Then he turned suddenly to Miss Gilman.

"You said that your uncle feared attack. Is this man Brant the man from whom he feared it?"

"One of them," she said; and her eyes fixed with horror as she met mine. "And—and—I wasn't certain a moment ago. I'm not certain now, but I'm nearer certainty than I was—that I heard those windows open just before the shot was fired. But I wouldn't want an innocent man—I'm not sure—so much happened afterward."

"Don't you worry, Miss Gilman," said Carney kindly. "There's lots of things besides your recollection of the time he went by that'll go to convict him. If he's innocent, your not being certain won't make him guilty."

He turned upon me.

"I don't want to act hasty in this matter, Mr. Brant. There's a lot of things neither the doctor nor myself understand. Miss Gilman could clear things up if she'd tell us why her uncle feared you. But that can wait. The main thing now is: can you prove it was before two o'clock when you was out on the balcony?"

"Oh, go easy," I said with an air of confidence that I was far from feeling. "You've got to have more than this to pin a crime on me. Why don't you investigate and see if what I've told you is at all true? Why don't you look and see if I told the truth about scraping the snow off my window? And why would I do such a fool thing as to leave tracks in the snow, that would have to be explained, if I planned murder?"

"Murder's a fool thing, anyway," said Carney. "Murderers always get caught. They're foolish to be murderers. Where there's such big foolishness there's often smaller foolishness. Still—what's the number of your room?"

I told him. He handed the doctor a revolver.

"Not that I think he'll be foolish some more, but just in case he is," he said.

Reese took the weapon and the sheriff clattered up-stairs. I had plenty of time, while he was gone, to mull over my predicament. Some whimsical fate certainly seemed to be making sport of me. Into false position after false position it had thrust me, until, at last, it had endangered my whole life.

Yet, though I saw black at the thought of being immured in a cell, though I feared that the restraint of handcuffs would render my claustrophobia dangerously acute, I managed, I think, to preserve an outward calm. I tried to be indifferent to the glances of horror that came my way. It was absurd that I should be deemed guilty of murdering Major Penrose.

I comforted myself with the thought that absurdities can not exist forever. In my case they would not exist long. I had only to prove my utter lack of motive.

Another unpleasant thought assailed me. In proving the lack of motive I should have to confess to my assumption of a false name. And this would the longer delay my freedom, by making suspicion more acute temporarily. I cursed the whole business heartily, including the ambition that had made me work so hard, to the detriment of my mental health. I cursed Weatherbee Jones, the medium of my fortune and my slight fame. Then Carney came down-stairs.

He had a look of puzzlement on his face.

"Take off your shoes," he said to me. "Go on, don't ask questions."

I removed them and handed them to him. Without another word he went up-stairs again. This time he was not gone so long. When he returned he handed the shoes to me. He looked at the coroner and shook his head. He turned to Miss Gilman.

"Are you any more certain about the time you heard those windows open?"

"I can't be certain," she answered.

"Well, you can be pretty certain that it wasn't Mr. Brant you heard."

"Why?"

I think every one present gasped that question, including myself.

"Because there's the footprints of two people on that balcony. I investigated Brant's story. He seems to have been telling the truth—about cleaning the snow off his window. And I found his footprints

leading from his window to the French windows. But over his footprints I found others that are altogether too large for his shoe to have made.

"Those footprints were made after Mr. Brant's, because in places they've almost wiped out the marks of his shoes. Somebody started from the French windows and walked to Major Penrose's window, looked in, turned around, and went back the way he came. And that somebody did that after Mr. Brant had come through the windows into the corridor. I can't tell how long afterward, but it was afterward, all right! Now, then, as Mr. Brant's story is borne out by the facts—his cleaning his window is true enough, for there's marks where his knife scraped the window-sash—it seems reasonable that he's telling the truth about the time he walked out there. Anyway, unless the other person who was out on the balcony says that Mr. Brant was with him, we can assume that he wasn't.

"Now, then, Miss Gilman, if you could only be certain about hearing that person come in from the balcony and go by your door it would help some. We'd find out what person could have been near there——"

"But I'm certain," I cried.

While they stared at me I told them what had been crowded from my recollection thus far by the swift march of events.

"Whoever made those footprints over mine," I said emphatically, "and ran down the hall afterwards—if the footprints won't convict him, the time at which he was outside the major's door, the very moment that the shot was fired, will. And I'll swear that he passed my door just after the shot was fired."

"H'm," said Reese. "Carney, suppose you search the house for a pair of shoes that will fit those prints. The women here, except Miss Gilman, we know were downstairs when the shot was fired. So was Captain Perkins."

"That leaves only Tony up-stairs, besides Mr. Brant," growled the captain. "I hope you ain't insinuatin', Doctor——"

"Any objection to letting Carney fit Tony's shoes to the marks?" demanded Reese.

The captain's rubicund visage grew redder still.

"Why, no," he muttered. "Tony, take off your shoes."

The Portuguese bent over to comply, but Miss Gilman's voice stopped him.

"How absurd! Haven't I told you that he was playing the violin?"

"So you did," exclaimed Reese. He looked around, nonplussed. "Isn't there any one else in the house, then, who could by any possibility have been on that balcony?" he demanded.

Before the captain could reply, the front door opened and Minot and Ravenell entered the hotel.

IX

THE unconcern of the two Greenham men seemed elaborate to my suspicious eyes. To me it seemed that they took an exceedingly great care lest their shoes should bring snow into the office, leaving the front door open while they used the iron shoe-scraper just outside. Also, they seemed fussier than was natural in hanging up their overcoats on the wall. I was ready to believe that they were exchanging whispers.

However, when finally they turned from the coat-rack and walked over to where we sat, I was forced to admit to myself that their manners were natural enough.

"Little party, eh, Captain?" smiled Minot.

He surveyed the strained faces of us all and in the semi-darkness that had come as the afternoon waned. I could not be sure that his eyebrows were raised. But I could see that his mouth was puckered as if for a silent whistle, if I may use the paradox.

"What's wrong?" he asked, as no one spoke to him.

Reese then did something whose cleverness is not detracted from by the fact that it gained him nothing. He rose quickly and faced Minot. Above the doctor's head swung a lamp, fitted with a reflector. Reese had struck a match as he rose and lighting the lamp took but a second. He turned the reflector so that the light flashed directly into the Greenham operative's eyes. He said one word—

"Murder!"

But beyond a natural amazement there was not, so far, at least, as I could tell the slightest guilty expression upon the face of Minot. As for Ravenell, his bull-dog countenance was immobile.

"Well, even so?" said Minot, after a moment. "Any reason why you should try to blind me? I haven't killed any one. What is this, a game of puzzles?"

"You're a guest here? Are you Minot or Ravenell?"

I wondered then that the doctor knew their names, but later I learned that he had glanced at the register before going to the major's room. He was not a man to overlook anything.

"My name is Minot. What's all this about, anyway? Are you joking or——"

"Major Penrose, one of the guests of this hotel, was murdered this afternoon," said Reese.

"Murdered? My God, that's awful!" Ravenell stared at the doctor. "Who did it?"

"That's what we're trying to find out," said Reese quietly. "Where have you been this afternoon? And your friend? I am the coroner of this county. This gentleman," and he indicated Carney, "is the sheriff."

"Murdered!" Minot looked around at the faces that were strained towards him, but I noticed, or thought I noticed, that his glance slid swiftly past the face of Ruth Gilman. He met the doctor's eyes again.

"Well, coroner," he said, "anything I can do to help—but there isn't anything, I'm afraid. My friend and I have been out since—since when, Ravenell?"

"It was quarter of three when we went out," said Ravenell. "At least, if that clock is right."

He pointed to the large clock on the wall behind the hotel desk.

"Huh!" The exclamation came from Captain Perkins. "You say it was quarter of three by that clock?"

"Sure. Why not?" demanded Ravenell.

"Because I was sittin' at that desk at quarter of three and didn't see you go out. Neither of you. I saw you go up-stairs some time before that——"

"You were pretty busy with something or other, Captain," interrupted Minot easily, "but I didn't know you were as engrossed as all that." He smiled at Dr. Reese. "The Captain was all hunched up over his desk and I guess he didn't hear us. But we went out at that time."

He made the statement very emphatically, and I looked for some equally emphatic denial from Captain Perkins. But the old sailor shook his head.

"Them Sunday menoos is mighty hard figgerin', and I was studyin' hard, but still——"

He did not deny Minot's words, even uttered the quasi-admission that they were true, but I could see doubt in his eyes. Minot laughed:

"You're away off, Captain. You didn't see both of us go up-stairs, either. I went up-stairs, but Ravenell remained down here. I guess you were thinking more of your guests' stomachs than of your guests themselves, so you didn't see me come down."

"Maybe," said the captain reluctantly.

But Reese changed the subject for the moment.

"And where have you and Mr. Ravenell been since you left here?" he asked.

"I'll tell you exactly where we've been," said Minot. "We left here and went around that side of the hotel." He pointed to the right. "We went down the path through the woods to the lake. Then we went for a walk on the ice. I don't know how far we walked, but—well, it's five o'clock now, we must have gone a few miles, although we couldn't walk fast as it was slippery."

"Slippery? I should think the snow would have afforded good footing," said Reese.

"We didn't walk on the snow at all," was Minot's reply. "We were afraid that the ice might be rotten underneath, so we stuck to the places where the snow had blown away."

"I see," said Reese thoughtfully. He turned to the captain. "I know," he said, "that both Mr. Minot and Mr. Ravenell will understand that I'm doing only my duty when I ask you this question, Captain. Tell me, is there any way in which these gentlemen could have left the hotel without coming down these front stairs? Are there any back stairs, I mean?"

The captain shook his head.

"And could they have left the hotel—the second floor—after the shot was fired?"

"Don't see how they could have," admitted the captain. "There was some one in the corridor outside the major's door all the time. A-course, they was all lookin' in——"

"I wasn't!" spoke up Polly, the waitress. "I was that scared I looked away from the body. I looked down the hall all the time, and nobody went down them stairs. I'm certain of that."

"Then it seems pretty clear, gentlemen," said Reese, "that Captain Perkins was too wrapped up in next Sunday's dinner to notice you. I have no doubt but that you went out at the time you say you did." He paused, looking thoughtfully from Minot to Ravenell.

Sheriff Carney took command. To my surprise he showed the same smooth courtesy that had distinguished Reese's manner toward the two Greenham men. He was almost apologetic as he said:

"Of course, if you were out of the hotel, this seems silly, but you'll understand that I got to do my dooty as I see it. Will you please take off your shoes?"

"Our shoes? Why, of course," said Minot.

He sat down in a chair and began unlacing his boots. Ravenell did likewise. I suppose that I am a captious sort of person; I know that while, in the excitement of all that had happened, I had practically forgotten the existence of the two detectives no sooner had they reappeared than I was suspicious of them. Their previous actions had been of the sort to make me willing to believe that there was little, if anything, that would stop them from encompassing their ends. Would murder? And while up to now their story had been straight and convincing, so much so that I did not understand my own continuing suspicion that they knew something of this crime, their very willingness to give their shoes to Carney seemed of itself suspicious.

I would have expected them to show a greater surprise at his request, a desire for explanation, if they had been entirely innocent. However, even while I held these thoughts, I berated myself for them. There is a vast difference between snatching a muff from a girl and killing a man.

Carney took the shoes. There was no conversation of any sort while he was gone, and the puzzled expression on his face when he returned clearly indicated that the shoes of Ravenell and Minot had done nothing toward the solving the mystery.

"They don't fit," he said tersely, giving the footwear to the owners.

"Don't fit what?" demanded Minot.

Carney explained. Minot whistled softly. He looked at his companion.

"Glad that man didn't happen to have the same size foot as either of us, eh, Ravenell?"

The latter nodded sourly, then, having laced his shoes, stared dumbly against the hotel wall. Reese nodded to Carney and the two drew aside for a whispered conference. Minot looked at Miss Gilman, now no longer sitting upright, as she had been while Minot answered Reese's questions, but leaning against the broad bosom of the cook, as if exhausted.

"Miss Gilman," he said, "I hope that the condolences of a stranger may not seem intrusive. I am deeply sorry——"

He stopped abruptly. The girl's eyes had opened and blazed with horrified anger, even as they had at me not so long ago. He could not endure them and turned away. He spoke to Captain Perkins, asking for details of the tragedy, and for a few moments I paid him no further attention. I was too busy trying to fit together the pieces of the puzzle and see if I could arrive at a solution.

I tried to put myself in the mental condition that I achieve when I write a Weatherbee Jones story, tried to apply some of the logic so characteristic of him to the present case. But, alas, I could not. In the Weatherbee Jones stories I always have a solution first, then create facts to fit that solution. Which explains the difference between writing a mystery story and living one.

My desperate strivings for light were interrupted by the approach of Reese. He spoke to the girl.

"Miss Gilman," he said gently, "a while ago you stated that your uncle feared attack. You said that Mr. Brant was the person from whom he feared it. Was there any one else?"

"Those two." She pointed at Minot and Ravenell. "He didn't fear them—but I did. And he would have feared them had he known."

She paused suddenly.

"Yes? Had he known what?" prompted Reese.

"I can't say any more—now," she replied.

"Won't you tell me why your uncle feared Brant, and why you feared those other two?"

She shook her head obstinately.

"Do you realize that you are casting suspicion upon three men without giving them a chance to clear themselves?"

"Am I? Let them tell you, then, why I feared them!" she cried.

Reese turned sternly to Minot.

"Have you any explanation to offer?"

For answer Minot fished a card from his pocket and handed it to the coroner. Reese read it and looked keenly at the detective.

"The Greenham Agency, eh? Following Miss Gilman and her uncle? And you, Mr. Ravenell?"

"Ravenell's with me," said Minot. "Brant is from the Healy people."

"And your object in being near Miss Gilman—and her uncle?"

"Oh, let her tell you," said Minot easily.

Reese turned again to the girl.

"Will you explain?"

Her mouth set stubbornly.

"I will not."

The coroner looked at me. I rose to my feet.

"If you'll give me a minute apart, you and Mr. Carney?" I said.

"Certainly," said Reese.

Minot gasped.

"You aren't going to— Look here, Brant, just because an old nut killed himself you aren't losing your nerve, are you? Do you want to queer every chance——"

He rose as if to restrain me, but a gun flashed in Carney's hand.

"If the gentleman wishes to talk, don't stop him," he said.

Minot fell back into his chair with a smothered exclamation. As for Ravenell he favored me with a snarl of contempt as I passed him.

"Well?" said Reese, as we got beyond hearing of the others.

"Hear me through, please," I said.

It was time that I declared myself, and I did so. I did not care to bear the load of suspicion any longer. Moreover, it might be possible for me, unhindered by suspicion, to do something, somehow, for Miss Gilman. I began at the beginning and finished with my arrival at Folly Cove.

"Now," I said, when I had explained my reasons for assuming a *nom de plnme*, "all you have to do is wire Dr. William Odlin my description and ask if I'm the man he sent down here. Will you do it? It's bad enough to be suspected by the young lady of being some sort of crook without being further suspected of murder. Wire Dr. Odlin, will you?"

Reese stared at me, the beginning of a grin on his lips.

"So you're the Weatherbee Jones man, eh? Why, good Lord, Wrenham, I should think it would be a cinch for you to solve this mystery!"

"Old stuff," I assured him, "old stuff! Every one says that whenever any mystery is discussed in my presence. But I can't. I wish to Heaven I could!"

"And you don't know what it is that Miss Gilman or her uncle possessed that has inspired those two sweet-scented scoundrels to follow her?"

"I haven't the vaguest idea," I confessed.

"She's spoken of 'work' that he did," said Reese. "Yet the papers that I found in his room were a mere jumble of mathematical formulas. I can't make head nor tail of them! Look at this last page he wrote."

He showed me a page half-covered with what seemed to be algebraical problems. There were two of them, both solved. A third problem had evidently been begun, but the dead man had got no further than the cryptic letters and figures. "Seventeen X pl——"

The "u" of the last word, which was evidently meant to be "plus" had been begun but not finished. I do not set down the other problems for they are uninteresting, unintelligible, indeed, and without bearing on the story. In fact, the only reason I set down the last line the dead man ever wrote is because of the fact that it was so convincing an argument to Dr. Reese that the major had not killed himself, and I wish to make it equally clear to my readers.

"No man," said Reese, "would drop his pen in the middle of a word to pick up his revolver and kill himself. Moreover, the ink is slightly spattered in that 'u,' which looks as though the pen were violently prevented from continuing the word. As though the major were shot while actually writing the letter. There is no other meaning to be read into that spatter of ink. The bullet that killed him made him drop his pen, and he didn't fire that bullet himself."

"Couldn't the glass have tipped over accidentally and thus discharged the cocked revolver?" I queried.

"Impossible! I felt the other tumbler. It was set so solidly in its socket that you could almost stand a rifle in it without overturning it. The rifle might fall out, but the socket is so deep that the glass probably would remain where it is. Provided, of

course, that you could get a rifle into it."

"But couldn't the revolver have tipped out from some slight jar without tipping the glass over, and then couldn't the recoil of the accidentally discharged revolver, whose bullet struck down the major, have smashed the glass?" I asked.

Reese shook his head.

"It was a tall tumbler. I examined it carefully. The muzzle of the revolver wouldn't have protruded more than an inch above the edge of the glass, not enough to make it uncertainly balanced. I tested it in the other glass. It was perfectly firm. Nothing short of an earthquake would have accidently tipped that weapon over and caused its discharge. And there was no earthquake, no jar of any kind. Some one fired that revolver deliberately and then broke the glass to support the theory of accident. That is as certain as that day follows night.

"Now, then, Brant—or Wrenham, rather—I'm convinced you tell the truth. However, this is a rather important matter. I'm going to wire your friend Odlin. If he corroborates your statement, well, I guess no suspicion can attach to you. Meanwhile, I know something about the mental trouble you have. If it's going to be too much for you to stay here, come along with me."

But I refused.

"I want to stay here," I said.

"To be near Miss Gilman, eh?" His shrewd eyes twinkled. "Don't deny it. No one can possibly blame you, even though the lady—well, she may listen to your explanations later on. Who can tell?"

"You don't think, then—" I stammered. I began again. "You haven't any idea, doctor, that she—that she——"

"Killed her uncle?" He shook his head. "I never did have. I merely wanted to find out all that I could. My profession gives me a fairly good knowledge of character, as does yours. She didn't kill him, but, unless we can prove that some one else did, it'll be hard for her to avoid suspicion. Until we find out who passed your door——"

He stopped abruptly and started for the group by the fireplace.

"There is only one way in which I can compel you people to talk," he said coldly. "That is by empanelling a coroner's jury and having it question you. If you refuse to answer then, you will be at least liable for contempt if not to suspicion of having guilty knowledge. Do you care to make any explanation now, Miss Gilman?"

"Not now," she answered firmly.

"You, Minot? Ravenell?"

"Oh, I guess you've nothing on us, Coroner," said Minot.

Reese turned to the sheriff.

"Carney, keep an eye on the people here. You, too, Captain Perkins. See that these men do not leave the hotel."

"Brant, of course, has convinced you that he's lily-white, eh?" sneered Minot.

"Never mind about him. That order goes for him, too, however." He walked over to the girl. "Try and get some rest, Miss Gilman. Are there any friends you'd like to have me telegraph?"

"Not tonight," she replied in a barely audible whisper.

Then Reese said something else to her, but I could not hear what it was, although she started violently.

Reese straightened up and spoke to Carney.

"I'll probably not be able to get a jury together before morning, but I'll make it as quick as possible. And I'll see that some one is sent up to help you look after things."

With no further words he put on his hat and coat and departed.

"May I go up-stairs?" Miss Gilman asked of Carney.

"Certainly," said he. He looked around. "I guess there's nobody here foolish enough to try and get away before the coroner's jury sits. If they do they're bound to be caught and make things harder for themselves. Captain Perkins, how about supper?"

The landlord roused himself from the lethargy that had overcome him in the past half hour.

"Nelly," he said, "as soon as you help Miss Gilman up-stairs start rustling some grub."

"Oh, I'm all right, Captain," said Miss Gilman. "I can get up-stairs alone."

She refused the further offer of the cook's assistance and mounted the stairs, walking strongly. At a harsh command from the captain, the waitress and chambermaid scurried after Nelly toward the kitchen. I looked at Carney.

"Is it permissible to go up-stairs to wash?"

"Since you can only come down by these stairs, it is," he said.

I climbed the stairs and reached the corridor above. Miss Gilman was just closing her door behind her. I felt a great ache in my heart for her. Alone down here in this country hotel, beset by some mystery which she dared not, for some inexplicable reason, explain, with her uncle dead in the next room—and she did not wish relatives notified, even? Why? Why?

Wonderingly I stepped into the washroom and mechanically attended to my face and hands. Finished, I emerged into the corridor once more. Tony Larue was just lighting a lamp in the hall, half-way down toward the end away from where my room was. He came toward me and descended the stairs.

The light of the lamp gleamed upon the French windows at the far end of the hall, duplicates of those through which I had hurriedly passed this afternoon. A sudden curiosity assailed me. A man, running swiftly, could have reached that window.

I walked to it, my heart beating with excitement. I opened the long, door-like window.

There, on the balcony, were footprints in the snow. Also, the snow was brushed away from the railing of the balcony. Captain Perkins had said that it was impossible for any one to leave the second floor of the hotel save by the front and only stairs. Yet if a man dared jump some fifteen feet——

I leaned over the balcony railing. The sun had set long since, but a white moon and the snow-clad ground gave forth plenty of light. I leaned farther, staring down.

"Well, what're you doing here?" I started at the voice and the touch on my shoulder. They were the voice and touch of Carney.

"Look," I told him excitedly, "look! Some one jumped—into that pile of snow."

He pushed me aside. He did not stare over the railing to the ground beneath, but examined the footprints upon the balcony. He drew an electric flashlight from his pocket and peered closely at the prints.

"I got no ruler with me to measure 'em," he said slowly, "but I'll take my oath that the same shoes made 'em as made the ones on the other end of this balcony!"

He straightened up and looked at me. I think the same idea must have occurred to both of us simultaneously. Some one had leaped from this balcony. Down below must lead, in the snow, the trail of this some one to wherever he might be now.

X

ANIMATED by the same thought, the same intention, we reentered the corridor, Carney closing the French windows behind us. He started for the stairs, but I clutched at his arm.

"I'm going with you," I said.

"Sure," agreed the sheriff. For the first time his voice lived up to the humorous promise of his face. "If you can do some more Weatherbee Jones stunts like this I'll begin to take more stock in that hero of yours. Funny I didn't think of it. Wish I had."

Captain Perkins sat behind his desk in the hotel office. Ravenell and Minot conferred together in low tones by the fireplace. From the dining-room came the sounds of Polly setting the table for supper.

"We're going outside a few minutes, Cap'n," said Carney. "See that those two gents stay here."

"I'll 'tend to them if they git gay," said Captain Perkins with a frown.

But if Minot and his companion were interested in our action, or suspicious of it, they gave no signs, beyond swift glances as we procured our coats and hats from the hooks on the wall. They were talking together, apparently without excitement, as we left the hotel.

We turned to the left, in the opposite direction from that which I had taken on my previous trips from the Inn. A moment of swift walking and we had rounded the corner of the hotel and were beneath the French windows where Carney had joined me a few minutes earlier. I noticed what I had previously noticed on the other side of the Inn: the balcony on the second floor ended at the French windows. It did not surround the building; it merely ran across its front and half-way along its sides.

But this was subconscious noting of the unimportant. What really held my notice was the deep impression in a snow drift, almost directly beneath the end of the balcony, and thus below the French windows. Some one, greatly daring, had leaped from the balcony, and only the presence of this heap of snow, piled by some vagrant eddy

of the wind, had saved him, perhaps, from broken limbs or worse.

"He sure struck it with a bang," was Carney's comment as he stared at the tumbled drift. "Must 'a' sunk in over his waist. Pretty lucky for him it happened to be there. Fifteen feet is some jump! Still," and he scrutinized the edge of the balcony above us, "maybe he didn't jump. Maybe he didn't stand on the edge; maybe he climbed over the rail and then squatted down and swung with his hands from the edge and then dropped. That's more like it. And he could do it almost as quick, too. He wouldn't have to drop more'n seven feet or so that way."

"But wouldn't he have feared that his hands would slip and drop him before he was ready?" I objected.

Carney chuckled.

"I don't believe he figgered he could drop any too soon," he replied. "And a guy runnin' from what he was runnin' from don't bother much about his hands slippin'. He wasn't riskin' his neck any more that way than he was by jumpin'. But we should worry about what he was thinkin'! We're wastin' time!"

On the word he plunged across the drift into which the fugitive had jumped or dropped. I swung into step beside him.

"Easy trail," commented the sheriff, as we reached the edge of the woods that ran steeply down to the shores of Rider's Pond.

It was. Even without the moonlight we would have had no difficulty in following the path from beneath the window to the trees. Nor was it much more difficult in the shadow of the woods. The fleeing fugitive had known that there was no chance of hiding his trail; he had only, judging by the length of his strides, thought of getting into the shelter of the woods as soon as possible.

But if he had slackened his pace here, as the closeness of his tracks would indicate, he had not slackened his efforts. Making straight for the lake, save when the trunk of a tree barred his progress, he had crashed through bushes and over fallen trunks with but the one idea, it seemed—to make the lake.

"And I don't understand it," panted Carney, as we ploughed through the snow in the fugitive's wake. "You'd think he'd kept to the trees until he'd got a good ways off, instead of bustin' for the lake where any one might see him."

Breathless, we burst through the last underbrush and dodged around the last tree that barred our way to the edge of the pond. Simultaneously we paused, sweeping the reach of ice and snow before us in the vain hope of seeing some shadowy figure that might be the murderer.

"Hell's bells!" said Carney, after a moment. "We're a couple dumb-heads to be standin' here. I'll bet that feller ain't stopped runnin' yet! 'S if he'd be out on the ice under this moon!"

He stepped upon the snow-covered ice of the lake. Before us, the tell-tale marks of the fugitive stretched straight out, headed across the lake. The snow was quite deep here and I dropped in behind Carney, letting him make still easier the path which the fugitive had begun. For the tracks were a path here, because of the depth of the snow, not a series of footprints. But within fifty yards the covering of snow grew thinner.

I gained the sheriff's side. With every stride the snow grew less deep, until at last, a hundred yards from the shore, less than an inch covered the ice.

"Hell's bells!" cried Carney again.

He stopped and pointed. I looked. There on the ice, some fifty yards ahead of us, was something black, too small to be a man.

"What——"

But Carney did not wait to hear my question. He let out a link of speed, careless of the ice that with every stride came closer to one's soles, and that afforded a most treacherous footing. He reached the dark objects —there were two of them—a moment before me, and picked them up. They were a pair of overshoes. And we were a good ten yards from where the snow ceased, to give way to sheer, smooth ice.

Silently Carney turned back to where the snow covered the ice. He fitted the overshoes to tracks made by the fugitive. There was not the shadow of a doubt; the overshoes had made the trail that we had followed. But where was their wearer?

"Ain't he clever?" said Carney, reluctant admiration in his voice. "Made for the ice as fast as he could lick it; dropped the over shoes when he'd passed the snow, and walked away on the smooth ice that won't leave ever a trail, beyond a scratch here and there that any one's shoes might make. Ain't he clever?"

I nodded. It was clever. But a gleam of hope came to me.

"He's had to leave the sheer ice somewhere," I said. "And all we've got to do is find footsteps leading away from the ice. Then find the man whose shoes will fit those prints——"

"Good Weatherby Jones stuff," derided Carney. "If you was writin' about a case of his that's what you'd have the murderer do and people would think how clever your detective was! But this ain't one of your stories. The man clever enough to leave them overshoes and continue in his ordinary shoes ain't fool enough to do what you suggest. He'd find some well-worn path in the snow and foller that from the lake."

"But are there any?"

"Around the point," and he pointed, "there's a path where the village boys and girls come upon the lake to go skating. School lets out at half-past three. I saw several of them on the road from the village as I come down to the hotel in answer to the captain's message. I saw them turn down that path. If none of them had been down it yesterday—and some of them was, I know—still they'd probably have trampled out whatever tracks our friend might have made when they went down it today. And anyway, there's a path nearer than that. There's the path that leads up to the back of the hotel, where we're headed for now, and where you had the run-in with them two detectives that you just told Reese and me about. That's the way the guy we been chasin' left the ice."

"How do you know?"

"Stands to reason! When he jumped from that balcony and made for the trees his one idea was to get out of sight. But once he got in them trees—didn't you notice anything funny about his tracks?"

I shook my head.

"Why, every time he pushed through any brambles there was a bunch of snow trampled down on the other side. He was in a hurry, he was, but not in so much of a hurry that he couldn't stop and see that his clothes hadn't been torn and hadn't left any shreds of cloth on the bushes. Leastwise, I'm a fair woodsmen, and I didn't see any cloth hangin' to the bushes, and that's how I figger it.

"But, for all those stoppin' periods—which didn't take long, any of 'em—he was in a powerful hurry to git rid of them overshoes. Likewise, if he was clever enough to think of the trail, he was clever enough to know that it wouldn't do for him to stay out on the ice long. Too liable to be seen. He'd make right for the nearest path that was trampled, so his footprints wouldn't be so noticeable, and that nearest path was the path we're on now."

I stopped.

"But this path, then, will show footprints. We can make every one in the hotel —every one that's been seen near the hotel, fit his shoes to every mark."

"Yours would fit some of these marks, wouldn't they? And so would Minot's and Ravenell's and Miss Gilman's. Mine, too, for I'm makin' some now."

"But then, there'd be some other——"

He shook his head decisively.

"This guy's too clever. Suppose he was somebody besides those I've mentioned. Well, he'd know that he couldn't make his way to Folly Cove village without some one seein' him and rememberin' seein' him, eh? Nor he couldn't go toward Shreeveport, which is the nearest town in the other direction, without being seen by somebody, eh? And when the news of this murder gits out, every one that's been seen comin' from this neighborhood this afternoon will have to explain themselves, won't they? Traffic ain't very heavy in the Winter, in these parts, and the people livin' along the road, some of them, would be sure to notice any one that went by. Especially as he'd be a stranger."

"Why do you say that?" I asked.

"Does it stand to reason that a native sneaked into the Inn and did that killin'? Why would he do it, in the first place? I know everybody in these parts, and no one round here did it! Where's your motive? How would the native dare take the chance of sneakin' in without bein' seen? Not to speak of the sneakin' out! It ain't imaginable, that's all."

"I guess you're right," I admitted. "But suppose it was a stranger? Couldn't he take to the woods whenever he approached a house?"

"He'd have to come out sooner or later, wouldn't he?" demanded the sheriff. "And if it was a stranger and he's gone toward Shreeveport or Folly Cove, we'll hear of it. Reese has had the telephone busy long before this, in every direction, inquirin' for strangers. Reese has a head on him. But

the man clever enough to think of that overshoes trick—he wouldn't sneak off. He'd know that we'd be shrewd enough to think of the footprints in this path where we're shivering now, and that if there was an extra footprint that didn't belong to some one workin' or stoppin' at the Inn, and it fitted him after he was brought back here."

"But you think," I cried, "that he did come up this path? You mean that he dared to do it because——"

"Because his footprints were already here or he could say that they had been made before the murder," finished Carney for me.

"Then you think he's in the hotel now?"

"Where else would he be?"

I gasped.

"But all of us—except Ravenell and Minot—you mean——"

"I follow Reese's lead, always," said Sheriff Carney emphatically. "I can do a little figgerin' myself, but I'd give more for his instinct than for my figgerin'. Didn't you notice how polite he was to them two men?"

"You, too," I said.

"That's because the doc was. Lemme tell you, when the doc is as soft-spoken as he was to them, at a time like that, he's thinkin' hard about them."

"He was quite courteous to Miss Gilman," I stated.

"Her? Yes. You see—don't git sore, now—at the go-off, though guessin' you're interested in the lady from what you didn't tell us, me and the doc both has eyes and could see the way you looked at her. Well, to save your feelin's, the doc said he hadn't suspected her at all. But up in the major's room—well, he said then what I'm sayin' now—if we don't hang it on somebody else it's goin' to look bad for her. Not that we either of us think she done it, for we don't. We couldn't make any jury think she did, even if we wanted to, not unless there was some mighty big motive to go by. But it looks bad!"

"But his politeness to Minot and Ravenell? Why did he suspect them?"

"I didn't say he suspected them; he just hadn't made up his mind about them. Like me, he was kinda doubtful about their story about leaving the hotel when the captain said that they didn't. A-course, the captain wasn't sure, but still—well, there was room for some doubts about them, after that. Mind, the doc didn't tell me that he thought that they done it, but after he learns what we've been doing, the trail we've followed, I'm thinkin' he will suspect them."

"But not unless the overshoe belongs to one of them," I objected.

"Huh? Well, we'll soon find that out," snapped the sheriff.

He led the way up the path where I had rescued Miss Gilman from the clutches of the two Greenham men. I followed in silence. If Carney's reasoning were correct, and I could find no flaw in it, the man who had made the footprints outside Major Penrose's window, after I had made mine, was at present in the hotel. And as that man could only be Minot or Ravenell, he must be one of the twain.

I remembered that Minot admitted having gone up-stairs. It was possible that he could have been the man. He must be the man, for he cleared Ravenell by his own statement. Unless, of course, the sheriff were all wrong.

It was a puzzle, made more difficult by Captain Perkins' inability to swear that the two detectives had not left the hotel at a quarter to three. If he could swear to that, it would help in solving the crime. But so long as there was no evidence that they had not been away from the hotel at the time of the murder it was going to prove hard, I felt, to obtain evidence that they had been in the building. Especially as it was indubitable that they had been out after the murder, and had not been seen to leave the Inn. Captain Perkins was wrong. One of them, at least, had left the hotel by the front door; the other—if the other had left the Inn by the balcony, if these overshoes belonged to him, the mystery, save for the motive, was solved.

CARNEY stopped our rapid pace toward the front door. He scrutinized footprints in the ground at our feet. He looked up.

"I should say we was about under the major's window, wouldn't you?"

"Yes."

"Looks as though somebody had been waiting here a few minutes. See?"

He flashed his pocket lamp and showed me where certain footprints were deeply indented in the snow, as if the maker had stood there some time.

"Suppose," and he voiced my own unspoken reasoning, "the captain was half right and half wrong. Suppose Minot did go up-stairs like he says, and the captain, busy plannin' the Sunday menoo, thought both of them went up. Suppose Minot sneaked out on that balcony and Ravenell waited for him below the major's window? If they wanted something the major had, that might be the way to get it. Minot might have hoped to sneak in, if the major was out, and steal it, and then toss it to Ravenell. Or he might have figgered on sneakin' into the major's room, but not goin' back the way he'd come, through the French windows. Instead, he mighta planned droppin' from the balcony here, with Ravenell to break his fall. Sounds O. K. Let's go in the house and see whose overshoes these are."

"You don't expect either of them to admit owning them, do you?"

"Huh? Why, no! But the captain or the chambermaid will remember if either of them had overshoes, and if they ain't got any now—get it?"

We entered the hotel. Tony Larue and the captain were behind the desk. Carney went directly to them. He held out the overshoes.

"Captain, I found these in pecooliar circrumstances. Do you know if Mr. Minot or Mr. Ravenell possess any overshoes?"

But Tony Larue forestalled the captain's reply.

"Those are my overshoes," he said. "Where did you find them? I left them in the bathroom up-stairs when I came in from the village today."

"What time was that?" snapped Carney.

"About half-past one."

"And you ain't had them since? But pshaw, a-course you ain't! You was in your room playin' the violin."

He turned disgustedly to me.

"I mighta known all along," he said, "that a guy as clever as all that wasn't goin' to use his own overshoes. Hell's bells!"

"Still," I suggested, as I drew him aside from the desk, "you don't know but what Ravenell or Minot took those shoes from the bathroom."

"Why, sure, of course one of 'em did! But how'm I goin' to prove it? It can't be done."

He stood a moment in deep despair. Then his head lifted.

"I didn't examine them bushes closely, to look for threads. I'm goin' to do it, now."

He turned and plunged out into the night again, carrying his pocket-flash in his hand. But when he returned, just as I was finishing supper, his face was disappointed. He sat down to the table with me. Ravenell and Minot had finished and left the dining-room.

"Not a thread. I'll look again tomorrow, though, in daylight. And them overshoes—they fitted the marks outside the major's window, O. K. But then, we was sure of that."

Despite his disappointment, he fell to his meal and ate prodigiously. After he had finished, we went out to the office. Ravenell and Minot had gone up-stairs, so our landlord told us. We informed him of our unsatisfactory pursuit and finding of the overshoes.

"They might sneak out the same way tonight," suggested the captain, anxiously.

But Carney shook his head.

"They ain't such fools. They know better. And they don't think they're in any danger, anyway. And they ain't so far's I can see," he said bitterly. "I only wish tomorrow was here. Maybe a little sweating before the coroner's jury will get the truth out of them."

But he didn't look confident, nor were his tones hopeful.

Neither Ravenell nor Minot appeared down-stairs during the evening, which was broken by the coming of the village undertaker who held a conference with Miss Gilman in her room, where Nelly the cook was keeping the girl company. On his return he told us that the girl had authorized him to do whatever was needful, but had refused to state where the body would be buried, or give out any of her plans.

But she had ordered an expensive casket and had paid for it in advance, so Bowler, the undertaker, cared not a whit that he might not be able to earn burial expenses in addition. The tragedy meant a good stroke of business for the phlegmatic Bowler, and nothing more.

At nine Dr. Reese telephoned Carney that the coroner's jury had been selected and notified and would sit at eight-thirty the next morning. He also told the sheriff that he had notified, by telephone, all persons living on the road to Shreeveport to

watch out for any stranger. No stranger had been seen in Folly Cove, during the day, save drummers whose presence was well accounted for. Further, he said that he had received a telegram from Dr. Odlin, vouching for me, and Carney was good enough to express gratification.

"Not that I've doubted you, for I ain't; but it's good to know that no one else, male or female, can," he said.

I knew that he referred to Miss Gilman by the second sex and, though I inwardly cursed his rural presumption and questionable taste, outwardly I was pleasant enough, for I had come, in a few hours, to have a decided liking for the sheriff and admiration for his intelligence.

We stayed talking until almost ten. Then we went up-stairs. And though I was tremendously excited, as was but natural, the excitement was exhausting and did not make me wakeful. Also, I had had a hard morning on the ice.

I was asleep, or so I seem to remember, the very moment my head touched the pillow. But before that had happened, I had uttered a fervent prayer that no more unhappiness might come to Ruth Gilman and that, if any untoward event did threaten, I might be there to avert its dangers. Youth—thirty-two is young, I think—and love are cruel. They have little time in which to mourn for death.

I thought much more of Ruth Gilman than I did of her dead uncle. He was at rest, at peace. God alone knew, judging by the past, what might come to threaten her! But I was smiling, I think, as I thought of this. I was strong. I was young. I was in love.

When she learned, as she would soon, that I was not of the Ravenell-Minot stripe, maybe she would let me face those threatened dangers with her. I hoped so.

XI

YOU may believe, if you will, that it was the extreme cold that awakened me, but I prefer to think that it was a prescience of evil, which only my presence could avert, that roused me from my slumbers. I may as well admit right now that the Irish strain in me becomes dominant in times of stress.

No one, so far as I know, ever dared to question the veracity of my great-grandmother, and it is a matter of family record that she heard the banshee calling on the night my great-grandfather died. I shall always think it a sort of sub-conscious foreknowledge, calling to my consciousness, telling it that there was need of me, that made me awake.

However, I will admit that it was very cold in my room and that my only thought upon awaking was a desire for more blankets. Through the open window the cold poured in, seeping through my coverings, through my very flesh it seemed, until even my bones felt frozen.

Believer in fresh air that I was, I was no fanatic on the subject; sleep is fully as important as fresh air, and one can not sleep in too great cold, not unless one is numbed until circulation ceases, and I had no desire to reach that stage. I got up and closed the window.

Back in bed, my brain began working. Try as I might to dismiss the incidents of the day, to forget the tragedy and its mystery, my mind concentrated on it, to the exclusion of sleep. I counted sheep jumping over the stile until I had accounted for enough lamb chops to feed half Christendom; I tried all the devices warranted to make one the victim of self-hypnotism, but in vain. The slumber that I'd already had seemed to have been sufficient; it seemed impossible to win more. Moreover, the closing of the window seemed to have vitiated the air.

Now this was absurd, although I didn't stop to reason so at the time. For sufficient fresh air seeped through the crack in the door, on this frigid night, to satisfy any one. But the room seemed close to me.

I got up and opened the window again. But the rush of icy air convinced me at once that, though its absence might have contributed to my wakefulness, its presence would have the same effect. And there were no more blankets in the room. I decided to go down-stairs and get my great-coat, hanging on a hook in the office.

And before leaving the room I dressed completely, even to my shoes, with a heavy sweater in place of shirt and collar.

It may be asked why, if I possessed a heavy sweater, I bothered about my overcoat. It may also be asked why, when I intended merely to go down-stairs, I put on my shoes, when I had a pair of slippers under my bed. I can only revert to the

theory, already advanced, of foreknowledge. There is no other way in which to account for it. The intense cold may have waked me up; the intense cold may have caused me to forget that I had clothing in the room sufficient for my needs; but I do not believe that the intense cold caused me to put on shoes for a trip down-stairs.

I am not a superstitious man; while I have the utmost reverence for the great-grandmother whom I never saw, and am willing to admit that times have changed and that things once fashionable no longer appeal to the present generation, still, not having myself heard the banshee recorded in the family archives, I will confess that I have always held grave doubts as to its existence. The estimable old lady might have heard the wind wailing. Her visitation, while I will never deny its authenticity, yet seems to lack definite proof of the existence of things supernatural.

For instance, the family records neglect to state whether the banshee spoke with a brogue, or with a cockney accent. And such matters, when dealing with the supernatural, are most important to the sober-minded, like myself.

No, I am not superstitious. But I do believe that somewhere in the world, for each and every one of us, a mate is waiting. We may never find that mate; we may marry one not the true mate. But somewhere a heart is calling, and if we wait and listen, we shall hear that call.

The heart that calls may not know of its cry; its owner may be content with things as they are; but the one who hears the call is lost in discontent until he has answered it, and has awakened the consciousness of its sender. No, I am not a eugenist; I believe in love.

So then, call it the cold, call it accident, put down my vague premonition to the condition of my nerves, if you will, I prefer to think that it was something else that sent me down-stairs in the middle of the night.

At the head of the stairs a lamp burned dimly. The other hall-lights had been extinguished.

On tiptoe, careful lest I disturb the sleepers, I made my way down the gloomy hall and descended the stairs to the office. I crossed swiftly to the wall where hung, among others, my coat. As I reached for it, a gust of wind that drove particles of snow ahead of it, struck my face. The front door was open.

Mechanically I put out my hand to close it. Then I withdrew my hand and stood staring stupidly into the night. Why was the door open? Surely Captain Perkins locked up every night! The door had not been blown open. Some one had unlocked it. Who? Why?

The icy air cleared my brain, a trifle stupid from my efforts to sleep. The snow particles stung my wits into action.

I brushed away a flake that hung to an eyelash, and the action suggested something. It could not have been snowing long, I thought, else the flakes would have been blown into my room. Still, there might be a difference in the air currents down-stairs here, caused by the overhang of the balcony, that caused the snow to swirl in. If, suppose, Dr. Reese, for reasons best known to himself, had decided to come back to the Inn for the night, some trace of his coming might be visible on the veranda, slight though the fall may have been.

I stepped through the open door and struck a match, shielding it from the wind with my curved palms.

There, faintly outlined on the veranda, in new snow that barely covered the boards, were footprints. But they pointed outward. Further, no man's feet had made them. They were too small. I thought at once of Ruth Gilman.

I straightened up and stood there undecidedly. It was absurd! Why should she leave the Inn in the dead of night? It must be Polly or Myra, gone to perform some neglected duty. But I smiled at that idea. I could not fancy the frightened waitress or chambermaid going out into the night for anything, granted that they would not fear the dark, ordinarily. But I had seen the somewhat superstitious dread on their faces this evening. While the body of Major Penrose was in the room up-stairs neither of those young women would venture forth in the dark. And Nelly, the cook! Her shoes would leave a much larger imprint than those just revealed to me by the flickering match. It was Ruth Gilman.

I turned back into the hotel and seized my coat and hat. I flung them on and started through the door. As I did so I thought I heard a board creak in the hall above.

I hesitated a second and listened. It did

not sound again. And yet I had an eerie feeling that some one was in that hall. But I set that down to my nerves. Who on earth, aside from Ruth Gilman and myself, would be abroad at this hour? I passed silently through the door, closing it softly after me.

The moon had set long since, and the stars were hidden in the light fall of snow. Yet, by the aid of another match, I saw that the newly made footprints turned to the right. In that direction I plunged.

I use the word plunge advisedly. For it was more than a walk, and the drifts on either side of the path, into which I stumbled, made it less than a run.

I did not bother to look again for footprints. Along this path around the hotel and between the trees down to the lake was the only road the girl could have taken. Surely, unless she were insane, she would not try to make her way through the untrodden snow, in places some feet deep, that lay on either side of the path. She must be going down to the lake. And why?

Over and over again I asked myself that question as I plunged ahead. It was but natural that I should wonder if her uncle's death had anything to do with it. Was she crazed by the tragedy? But she seemed too strong a character to let grief, no matter how poignant, or shock, however great, break down her will and brain.

That it was guilt, fleeing from the scene of tragedy, that impelled her, I am glad to say that I did not consider for a moment. While, according to the evidence, it was not a physical impossibility for her to have slain her uncle, it was a moral impossibility. The thought, I admit, flashed across my mind, but I can not help it that I have a vivid imagination and can see many sides to everything. The thing that counts is that the thought was instantly dismissed.

But that it was the mystery that existed previous to the tragedy that sent her forth I had little doubt. Yet that did not answer the why. What was this mystery and why should it impel her to such a doubtful, and mayhap dangerous, exploit as this?

But the answer to that would only come when I had caught up with her, if then. I raced down the path through the trees and stood on the edge of the lake. Something dark, only a few rods out upon the ice, loomed up through the snow-flakes. I had been right, then. The tracks on the veranda, and just over the veranda's edge, had been made barely a minute before I discovered them.

She must have slipped by my door even as I was buttoning my coat-sweater, because the tracks had held in them only a casual flake or so of snow that had fallen after they were printed. And what little advantage of start she had had over me had been practically nullified by my greater speed in her pursuit.

I dashed out upon the ice in the direction of the moving blotch that I felt certain was she. For a minute the snow muffled my approach, but as I passed the snow-line and came out upon the ice the nails in my heels rang upon its smooth surface. The moving blotch paused. But I rushed on toward her until, a dozen yards away, I heard her voice.

"Don't come any nearer!" Her voice shook, but I knew that it was with excitement more than with fear. "Go back—I'll fire!"

I slowed down, though I still advanced.

"Don't be frightened, Miss Gilman," I said. "Please!"

"Oh! It's you!"

I was close to her now, close enough to see that she held her automatic pistol in her hand, and that it pointed at me. But she lowered it.

"Oh," she said again, "it's you."

I sensed a relief in her tones, and my heart beat a little faster. Plainly, during the night, her opinion of me had vanished. At least she no longer feared me. But her voice was cold with her next words.

"Why are you following me? What right have you?"

"No right except the wish to be of service," I answered. "I want to help you—in whatever you need help."

"But I don't want any," she stated. "I want to be let alone. Please go back."

But she no longer threatened with her weapon, and her tone did not seem insistent to me.

"I can't let you wander about this lake by yourself in the middle of the night," I told her. "You might get lost. This may be a blizzard coming up."

"And suppose I am lost?" Her voice was frigid again, as if she had mastered a momentary weakness. "What concern is that of yours?"

"I intend to make it mine," I said sternly. "If I didn't and anything happened to you,

I'd feel a murderer. But why are you out here? What made you do such a rash thing?"

"If I could trust you," she began. "Dr. Reese told me who you really were. Or who you claimed to be. He didn't think you were like the other two. But I don't know. Please go back!"

"Not unless you come with me," I returned.

"But I can't!" Her voice was almost a wail. "I must give—" She clutched my wrist. "You are honest? You'll help me?"

"You know it," I told her.

"Then keep them—stop them—no, perhaps they haven't seen us. Come!"

She pulled at my wrist and I turned with her, toward the farther shore of the lake, but not before I had seen the two blotched figures on the shore, at the foot of the path I had descended, which had made her decide to trust me.

So, then, I had been right—right in my vague premonition that danger brooded over me, right when I thought I had heard a step in the hall above me. But it was no time to reason or to think at all. Hand in hand, slipping and almost falling because each of us ran on our toes, lest the nails in our heels signal the two behind, we dashed across the ice. And though I knew that Ravenell and Minot were dangerous men, though somehow I felt certain that they were the men behind us, I had at first, no thought for them. I only knew that I held Ruth Gilman's mittened hand, and that the firm clasp of her fingers led me into an earthly heaven. She trusted me!

After all the misunderstandings, after all the suspicious circumstances, she trusted me! And I? Though she had rifled my bag and wallet a score of times and I had caught her in the act, there would have been no room in my heart for doubt of her.

What her business was on the surface of this lake at such an hour, what the mysterious something was, that Ravenell and Minot desired, I neither knew nor cared. I only knew that she held my hand and that while I ran a fierce desire to stay and tear an explanation from the two detectives possessed me, an explanation of why they dared harass Miss Gilman. And I didn't really care for the explanation. It would have been enough to drive my fists into the faces of the men who dared presume to annoy her. Their mercenary motives were nothing to me in that moment of exaltation, as we raced across the ice. I merely wanted to fight for her, and hated the caution that suggested flight before fight.

But fight was to come soon enough to gratify my suddenly hot blood. Miss Gilman stumbled. As I lifted her she glanced over her shoulder.

"They're coming," she cried. "They've seen us. They——"

I looked. Less than fifty yards away, as nearly as one could tell in the snowy gloom, I could see the two oncoming figures. In silence they had followed us, and grimly they bore down upon us. Something hard was thrust into my hand. It was her automatic. But I pressed it back in her hand.

"If I stop them," I asked, "could you—do whatever it is you've come to do—by yourself?"

"If you can stop them, yes."

"Then run," I said. I gave her a little shove. "Run!"

She hesitated but a moment.

"Oh, I—can't leave you."

But if her business, whatever it was, was important enough for her to risk what already she had risked, I would not let her hesitate on my account.

"I'll stop them," I promised. "And I'll come after you—if I can. Run!"

I pushed her again. With a little gasp of protest she forged ahead. As for myself, I braced myself against the rush of the two Greenham men. Somehow, I forgot that a while ago I had protested against her risking herself in the storm. Somehow, I felt a sudden great confidence in her; that she would front the perils of the night without harm; that she ought to front them.

This feeling I can not explain, unless it was because, in the back of my mind, I held the feeling that Ruth Gilman would not have risked this nocturnal journey for mere gain; that she did it for something greater than anything measured in money; that she did it because of duty, and that duty should be done.

I measured the two oncoming men. The burly Ravenell was slightly in the lead, and I was glad of that. If I could render him *hors de combat* at the start I would have little trouble with the slighter Minot. Whereas, if I came to clutches with Minot, and did not dispose of him at once, Ravenell, with his great strength, and with me handicapped by Minot, would prove too

much for me. My only hope lay in putting one of them out of the fight with a blow, and my chances were greater if that one were Ravenell.

But Minot was cunning. He swerved as they drew closer.

"'Tend to him, Ravenell," he cried. "I'll follow the girl."

And I knew that he would catch her; that she could not possibly escape him. I feared that she would not use the pistol she carried; that at the last moment her feminine shrinking from blood would deter her. Further, I feared that she would not dare use it. She had not informed the town authorities of their attack upon her in the path. She did not want publicity.

Would she dare use the gun? Wouldn't Minot know that she'd fear to use it? There was but one hope for her—that I should knock Ravenell out with a punch.

I crouched slightly and drew my right fist back. This was no boxing match; there was no time for sparring. I must get in the knock-out before he came to a clinch.

He came in with no diminution of his rush, his right arm drawn back, and our blows were launched at the same moment. His fist caught my shoulder, but its force was gone. For I had stepped in as he swung and driven my clenched hand to his jaw.

His knees sagged; his fingers clutched at my body. I stepped back and he slid to the ice. It had all taken but a fraction of a second.

Minot was within my reach. I sprang for him, but Ravenell, not completely knocked out, or with the convulsive clutch of the man losing consciousness, caught at my ankle. As I sprang for Minot Ravenell's fingers tripped me.

I fell forward, reaching outward as I did. And my hands caught at Minot's knees in an unmeant tackle. He came down with me. I heard him curse; I felt something hard that I guessed to be the barrel of a gun strike my arm, numbing it from the elbow down. My fingers, that had been gripping Minot's knee, relaxed and the knee bent, to straighten in a moment, driving the booted foot against my shoulder. A wriggle, another kick, and he was free.

He was standing up when I reached my knees, my arm, the left, utterly useless from the blows on elbow and shoulder. Then, for one second, I wished that I had retained the automatic pistol which I had returned to Ruth Gilman for two reasons: first because I would not disarm her, and second, because I wished to kill no man, and I had feared in the fury of my wrath against Ravenell and Minot that if I held a pistol I would shoot.

But now, practically helpless, with my sound right arm held over my head to ward, if possible, the blow of the revolver barrel which I knew was imminent, I regretted that squeamishness had been any part of my reason for refusing the gun. For, cursing like a mad man, Minot circled about me, looking for an opening in my guard.

It would only be a second before, twisting on the ice to face him, my right hand would be lowered to steady myself. I could not rise, for rising would mean that my good hand would be thrown out to steady myself, and Minot's chance would come.

But every moment of delay, every second, in this gathering snow-storm, meant that Ruth Gilman would have so much more time in which to escape. I knew, from the mutterings that fell from Minot's lips, the snarls of anger, that he knew the same thing, and that he feared me too much to let me gain my feet, for he knew that I would follow. And I guessed that part of his anger was because he dared not risk a shot. Though angry enough, I judged, to do murder, he was cautious enough to know that a shot might bring aid from the hotel. So he circled me.

Suddenly he wheeled. I threw my body around, but not quickly enough; I was off balance and falling forward. Instinctively my right hand dropped to the ice to steady myself and I threw my head as far to one side as possible to avoid the arc of his revolver barrel. But his aim was good. It landed fairly upon my forehead, the cold steel cutting open the skin.

But no more. The muzzle fell upon my forehead, did not crash down upon it. The arm that had propelled it had gone suddenly as limp as my own left arm. For like a wraith in the snowy gloom, but more muscularly substantial, I thanked God, Ruth Gilman had stolen up behind the one-idea Minot and the barrel of her own automatic had done for him what he had planned to do for me. His figure crumpled into itself and he lay in a heap on the ice.

I gained my feet and brushed away the blood that had trickled down into my eyes. The girl stood staring down at the form of

Minot, and even in the gloom I could see that her slight form shook terribly.

The pistol with which she had knocked the Greenham man out slipped from her fingers and clattered on the ice. I bent over and picked it up. I placed my hand inside Minot's coat; his heart was beating. For the first time in my hitherto prosaic life I experienced the lustful feeling of vindictiveness.

"Will he die?" she gasped.

"No such luck," I said bitterly.

"But we must take him back—get a doctor—and I must go on."

Ravenell stirred; he groaned. I pointed to him.

"He'll look after his precious companion," I whispered. "Come, before he sees which way we go."

But still she lingered, trembling.

"You're sure he's able to?"

"Sure," said I. "I only hit him once."

To my surprise, for I did not at first recognize the naivete of my remark, she laughed.

"And if you'd hit him twice it would have meant death, of course."

I grinned in the darkness. Her mirth seemed to have steadied her.

"Come, then," she said.

Again we took up our interrupted race across the lake. And as we ran I could think only of the wonderful, glorious fact that when safety had been hers she had jeopardized it for me.

XII

SHE seemed to know the way to wherever she was bound. When we reached the farther shore of the lake she turned to the left and skirted the shore for fully half a mile. Before a huge boulder that looked as if it belonged over at the "Head," instead of on the shores of this fresh-water pond—I suppose some convulsion of nature in earlier days had lifted it from the ocean's shore and deposited it here—she paused.

It had ceased to snow now and in the darkness the great bulk of the monster rock loomed larger than it had seemed when I had viewed it when skating. It was a guide-post that could hardly be missed in anything short of a dense fog, and her pause was only for the purpose of regaining her breath.

"It's stopped snowing," she gasped. "Do you think they'll follow?"

"Suppose they do," I laughed. "What man—and a woman—have done, they can do again. But I rather think they've had enough. Even though they can trace us, I hardly think they'll want to. Got your wind?"

"I'm all right," she replied. "But you—I've not even asked if you were hurt."

"I'm not," I told her.

My head still rang from the deflected blow of Minot's revolver, but I saw no reason why I should excite her alarm over a trifle, sweet though such alarm would be to me.

"Where now?" I asked her.

For answer she turned off the ice and up the bank of the lake, not very steep here. There was a path through the trees and she took it unhesitatingly. For a moment I trailed behind, wondering how she knew her way so well. Then I passed her.

"Better let me break the trail," I suggested. "The snow is deep."

It was, but the path through the trees, even in the darkness, was pretty well defined.

"No, we'll walk together," she said.

She swung into stride with me, and we plunged forwardly silently.

After a hundred yards, she spoke again.

"You don't ask me where we're going," she said.

"I thought I'd wait until you chose to tell me," I answered.

"You aren't curious?"

"Slightly," I laughed. "Curious about everything. But my curiosity can wait."

"Thank you," she said quietly. "I really trust you, Mr. Wrenham—I ought to. You saved me from them twice, now. But I can't explain yet. I—I haven't the right."

"And I trust you," I told her. "So we're both of one mind, and let explanation wait. Where now?"

For we had descended the farther side of the hill that rose from the lake's edge, and before us stretched open country for as far as I could see in the darkness.

"Straight across this meadow," she answered.

I offered her my arm, but she took my hand and together we plunged through the deep snow, impeded by the light crust that broke beneath our combined weights. It

was hard work, but I don't suppose it lasted over quarter of an hour. Then we reached a fringe of trees again, and the girl insisted on taking the lead.

There was no path, but there was little underbrush between the trees, and not so much snow had sifted down here, between the branches, and our progress was easier than it had been in the meadow. Again I wondered that she seemed so certain of her direction. But I had told her that I could wait, and the matter of her knowledge of the ground was a slight thing in comparison with the other things I wanted to know.

The trees suddenly ceased again, that is, directly ahead of us. A clearing, not over forty yards wide, spread before us, and in its center stood a little log cabin. From the window nearest us, the only one in that side, gleamed a light. I needed not the little gasping sigh of relief from Miss Gilman to know that we were at our journey's end.

Swiftly, my hand relinquished now, she sped across the clearing and knocked upon the cabin's door. There came to my acutely listening ears the sound of a chair being moved, as though its owner pushed it back as he arose. Then some one fumbled at the latch of the door. It was thrown swiftly open and the blaze of an electric torch flashed in our eyes, blinding us. We—myself, at any rate—could see nothing.

There was a moment's pause, while the holder of the torch surveyed us.

"A girl—and a man. Right enough! Where from?" he asked coolly.

"I am Ruth Gilman, Major Penrose's niece," said the girl quickly. "This is Mr. Wrenham who has brought me here. Are you Lieutenant Carey?"

"Come in," he said.

He turned off his torch and the flames of an open fire behind him showed his figure, tall and slim. I did not see his face until we were inside. He was a handsome chap, with an imperturbable-looking face, of that British type that seems incapable of any astonishment. Not stupid, but extremely self-controlled.

He placed a chair for Miss Gilman and waved me to one. He stood by the open fire, looking at us.

"Your uncle sent you, Miss Gilman?"

"He is dead."

For a moment the immobile face showed expression. Then it fell into its inscrutable lines again.

"I am sorry, Miss Gilman. When?"

For all he cared, I thought, she might have been talking about a pet dog.

"Yesterday at the Inn—murdered!"

"And robbed?" he asked.

I flushed at the cold-bloodedness of the man.

"I don't know," she said. "It may have been accident, but I don't see how it could have been. Men have been following him. Retained by a detective agency. They followed me just now on the ice. Mr. Wrenham beat them off."

His eyes looked eager.

"Then your uncle wasn't robbed, Miss Gilman?" he asked anxiously.

"I have them here."

She opened her jacket; we could see that the end of an envelope protruded from a pocket and that it was fastened with pins. She drew them out and handed the envelope to the man whose manner and accent proved him to be English, and an English officer, according to the title she gave him. Faint glimmerings of understanding began to come to me. Understanding, at least, of what that envelope might contain.

He snatched them, almost, from her hand.

"Pardon," he said.

He opened the envelope and drew forth sheets of paper. Swiftly he glanced over the first two or three, then put them all back and buttoned them inside the khaki Norfolk jacket that he wore. He held out his hand to the girl.

"Miss Gilman, you have played cricket! I haven't the time to go over these now, but I know, from a glance, they're what I've waited for."

He dropped her hand and stepped back. His hand went, as if unconsciously, to the salute.

"Your uncle was an honorable gentleman who played the game. God rest him. I am sorry that I can not stay. I would like one shot at his murderers—but England is waiting."

"And you must hurry," cried the girl. "Suppose they should follow? Mr. Wrenham knocked them out, but they may recover."

A smile illumined the grave face of the Englishman.

"You knocked them out, Mr. Wrenham? England owes you her thanks, too."

He held out his hand and I took it, I liked this tall, grave man.

"You haven't time for thanks—for anything," cried Miss Gilman. "They know now—they must be certain. If they don't dare follow, they'll arouse the hotel—there's the sheriff there—if they charged you with my uncle's murder."

"Awkward, eh?" His lips tightened. "But there's no danger, Miss Gilman."

"No danger? But they know! They must know now. The countryside will be on the lookout for a stranger, any stranger, and if you're arrested what good will the plans be to you—and England? The men who've hired those detectives, if they can't get the plans for themselves, won't they protest against England getting them? It's a violation of neutrality. Germany won't permit——"

"Did you think I walked here? Or came on a train?" He laughed shortly. "Three hundred yards from here is a boat-house, Miss Gilman. It has not contained a boat for a year. But it does contain my Bleriot. I asked no better landing-place than the ice, when I arrived a week ago, I ask no better starting-place. By dawn I'll be in St. Johns. The Bleriot will make a hundred an hour if I ask her to.

"But look here, Miss Gilman; isn't there an inquest or something of the sort to be held? Yes? But won't it be awkward for you, to have assisted in the violation of your country's neutrality?"

"Before Germany and England went to war," she answered, "my uncle had a private agreement with General Fenton. That private agreement, he, as a retired officer of the United States Army, was willing to fulfill. Those papers are England's property equally with the United States. If it is a violation of neutrality to give England what is hers—But it isn't! My uncle was a retired officer And he is dead. But you—you are an officer of the British Army. If you are caught——"

"But I won't be," he smiled. He looked at her. "If you were English, and a man, the Victoria Cross would be yours, Miss Gilman. From what you have told me, I can guess the rest. You have risked a great deal to keep your uncle's pledge. You have come in the night. I'm not much of a speech-maker, Miss Gilman. I can only tell you, once again, that England thanks you—and your uncle, too. I have no doubt that he could have sold this envelope to our enemies for a fortune. He gets nothing from England save England's thanks. But you, when the war is ended——"

"I want nothing," she said. "I only want—please start."

I think he must have read her thoughts. I know that I did. Having risked so much, having dared so much at a time when most girls of her age would be stricken with shock, she did not want anything to delay his departure. Even his thanks, the thanks of England, were unwelcome until what she had set out to do was done.

At any rate, with no further words, he began picking up things from a bureau, a rough affair, and putting them into a small satchel. He finished, locked the bag, felt a last time at his breast pocket to be sure the envelope was safe. He patted the pocket.

"God grant it works," he said. He held out his hand to me again. "In happier times I trust we'll meet again, sir."

He walked to the door and threw it open. He stepped back. Against his chest was pressed the muzzle of a revolver, and Minot, his eyes blazing, followed the lieutenant as he walked backward into the room. Behind him appeared the burly figure of Ravenell.

"Now, then, come across," snarled Minot. "We've got you and we've got the goods. Come across with them!"

And then, when victory was in his grasp, Minot had to relinquish it. He could not forbear to sneer viciously at me—

"I'll get even with you for that crack on the head, Brant, before you're five minutes older."

I don't suppose he glanced away from the face of Carey for more than a hundredth of a second, but that was long enough. The Englishman's right hand came down; the revolver was knocked to the floor of the cabin; Minot went down before a savage left uppercut, and I—well, for a man of peace, with extremely nervous tendencies, I once again surprised myself. Also, I justified the training of three years on a varsity crew once more.

For, as the revolver of Minot clattered to the floor, I lifted a table and plunged for Ravenell. I heard his revolver crack once, and later I discovered that it had bored through the table top, not far, I think, from my head. Then I was upon him and he went down beneath my wooden weapon.

It was all over in a moment. Disarmed, cowed, beaten, Minot and Ravenell stood in a corner of the cabin, while Carey gave it a last glance.

"Haven't forgotten anything," he said as coolly as if our subduing of the Greenham men had been an every-day affair. "Come on, Miss Gilman, and you, Wrenham."

"What about them?" I asked, pointing at Minot and his burly partner.

Carey laughed.

"According to what you tell me, these gentlemen may have been implicated in Major Penrose's death. In that case, they won't get far, eh? In fact, they'll hardly dare run away. But if you think they will, just notify your sheriff where they are. They'll be here, I should say, for at least three hours. Those windows are too small for a man to crawl through. To make the opening large enough will take them at least three hours. And the door—I know a trick to play on that door."

He stared icily at the two Greenham men.

"It's war you two have involved yourself in," he stated. "Were it not for the fact that I am on neutral soil—even that wouldn't stop me, I think, were it not that even in times of war there might be some way of stopping me after I reach Canada. And I can't be stopped. It wouldn't be enough to give the plans you've tried so hard to get to some one else in the service. I want a chance to be present when they're used. And England needs every man she can get. So I won't do what I'd like to do."

Very calmly he said it all, and yet, had I been Ravenell or Minot I would have felt that I had been very near to death that moment. But Carey shrugged his shoulders. He gently urged Miss Gilman from the cabin and followed me out. He pointed to a pile of cordwood near the door.

"If we pile that against it they'll not remove it soon. The only tools inside are ordinary kitchen knives. Will you help me?"

In ten minutes we had effectually blocked the door, which opened outward, from the assaults of the two Greenham men. Then we started for the lake. We reached the boat-house where his Bleriot was hidden. He unlocked the door and I helped him place planks from the door to the ice. Then we wheeled the air-craft out upon the ice. He tinkered with the engine a moment, then donned a helmet and life-belt which he had taken from a box behind his seat. He turned to us.

"Can't say much, you know. Not a speech-maker, as you know."

He climbed into his seat. We stood back. The propeller whirled; the engine barked its staccato bark; the great contrivance quivered. He shut off the engine. He had tested it and found it all right.

"If it's going to be awkward. Having given this to me, better run for it, to your hotel," he counseled. "Came in a storm, regular gale, and no one seemed to have heard my arrival. But they may hear me go—may ask questions—those beggars in the cabin will keep their mouths shut, I fancy. But others—awkward questions, you know. And—and I'm not much for making a speech, as you know, but God bless you both, and don't forget that England tha——"

We heard no more. The engine roared; the propeller spun; the wheels moved. With a convulsive jerk the thing of wire and canvas moved; it lurched to one side and righted itself; its wheels slipped on the ice, then gripped it. It seemed to leap; it raced forward; it tilted crazily until one wing scraped the ice; then, like a bird after its starting run, it sprang into the air. We lost it in the gloom long before its engine's roar ceased to come back to us.

We had stood, staring fascinatedly in the direction whence Carey had vanished, for fully five minutes, I think, before either of us moved. Then I touched the girl gently on the arm.

"Come," I said.

She turned to me slowly.

"It's a great thing, to be a man and love your country—and risk death for it. Isn't it? I wish—I wish I'd been a man, and——"

"I'm very glad that you're not," I told her with emphasis. "And as to that; I'm in the dark, of course, but it seems to me that you've done something mighty fine. Lieutenant Carey seemed to think so, at all events. And I'm sure of it. You've risked your life. Why, no man could have done more. Though why, and what it's all about, is beyond me."

"Is it? Haven't you guessed at all?"

"Well," I admitted, "I suppose you've given him plans of some sort of a gun. I don't know."

"It never occurred to you that they might

be the plans of one of the United States' fortifications, or battle-ships, or anything like that?"

"Good God, no," I assured her. "Why, England isn't at war with us and never will be. But aside from that—why, it's absurd! I—well, it's just too nonsensical an idea to have occurred to me. You—you aren't the type of woman, Miss Gilman, that betrays her country."

"You know a great deal about women, being an author, don't you, Mr. Wrenham?"

"I know absolutely nothing about them, like every other man," I replied, "except that——"

"Except what?"

"Like the explanation you are going to give me of all this, my exception can wait," I answered.

"Oh," she said. She began walking across the ice.

"I—I'll explain tomorrow," she said. "Tonight I am very tired," she sighed and we talked no more.

She leaned heavily against me, and for the rest of the journey I half-carried her. Small wonder! Any other woman I knew would have been under a doctor's care, but she had ventured into the night, had braved its perils.

But this isn't really a love-story. I shall rhapsodize over Ruth Gilman no more than is absolutely necessary. The reader knows what Ruth Gilman had done and can give her credit.

We reached the hotel in safety. Two minutes later we had tiptoed across the threshold, I had seen Miss Gilman to her room, and had entered my own. And all without discovery, although indeed, discovery wouldn't have mattered much.

Insomnia didn't bother me through the little that remained of the night. Indeed, I did not awake until Carney had been shaking me by the shoulder, so he said, for five minutes. But I'd put in a more exhausting and exciting day than ever Weatherbee Jones had. Little wonder that I slept soundly.

XIII

THE coroner's jury, so Carney told me, was assembled downstairs, and I was wanted. The jurymen had already visited the major's room and were about to examine the witnesses. I dressed hurriedly and made my way to the office. Except for Polly, the waitress, who, I could see through the open dining-room door, was hovering nervously about the table, waiting my belated arrival, every one who had testified to Dr. Reese yesterday was present in the office this morning.

Ruth Gilman's white and tired face lighted up as she saw me. The friendliness, the chumminess, that I had long ago decided could appear in her eyes, were there now. Only for a moment but long enough to lift me to the heights. But she looked down immediately and I made no attempt to speak to her now.

Ravenell and Minot, too, favored me with glances, but they were rather different from her look. Ravenell's was the acme of surly hate, while Minot's was venomous, less honestly hateful and therefore doubly dangerous. He looked away, as if to conceal his feelings, while Ravenell met my eyes tenaciously.

But beyond a mild wonder as to how long it had taken them to enlarge the cabin window sufficiently for them to crawl through, I gave them none of my thoughts. They were beaten; Miss Gilman and I had won. That they cherished resentment bothered me not at all.

As I made my way to the dining-room, Dr. Reese broke off a whispered conversation with a man who, I soon learned, was foreman of the hastily impaneled jury, and came over to me. He sat down at the table with me, and Polly the waitress at once bustled out of the dining-room, into the office, to bask in the sense of her own importance as a witness, leaving me to serve myself to the fast-cooling breakfast.

However, the coffee was hot and I could forgive the rest of it.

"Carney has told you that I received a wire from Dr. Odlin bearing out your story, Mr. Wrenham? Well, now that I know you're the Weatherbee Jones man, I expect you to unravel this affair. Can you think of any way of proving that one of those Greenham men wore the overshoes you and Carney discovered last night?"

I gulped some cold omelette and washed it down with coffee.

"Not that I know of," I said regretfully, "but if willingness to do murder means anything, Minot and Ravenell ought to be hung a dozen times over."

I told him of my nocturnal adventures, while his eyebrows rose.

"Still," he said thoughtfully, when I had finished my amazing tale, "all that doesn't prove either of them killed Major Penrose. To have them punished for assault would be a sort of anti-climax, wouldn't it, Wrenham?"

I was forced to agree with him, and he didn't speak again while I ate. But through the open door of the dining-room he watched Minot and Ravenell with speculative eyes, while his lips were pursed.

He rose when I had finished and we went into the office. I sat down beside Captain Perkins. Ruth Gilman sat several feet from me, but with her back toward me, so that I could not see her face. Reese conferred again with the foreman of the jury, and then there was a stir as the jurymen settled into chairs and looked expectantly at Reese. He took command and the giving of testimony followed.

He testified himself, first, and stated positively that it was a murder and not a suicide or an accidental death. He referred to the solidarity of the unbroken tumbler in its socket, and stated that nothing could have discharged the revolver that had rested in the broken tumbler save a human hand. The jurymen nodded, plainly impressed. They had been in the chamber of death and had tested the unbroken tumbler.

Captain Perkins testified next. He was followed in order by Polly and Myra, Tony Larue, Nelly the cook and myself, all of us repeating what we had said yesterday. But I noticed that the doctor refrained from questioning the landlord about his imperfect recollection of the presence or absence of the two detectives from the hotel at the time of the tragedy. Nor did he question me about anything save what I had heard and seen at that time. But I noticed that my statement that some one had run past my door just after the shot was fired stirred the jurymen.

I sat down finally. So far as I could tell, neither Ravenell nor Minot seemed the least disturbed by the proceedings. If they held guilty knowledge of the murder, they were indeed geniuses in the art of hiding their emotions.

Then the coroner-doctor called Miss Gilman to the stand. Gently he spoke to her.

"Miss Gilman, will you please tell the jury what you told me yesterday."

Bravely, though exhaustion, both physical and nervous, showed in every line of her face and in every word she spoke, she told of the discovery of the body, of the entrance of some one through the French windows and his passage along the hall, of her uncle's absent-mindedness, her own fears of the revolver in his hands because of that absent-mindedness, the placing of the weapon in the large tumbler, her certainty that it could not have been overbalanced by anything short of an earthquake.

She paused when she had said this much and looked, inquiringly almost, at Reese.

"Now then," said the doctor, "yesterday you pointed out three men, now present, and stated that you had reason to believe they bore your uncle ill will. One of those men, I understand, you have changed your opinion about. The others?"

"I have not changed," she said. "And—and I'm free to tell now what I could not tell yesterday."

"Then please tell it," said Reese.

For a moment her eyes fastened on the face of Minot, then on Ravenell. Then she turned her face to Reese.

"What I say here," she said, "may appear in print. Therefore, that there may be no misunderstandings of my uncle's motives, no question as to his loyalty to his country, I must go back some distance."

Reese bowed, and she continued:

"MY uncle, Major Samuel Penrose, was retired from active service in the Fall of Nineteen-Thirteen. In December of that year he went to Bermuda for the Winter. For fifteen years, since the death of my parents, I have lived with my uncle. Of late years I have acted as his secretary, taking charge of his correspondence and looking after his accounts. Of course, I went to Bermuda with him.

"There my uncle became acquainted with General Sir Richard Fenton, retired, of the British Army. Sir Richard had spent a great deal of his active service in the tropics and upon retirement had moved permanently to Bermuda. The acquaintance between the two retired officers became friendship and soon a sort of partnership. This last because each soon learned that the other was working on the same invention.

"It was strange that two army men should be trying to invent submarine appliances, but it was so. In fact, my uncle

would have entered the navy as a young man had it been possible for him to obtain an appointment to Annapolis. As it had not, and he had been able to get an appointment to West Point, he had gone there. But the navy was his first love, and of late years he had taken a tremendous interest in submarine navigation problems, believing that in coming warfare the submarine was to prove of tremendous importance.

"So he determined that his years of retirement should be devoted to submarine invention, and when we reached Bermuda he plunged at once into work. He had an idea that he could invent some appliance whereby a submarine could carry enough air to remain under water several days—weeks, possibly.

"Air, you know, is the greatest problem confronting submarine inventors. How to store enough air to enable a submarine to cruise almost indefinitely beneath the surface, never rising to expose itself to hostile guns, that was his problem.

"And very shortly he learned that Sir Richard was engaged on practically the same work. As their friendship ripened, and as each learned that the other was the soul of honor, they began confiding their difficulties one to the other. Soon my uncle learned that Sir Richard was possessed of certain qualities, followed certain theories, that were of great value. Sir Richard learned the same thing about my uncle. And soon they came to the discovery that the work and inventions of each, thus far, were complements of the work and inventions of the other. Together they had solved the problem—on paper, at any rate.

"At least, it seemed that by combining their labors they would be in a fair way to achieve the dream of each. I know that both of them thought so. Of course this conclusion was not reached quickly. In fact, it was not until after several months that their friendship and confidences had advanced thus far. Then, last June, they decided to work together.

"Each of course, would have preferred to have achieved the invention for his own country and by himself. But each was confronted by obstacles too great for him to surmount alone. I can not explain it, because I am not versed in the technicalities of submarine invention. I only know that my uncle said to me that half a loaf was better than none.

"By that he meant that it would be better for the United States to share the invention with Great Britain than for the United States to have no share in its ownership.

"There were few objections to this course of reasoning. The United States and Great Britain were the two countries on earth least liable to be engaged in a war with each other. England would not dare attack us because of Canada's helplessness before our assaults. We would hesitate to attack England because of her great fleet which could destroy our commerce and cut off our communications with our colonies. Self-interest then, seemed to assure the continuance of the peace that had already existed for a century, aside from all considerations of the ties of blood and friendship between the two nations.

"So, then, in June, Sir Richard and my uncle joined forces. They worked together that month, and early in July it was decided that my uncle should go to New York, there to purchase some supplies needed by them. I accompanied him.

"The week before we intended to return to Bermuda my uncle received a cablegram notifying him of Sir Richard's death. What is known in Bermuda as 'broken-bones' fever, and which is a form of our grip, had killed him. And then, the following week, the Great War broke out.

"It was manifestly impossible that we should return to Bermuda at that time. In fact, one could obtain no passage there, as the fear of German cruisers stopped traffic for a while. Moreover, though connected with Halifax and thus with London, by cable, Bermuda was too out-of-the-way, too far from British headquarters. For, of course, my uncle had decided to offer at once—that is, as soon as possible—the joint plans to the British Government for use, perhaps, in the current struggle.

"It so happened that the plans thus far drawn by the two officers were incomplete. That is, to a person unfamiliar with their object, they would have been unintelligible. Only a person who had been working on them, who knew their ultimate object, could have gained any information from the mass of figures, copies of which were possessed by Sir Richard and would undoubtedly be found among his effects.

"Now, neither my uncle nor Sir Richard had taken their respective governments

into their confidence. Retired army officers with inventions are a drug on the military market. They are listened to politely and forgotten the moment they leave. Also, they are often jeered at, behind their backs, as fanatics. Especially so would this state of affairs be in the case of army officers presenting plans for a naval invention. The plans would be pigeonholed. Unless, indeed, the plans were perfected, up to the minute. But if the plans were in such shape that money was needed for experiments—well, both my uncle and Sir Richard knew better than to apply to their respective war offices.

"And money for experiments was needed, had been needed, and had been supplied by the private fortunes of these two men.

"So then, the plans not yet being whipped into shape, and months of work being necessary before they would be in shape, my uncle was not foolish enough to attempt to interest either the British or the United States governments at once. He knew that Sir Richard's copy of the plans would be unintelligible to his executors, that nothing would be thought of them, and that they could not possibly be developed by any one other than my uncle himself. So my uncle set to work to develop them himself.

"A month or so ago he was so near completion of his work that he went to the Navy Department and had a talk with the secretary. He told him all that I have told you. He explained that while the plans were in his single possession, and that he intended to offer them to the United States, he felt honorably bound to offer them to the British Government, also.

"And here arose a peculiar position. By the laws of neutrality the United States Government, as such, could not countenance one of its army officers, though retired, placing himself in the position of giving aid to one of the combatants in the Great War. So the secretary, being a man of tact, told my uncle this, and added that inasmuch as my uncle had been in partnership with an English officer before the Great War broke out, a perfectly proper arrangement, he saw no valid reason why my uncle should not enter into another partnership with another English officer now that the War had broken out.

"In other words, inasmuch as the United States government did not forbid the exportation of munitions of war to the belligerents by private parties, there was no reason why an American citizen, who happened also to be a retired army officer, should not engage in any business he saw fit with any Englishman. But, being a retired officer and therefore an official, so to speak, of the United States, it would not be proper for him to deal directly with the British Government.

"Dealing with an English officer might amount to the same thing, but it would not be the same thing, and to such an arrangement none of the Powers opposed to Great Britain in the War could possibly have any valid objection. Needless to state, our Navy Department in no way attempted to interfere with the carrying out of my uncle's honorable obligation to his dead partner, General Sir Richard Fenton. Our Government admitted that England had a perfectly just claim to the invention.

"It took some little time for uncle to get into touch with the proper British authorities. He could not, under the Secretary's construction of our neutrality, go to the British Embassy at Washington. He could only write to English friends, explain the situation and trust that some one of them would appreciate the value of the invention.

"Some one of them did. Also, the delicate situation was appreciated. The British Government made no official overtures to my uncle, but an agent of an English firearms manufacturing company visited my uncle two weeks ago with cabled credentials from one of the English friends to whom uncle had written. But my uncle had come upon a flaw in the plans; before turning them over he wished to make some minor changes. He told his visitor to return in three days.

"The visitor never came back! What happened to him can be guessed at by my uncle's discovery, shortly thereafter, that spies were watching his every move. A servant in the house we had leased, furnished, in Washington, told us of an attempt to bribe him. My uncle investigated and discovered that no private government was employing those who spied upon him. Instead, it was an American financier—if one can be called American who has no patriotism. It was not the German Embassy, that might have been expected to be interested. My uncle learned, on unquestionable authority, that the German Embassy had no

suspicion of his and General Fenton's discovery.

"But this American financier, was striking at his own country as well as at England —there had been treachery somewhere. Possibly one of uncle's letters had fallen into dishonest hands. It was known, of course, that uncle was an inventor. But we can not tell how this man discovered that uncle had the plans. We only knew that he did know of them and that he would not stop at murder.

"And yet, because I have no definite proof against him, I will not mention his name even now. For I believe that punishment will reach him in the end, dodge though he may.

"He was not retained by any government. I believe that his idea was simply to obtain the plans, offer to surrender them if England would pay him a fabulous fortune, or sell them to some other country, possibly Germany. He knew their tremendous value.

"But we could not have him arrested. For he would, out of sheer anger at being thwarted, tell the German Embassy of the plans; the German Embassy would protest to our government against the delivery of the plans to England. The fact that an English officer owned half of the plans would make no difference. Germany would protest just the same. Even though we suspected him of murdering uncle's English visitor, we were helpless, for the plans were more important to England than vengeance for the murder of one of her subjects.

"You see, my uncle was a retired army officer. His quasi-official position made it impossible for our Government openly to help him in his efforts to aid England, even though those efforts were made, presumably, to aid a private citizen of England. The Navy Department had been perfectly justified in telling my uncle to go ahead, and in outlining the manner in which he might go ahead. But as soon as Germany should protest, my uncle would be restrained, that's all.

"My uncle's moral position was unassailable; his legal position was unassailable. But these things did not matter. A German protest must be received with due consideration. It could not be answered in a moment. Germany would insist on a long discussion of the legal aspects of the situation, of an interminable interchange of notes, and even though it were finally decided that despite my uncle's military position he had a right openly to deal with a citizen of England, time would have been lost. Powerful nations like Germany must be shown consideration. Furthermore, it is a habit of the United States to show consideration to every nation, weak or strong.

"Therefore, we could not appeal to the Government for protection for that meant publicity. Germany's immediate protest against the transference of the plans to an Englishman would mean that England would be fortunate if she got the plans within a year, even if the matter were decided in her favor. And that would not do. The country to which General Sir Richard Fenton had belonged, to which he had given over forty years of faithful service, was entitled, in her hour of need, to the product of his brain. Therefore, my uncle decided to continue to risk the mercenary greed of murderous spies and turn the plans over to England."

She paused a moment and her eyes shadowed with pain. Not a sound came from us who hung breathlessly upon her words. In a moment she resumed:

"You see, uncle knew that the man who was trying to obtain these plans would not inform Germany of their existence until he had lost all hope of obtaining them for himself. Therefore, if we could trick him into believing that the plans were incomplete, that more work and study must be devoted to them, we would have an opportunity to deliver them to an English agent.

"But he must not suspect our intentions, or he would do as he would do if arrested: notify the German Embassy and the fat would be in the fire.

"So, then, with the disappearance of the English fire-arms agent, my uncle wrote new letters. A new plan was made. He was to pretend, and let the pretension leak out, that his plans were far from complete, that they needed more time for completion.

"But we knew that every visitor to our house was traced. We feared that if we passed the plans to any one that person would be robbed—worse, perhaps.

"So, then, the plans must be turned over to England without any one's knowledge and in such a way that whoever took them from my uncle could gain the Canadian border before any demand that he be held could be complied with.

"Needless to state, the Government, our Government, even unofficially, knew nothing of my uncle's plan. We gave it out that Major Penrose was going South for his health. Then we slipped away from Washington, going to New York. We did not dare go ourselves to Canada. We feared robbery on the train. My uncle had no fear of losing his life; he realized that he might lose it, but that was not to be considered by him. His personal honor was at stake, depended upon his turning those plans over to the country of his dead partner, Sir Richard Fenton. He could not risk losing them.

"But we believed, from evidence too long to detail here, that the spies who had been watching us had been deceived, and that they believed the invention was really incomplete. As a matter of fact, when we left Washington a few days ago, the plans were ready for the builder.

"But, though we hoped we had eluded pursuit, my uncle decided, in case we were followed, to pretend continuance on his work, thus delaying any attack or attempt at robbery, until the plans had been turned over to the English officer who we knew would be waiting for us down here to Folly Cove. If we went openly to Canada the attack wouldn't be delayed and we might lose the plans.

"My uncle knew this country down here. I knew it, too, having been here as a girl. And it happened that certain Canadians possessed a little camp back of the lake here. It was arranged that an officer of the British Army, detailed to Canadian service a year ago and not yet returned to Europe, should meet us at that camp and there receive the plans.

"We were glad that we had not started for Canada before we were well started on the train from New York for Portland, for we took Mr. Wrenham here, for a spy. We were mistaken, but other spies were on our trail. Two other men here followed us down here and attempted to steal the plans from me. They sit there."

She pointed to Ravenell and Minot and the rustic jurymen growled angrily.

"I tried to slip out of this hotel yesterday and make my way across the lake, leaving my uncle in his room, pretending to work. I did not know that those two men were spying upon us. I thought Mr. Wrenham was the only one we had to fear and that he would be deceived by my uncle's apparent labor in his room. And even when Mr. Wrenham rescued me from their clutches, I still thought him a spy, retained, perhaps, by some other person who had heard of the invention.

"Frustrated then, in our first attempt to deliver the plans to the officer that we knew must be waiting in the camp for us, my uncle and I decided to try again. But that same afternoon—yesterday—he was killed. But last night I slipped out in the night. I crossed the lake. Mr. Wrenham followed me—he helped me—he drove off those two men there. I gave the plans to the man waiting for them! In his monoplane, while those two men," and again she pointed at the Greenham operatives, "were locked in the cabin where they'd followed us after their fight with Mr. Wrenham, he started for Canada. He must have reached St. Johns early this morning. And England has the plans! And now—and now——"

She had held herself in well. From the moment of the discovery of her uncle's death until this moment, she had acted more bravely than I thought any girl could act. But now she had reached the breaking-point, it seemed. She pointed at the two detectives.

"They killed him!" she cried. "They must have killed him! What are you going to do to them?"

XIV

REESE stepped swiftly to the girl's side. He bent over and talked to her. Though I could not hear his words, I knew that he tried to calm her, and at his success I was meanly jealous. But that state of mind endured only a moment; as he stepped away from her, I was glad to see that she had controlled herself, though I could tell by her drawn features that it was only by a mighty effort.

"Mr. Wrenham to the stand," said the doctor-coroner.

"Mr. Wrenham," he said to me when I had taken the witness chair, "tell the jury what you discovered last night."

Swiftly I told them of the discovery of the balcony tracks and of the following of the trail that had ended in the empty overshoes.

"Sheriff Carney," called Reese.

Carney corroborated my account.

"Captain Perkins!"

Reese waved our landlord to the witness chair.

"Captain Perkins," he said, "yesterday you were not absolutely certain that you had seen Ravenell and Minot go out before the murder. Are you certain today?"

"Not certain I saw them go out? I'm dead certain I didn't see them go out!" corrected Captain Perkins. "But I can't swear that they didn't, either. My recollection is that they went up-stairs. I don't remember seein' 'em come down again. I don't want to do an injustice even to a couple of skunks like them, but I can't swear that they was in the hotel. Don't see how they could have been—both on 'em. One of them might 'a' worn them overshoes, but t'other——"

"That will do, Captain," said the doctor.

He faced the jury.

"Gentlemen, you have heard the motive. Miss Gilman has made it perfectly clear why. It is easy to understand that one of these men, hired to rob Major Penrose, might have killed him. He might have been discovered by the major, not have known the major was in the room, and then, in excited fear, have snatched up the major's weapon and committed the murder. Which one of them it was we can not tell.

"This man Minot admitted yesterday that he had gone up-stairs at about the time the Captains thinks they both went up. He says that he came down the stairs. Perhaps he did, but it is possible that he is the person who wore those overshoes. His partner may have gone out-doors as he says. But there is a place below Major Penrose's windows that shows that somebody stood there a little while. The tracks are covered now, but Sheriff Carney is very certain that they were made by one of these men. His theory is that one of these two men stood below that window ready to break his partner's fall if his partner should swing from the balcony to the ground, to avoid discovery. That makes the man waiting below partner in the crime, accessory after the fact, if not before, in the crime of murder.

"I admit that owing to Captain Perkins's imperfect recollection we can not be certain that Minot did not come down-stairs. It is pretty certain that both of them did not go up-stairs, for there are the tracks of only one man in the snow beneath the balcony at the other end of the hotel from the major's room. And only one man could have escaped them, that way. And as another man could not possibly have come down-stairs after the murder without detection, part of the story of Minot seems true. But I believe that there is evidence here sufficient to detain these men. We have the motive; we know that they committed a murderous assault on Mr. Wrenham last night. I ask you to hold them for the Grand Jury."

Ravenell leaped to his feet, his face flushed.

"What right you got to do that?" he cried. "Suppose I was standin' below the major's window? That don't prove anything against me. That don't prove I was in on murder. That don't prove nothing! You got no right to hold me."

"Then you were below the window?" asked Reese suavely.

Minot snatched at his companion's sleeve.

"Sit down, you idiot," he snarled. "Suppose they do try to hold us on this flimsy evidence? Any decent lawyer will get us out on a writ of habeas corpus in twenty-four hours."

Ravenell looked uncertainly from Reese to his fellow-operative. Reese laughed.

"Oh, very well, gentlemen. It doesn't matter to me what the charge is on which you are detained. But be very certain that you will be detained until there has been an opportunity for me to summon detectives from Portland. Your own agency, perhaps. Or perhaps the Healy agency would be better. For I can and will detain you." He turned to me. "Wrenham, will you swear out a warrant against these men, charging them with assault with intent to kill?"

"I certainly will," I promised.

Reese smiled at Ravenell.

"Care to admit now that you were below the window and that Minot was on the balcony? Not that it matters much; you just admitted it. But is there anything you'd care to add to that admission? A clean breast might help your case, you know."

Ravenell's face was white now. Up to now he had evidently believed that there was nothing to connect either himself or Minot with the murder. Minot, evidently the stronger spirit, as he was more patently the more crafty, had held a mastery over the man that made him sit tight. But with

all his burliness, Ravenell was a coward at heart, and his predicament brought out the weakness in his character.

"I'll tell you," he began, "I'll tell you! You got nothin' on me, and——"

The slim Minot leaped to his feet. He seized Ravenell by the shoulder and pulled him backward into his chair. He advanced to the witness chair.

"If anything must be told, let me tell it," he said with a sneer.

"You realize that anything you say will be used against you?" queried Reese.

Minot sneered again.

"Doctor, I've been chasing crooks some little time. I guess I know how to protect my own interests. Used against me? Use it as far as you like."

He looked venomously around the room, his eyes holding an especially unpleasant gleam when they met mine.

"Where do you want me to begin?" he asked.

"You might start at the beginning," suggested Reese mildly. "Suppose you tell us why you followed Major Penrose and his niece."

"I'll tell you why, but not who employed my firm," said Minot. "That's a professional secret and I'm not yet in any such hole that I need to use professional secrets as a ladder. Let it be enough that Miss Gilman has told the truth, and that the employer of my firm wanted the major's plans. Never mind who he is! Does it make any difference? It's enough that he wanted them; that he decided that he'd better not use any more of his own secret agents for fear of arousing further suspicion and putting the major on his guard. He came to my firm. He offered half a million dollars for those plans."

"And a reputable detective agency accepted the commission?"

"Wait a bit," said Minot coolly. His sang-froid amazed me. Didn't the man realize the gravity of his position?

"Perhaps," he said, "if my firm had known that the plans possessed by the major belonged partly to the United States we'd not have accepted the commission. I'm sure we wouldn't have. But that part of it is all news to me. The Greenhams aren't traitors. But we didn't know that. And everything is fair in war. If her uncle could help England—oh, I understand that his honor compelled him, all right—but still, if he could help England, why couldn't we help one of England's opponents? Or a private individual, if we wished?

"We were told that a certain man, now dead, had invented certain plans. He had sold those plans to the man that hired us. We were shown the bill of sale. We were told that Major Penrose had got hold of those plans in a dishonorable manner. We were told that Major Penrose was planning to sell them to England. Now, maybe we weren't as fussy about proofs as we might have been. But here was the situation: Major Penrose was keeping under cover pretty closely. We could tell that at once. If he had an honest proposition why all the precautions and secrecy we soon learned that he was using?

"The fact that he was under an honorable obligation to use every means in his power to deliver those plans to England is news to me. We thought he was after the coin. If he wasn't, we wondered why he didn't give the plans to his own country. Frankly, without meaning to hurt Miss Gilman's feelings, we thought he was a crook. But we couldn't have him jailed, because our client said that would spoil everything. It would get out that the major was dickering with a foreign power, and the United States would stop all that, and our client wouldn't be able to do any dickering himself.

"Our job was to get the plans, and the major's secrecy convinced us that he didn't have any good title to them himself, and that our client told the truth. That our client might sell them to one of England's enemies didn't enter into the case, and wouldn't have mattered if it had. We were retained to get the plans; we were assured that Major Penrose, being a thief, would not dare appeal to the police. We were offered half a million dollars. We took the case.

"And I hope it isn't necessary to state that the Greenham Agency knew nothing of what had happened before we took charge. We knew nothing about any one having been killed. If we had we'd not have touched it. All we knew was that we believed our client, that Major Penrose wouldn't be permitted to deal with England if Germany protested, and that if Penrose put up any squawk Germany would learn the truth and would protest. Silence was necessary all around, and, well, we took the case."

"The large reward causing you to shut your eyes and not ask too many questions, eh?" demanded Reese sarcastically.

"Oh, well, business is business," said Minot impudently. "Back to cases! But at that, half a million is quite some money, eh? Well, I was put on to the case in Washington. I followed Major Penrose and his niece to New York. I watched them in New York, but they didn't let drop a hint where they were going. And when I finally learned they were going to Portland, I missed the train that carried them. That's where Brant—or Wrenham, as you call him—comes in.

"He happened to wear clothes like mine. My office wired Portland that I'd be on the train the major took, and described me, for fear of accidents. I thought I'd need help. Well, the telegram saying that I was coming went through, but the next telegram was delayed by the storm. So Ravenell, here, thought that Wrenham was myself. He tried to pal in with Wrenham but Wrenham couldn't see it. But Ravenell merely thought that Wrenham had a swelled head and didn't want help. At that, Wrenham acted kind of queer, and I ain't so dead sure that he's all you think he is. Still, he helped the young lady get the plans away.

"Well, when I got to Portland, I traced Ravenell down here. The station agent remembered that a man answering Ravenell's description had bought a ticket for Folly Cove, and that two people looking like the major and Miss Gilman had done the same thing. Ravenell hadn't wired the Portland office where he was, and explained that by saying he didn't have a chance. Maybe he did; maybe he didn't. Anyway, the big saphead, after his wanting to squeal just now, and putting me to the trouble of telling this long yarn, will be back driving a truck next week where he belongs. I have an idea that he figured on getting the plans for himself and selling out to some one else—let's say Japan. Of course, Japan's allied with England and might not bid against England. But I'm not so sure. Alliances don't mean much. Anyway, my large friend Ravenell," and he sneered at his partner, "thought he saw a chance for easy money, I think. He may get it driving a truck, but I doubt it.

"Well, whatever his lone game was, he dropped it when I came down here. I took charge. Miss Gilman has spoken of Wrenham rescuing her from our clutches. She's spoken of our attempting to steal the plans. You, Dr. Reese, have asked Wrenham to swear out a warrant for assault against us. I'm telling you a straight story, without any frills or excuses. If I continue telling it, will you drop the assault charges?"

Reese, amazement on his face, looked from Minot to me, and then to Miss Gilman. Equally amazed, we both nodded assent.

"If you prefer a murder charge against you," began Reese hesitatingly, "why, you're welcome. The assault charge will be dropped if you convince me that you are telling the truth, and the whole truth —and convince the jury."

"I'll take a chance," said Minot airily. "Well, I'll get down to yesterday. My agency had been hired because our employer feared that his own agents were too well known. He figured that Greenham men wouldn't be suspected and could turn the trick easily, if it were to be done at all. But I wasn't so sure of that. Moreover, the major's secret flight made me think that he'd fooled my employer into thinking the work wasn't done, and that it really was done. Further, I reasoned that he hadn't come to this neck of the woods for nothing. He'd either done it as a blind, and managed to get the plans off to England by somebody else, or was intending to pass them here. And while I was talking this over with my fat-witted friend Ravenell, what does she do but come down the path where we were talking!

"Ravenell grabbed at her muff. I tried to stop him, but the look on her face told me that the plans were there. Personally, I'd have preferred to have waited until she gave them to whoever she'd started out to meet and take them from him, or them, but Ravenell's sudden move, unexpected by me, and about as full of finesse as his head is of brains, made it necessary to play the hand out then and there.

"The way she clung to that muff proved she had the plans, all right. And we'd have had 'em but for Mr. Brant-Wrenham here. I can only say for Mr. Brant-Wrenham that I hope he commits forgery or some other little trick some day, and that I'm assigned to his case.

"He got her away from us, and I knew the game was up. She knew who and what Ravenell and I were, and finesse was in the

discard. We had to grab those plans. I knew, of course, that she'd not dare say anything to the authorities here. If she did that we'd have made the authorities hold her uncle and herself until our employer got into touch with the German Embassy. That would have thrown the matter into arbitration. But then, while England would have had to whistle for the plans, so would my employer!"

"Wish she had complained to me," said Carney. "I'd have told you to chase yourself—after you got through breakin' rocks for assaulting her. And I'd not have detained her uncle or her, either, and he'd be alive today."

"Then it's just as well she didn't complain—for me, isn't it?" sneered Minot. "As for her uncle being alive—perhaps Miss Gilman would have something to say about that."

"What!" cried Reese.

From the throats of the jurymen came growls of anger. Minot waved a hand airily.

"Just wait until I finish," he said. He stared defiantly around.

"Ravenell and I watched the hotel after Miss Gilman returned. We knew that neither she nor her uncle had left the building. Neither had Wrenham, and we looked out for him, too, not knowing just where he stood with the major and his niece. There was some puzzle about him which isn't clear yet. Ravenell said that he was on good terms with them coming down here, and afterward they didn't seem on good terms.

"Anyway, after lunch I decided to look over the situation. I was dead sure the plans were fully completed and that another effort might be made to deliver them to some one. Also, our intentions and purposes were known. If I could get a chance to take them——

"Well, I went up-stairs. I thought I'd take a chance on sneaking into the major's room by way of the balcony. I had told Ravenell to stand below the major's window so that if I had to make a quick getaway he could break my fall."

He turned to Carney.

"Nice reasoning, sheriff. If you ever want a job with the Greenhams, refer them to me. I'll recommend you."

His impudence was amazing and Carney growled angrily. Minot smiled irritatingly and continued.

"It was raw work, but what else was there to be done? I couldn't watch the girl or her uncle forever. Sooner or later they might get the chance to slip the plans to whoever was waiting, and I've known lots of tricks pulled by sheer nerve. They'd hardly expect me to attempt to rob their rooms while they were in them. They'd be too confident that I'd be afraid to, with help for them so near. But I had to take chances, and when you're working for a half-million, a good slice of which is your commission—well, I decided to look the ground over.

"But there was snow on the balcony. Of course, the major knowing by this time who I was—I supposed Miss Gilman had told him, of course—it may seem funny that I cared about making tracks on the balcony. But I figured it this way: If I got the plans and the major discovered their loss soon—before I had a chance to deliver them anywhere, to get them out of the hotel—he'd try for an arrest. But he wouldn't want to say what I'd stolen. Because he'd know that if it got into the papers that I'd stolen his plans, my employer would know that the fat was in the fire; that they could never get the plans, now, so he'd appeal to the State Department to see that England didn't get them, out of clear spite.

"So, then, the major wouldn't charge me with having stolen the plans. But he'd charge me with having stolen something else. But he'd have to prove a case on me to get me held and searched; he'd have difficulty in proving that I stole money, or a watch, or anything like that. He'd have sense enough to know that his mere saying that he believed I stole anything like that wouldn't be sufficient to have me held by the police, because I could get a wire from my office saying that I was O. K. He'd have to have a case on me.

"Therefore, if he could prove that I'd been outside his window, say, he could have me held. My footprints would be a give-away. He could have me held on any ordinary theft charge. The footprints, proof presumptive of attempted robbery, at any rate, would save him from talking about the plans. While I was locked up as a thief he'd get the plans and deliver them before my protests were heeded.

"But I wasn't going to be held on any trumped-up charge. I'd be held for taking the plans, if I got them, or for nothing. I

knew that the major wouldn't mention the plans save as a last resort, to prevent them from going to my employer. Of course, he could give duplicates later on to England, but half their value would be lost if my employer sold the same sort of submarine to another country. A gun in your hand isn't so all-powerful if the other fellow has a gun, too.

"Of course, if the trumped-up charge held, I could mention the plans, but a half-million would be lost to the Greenhams. But what I wanted to do was to have the appearance of innocence so that any sheriff down here would hesitate to arrest me on the major's say-so. Then, while he hesitated, I'd get rid of the plans somehow. But if my footprints were plain on the balcony—outside the major's room—well, the sheriff or constable wouldn't hesitate. And, of course, my plan was to sneak into the major's room if possible while he was out.

"As I've said, it was a long chance, but I had to do something. I couldn't wait until the major turned over the plans to some British agent. For now that Ravenell had given us dead away by grabbing Miss Gilman's muff, the plans wouldn't be so easy to get at again. The major would probably hand them over himself; there'd be gun play if we tried to get them. I wasn't anxious for anything like that. It was my cue to get them before some one came after them. Of course, if I saw him hand them over to some one that we didn't dare tackle—say, to several people—we'd follow them until we could get in touch with our employer, and then the State Department would take a hand. But it wasn't enough, as I've explained several times, to prevent England from getting those plans. My employer wanted them for himself!

"Well, in the bathroom I'd noticed a pair of overshoes. I never neglect a trick. That's why the Greenhams chose me as the man to handle this little affair. And I'd have handled it right, too, if that sap-head Ravenell hadn't gummed the game by snatching the muff from Miss Gilman on the path yesterday morning. But that's all over. Spilt milk can't be picked up.

"I went to the washroom to see if those overshoes were still there. I'd noticed them in the morning. They were still there, though not in the same place as in the morning. That looked as though whoever owned them had worn them since I saw them last. And if he went to the trouble of bringing them up to the bathroom it didn't seem that he intended to put them on again right away. I had time. Anyway, it didn't matter much; I'm only telling you so you'll see that I never overlook a bet."

He smiled conceitedly while we stared at him in amazement. But my amazement was combined with a certain apprehension. Minot was no fool. Mixture of good breeding and coarseness, combination of real brains and low cunning, he was a queer sort. His language wandered from careful expression to common slang, his manner from honest assurance to impudent defiance.

He might have been a fallen gentleman; he might have been a self-educated product of the slums. He was vicious in his instincts; no question of that. And he looked particularly malign now, because of the red bruise on his forehead, a bruise that I had put there.

But he was no fool. I think that the others had begun to grasp that salient fact; to understand that they were not listening to a confession but the prelude to a defense. The look of triumph had faded from Reese's face. Carney, puzzled, was biting his nails. The countrymen who comprised the jury listened with blank surprise to him. The horror that had been on Ruth Gilman's face had disappeared, to be replaced by a wondering incredulity. Only Ravenell, burly, surly, maintained the expression of sullen resentment that was his usual manner, and that he had lapsed from only for a moment when Reese had put the fear of jail into his heart.

"You confess that you wore those overshoes, then?" demanded Dr. Reese.

"Confess it? Why not?" sneered Minot.

"And you realize that this confession will be used against you? You understand that no promise of light punishment has been made you; that I have not the power to make such a promise?"

"Light punishment? You haven't the power—" Minot leaned forward from the witness chair and stared at the coroner-doctor. "Say, for Heaven's sake, doctor," he said, "you don't imagine I murdered the old boy, do you? Do you think I'd be boob enough to open my mouth without a lawyer handy if I'd done it? You don't really think I did it? Not now; not after I've admitted the overshoe business. You aren't that thick, are you?"

Reese stared at him.

"Well, then, Minot, if you didn't do it, who did?"

"Who did? Come off, doctor! I don't blame you for being a little suspicious of me for a while. But now that I've begun to talk—as no guilty man would talk—who did it? Why the only person that could have done it! There!"

And he pointed straight at the face of Ruth Gilman.

XV

REESE broke the silence that ensued. He licked his lips with his tongue.

"How dare you make such a charge against her?" he demanded.

"How dare I? Say, have you let a pretty face turn your brains to soup? What are you, anyway, coroner or counsel for the defense?" sneered Minot. "Right from the start you've suspected her; been wise to her all along. But because she's pretty and looked so forlorn, you've tried to put it over onto some one else—me! And I would have kept my mouth if you hadn't been so anxious to land a defendant. Why didn't you call it suicide if you were so dead anxious to get her clear? Why did you try to hang it on me? Didn't you think I'd fight? Didn't you think I'd have a clear defense?"

He almost spat his contempt for Reese. The coroner, white faced, held up his hand for silence, not only to stop Minot's flow of speech but to quell the murmurs of anger from witnesses and jurymen alike.

"Let's hear that clear defense, Minot," he snapped. "Do you admit going out upon the balcony?"

"Of course I do," said Minot. "I went through the French windows at the end of the hall and pussy-footed around to the major's window. Ravenell was waiting down below, on the ground, for me. But I saw at a glance that there was nothing doing. The major was at his desk, writing, and I knew that I could never open those windows and get through at him without his having fifteen chances to put a bullet into me.

"So I leaned over the balcony railing and shook my head at Ravenell. That was our signal for him to drift along; it meant that I'd meet him down by the lake shortly and we'd try and look around and find out if the person Miss Gilman had intended to hand those plans to was snooping around anywhere. I didn't want Ravenell attracting attention by standing too long under the major's window. Later, of course, I'd make another try, but not just now. I couldn't stay on that balcony too long at a stretch. Some one might see me.

"Well, I went back along the balcony and through the French windows again. I reached the major's door. It came to me that I might get away with it if I took a big chance. He had seemed mighty busy, wrapped up in his work, when I looked through his window. If I could get through the door and on top of him before he could call—well, the idea of gumshoeing around for whoever was waiting in the neighborhood for those plans didn't look very good to me. There might be more than one of them, as I've said before.

"If I wanted those plans the only thing for me to do was to get them before they left the major's possession. Of course, I couldn't be sure that the major had them; Miss Gilman might have them still. But that was one of the chances of the game. I put my hand on his door-knob——"

He paused and seemed to enjoy the dramatic suspense of the moment.

"Now, do you want to know why I say that Miss Gilman killed her uncle?" he asked.

"Go on," said Reese harshly.

"I'm a detective," said Minot. "Without bragging I may say that I'm one of the star Greenham operatives. I wouldn't have had this case if I wasn't. And I'll tell you how the facts look to me. Forget, for a minute, that you've been trying to hang this thing on me; just remember that I'm a first-class detective. And try and think you've engaged me to solve this mystery and that I'm doing it. Listen!

"Miss Gilman said she heard a shot and rushed to her uncle's room. She tells you that she found him dead upon the floor. She makes her story seem good by putting in little absurd things like her uncle's absent-mindedness and her fear that he'd pick his teeth with his gun and that sort of thing. Wants us to believe that he kept his revolver, like his toothbrush, in a glass. But don't forget this: she was the first one in the room; she was the one to cry for help; she was the one to find his body!"

"And you were the one," cried Reese,

"to open the door and fire the shot! You were the one to race down the corridor, pass through the French windows, leap to the ground, run through the woods to the lake, and discard the incriminating overshoes. If you didn't commit the murder, why did you do that?"

Minot smiled.

"That was my fool play," he said. "You wonder why? Well, as I knelt before the major's door I heard a shot fired inside his room. I heard him crash to the floor. Naturally, I was startled. But it came to me immediately that outside that door was no place for me. It didn't make any difference who fired that shot, or why. I might get mixed up in it some way or other. And that might mean that I'd lose my chance of getting those plans. Don't ask me why; a man doesn't do much reasoning at a moment like that.

"I seemed to feel that it was no accident that had discharged the weapon in that room. I sensed death in the report! And death by violence is an ugly thing. I couldn't be mixed up in it; I couldn't be held as a witness to murder or suicide and prevented from taking my chance for those plans.

"So I rushed down the hall, through the windows, to the ground and down to the lake where I met Ravenell and warned him to keep his mouth shut. So we took a good long walk on the ice and came back unconcerned. And that's my part of it, except for this!"

He rose and pointed at Miss Gilman.

"She wasn't in the room when I looked through the major's window. He was alone. You, Dr. Reese, say it wasn't accident and couldn't have been suicide! So it was murder! And you've accounted for every single person that was in the house, or could have been in the house, except me, and I account for myself, here and now. I've told the truth and you know I've told the truth. And she knows it.

"The major was alone in his room when I looked in his window. Two minutes later, when I knelt before his door, some one else was in the room. There must have been, if it wasn't accident or suicide; and you're a doctor, Reese; you know! Who was that person, then? If it wasn't me it must have been Miss Gilman."

"But where's your proof?" demanded Reese.

"Proof? Do I talk like a man that's lying?"

In very truth, he did not. Damnable as was his accusation against Ruth Gilman, preposterous, absurd beyond reason, I yet doubt if a single one of us that heard him doubted his own innocence. Beyond question he had not killed Major Penrose. No man that ever lived, be he ever so great an actor, could have played the part of honesty so well unless, indeed, he were honest. The very fact that Minot's confession proved him to be devoid of honor was argument, strangely enough, in his favor, now. I can not explain this. I only know that I felt it and the others, too.

But something more than mere belief in his words was needed.

"Where's your proof?" demanded Reese hoarsely.

Minot turned to the girl again. Again his long slim forefinger singled her out.

"You were in that room," he said. "You can not deny it! For the major's door was locked when I knelt before it! Deny it if you can!"

He paused, and we who had held our breath breathed deeply once again. If this were his proof, we could not understand it.

"Well, what does that prove?" demanded Reese.

Minot laughed harshly.

"No two keys in this hotel are alike. I know. It was my business to find out if the key to my room would fit the lock of the major's door. There are forty odd keys hanging behind the office desk. No two of them are alike. The major's door was locked. Only one key could unlock it. Yet Miss Gilman would have us believe that she was not in her uncle's room when the shot was fired!

"If she wasn't in there, then, how did she get in there later? Is it reasonable to believe that her uncle permitted her to lock him in? Rot, and you all know it! Would a grown man permit a young girl to lock him in his room and make off with the key? Nonsense! Yet that door was locked, and when people came running to her, it was unlocked. Does she want us to believe that she unlocked it—from the outside?

"And yet, if she were innocent of murder, that was what she must have done—unlocked it from the outside. And if she were guilty of murder, she unlocked it from the inside! I dare her to deny that that is what she did."

HE PAUSED dramatically and stared around at us. At the expressions on our faces a sense of his fatuity reached him. He gasped and sank back into his chair. For in the minds of every one of us the same conclusion had been reached. There was only Minot's word for it that the door had been locked.

Against that word was all the other evidence against him; his possible motive, the theft of the plans, his flight. And yet, with that word of his was arrayed something else —the knowledge of his own innocence of the crime that had made him rely so utterly on his own knowledge of the locked door. For it was knowledge, not a mere makeshift lie. Had it been a lie, he would not have been so carefree, would not have staked his all upon it. I think that each and every one of us was psychologist enough to guess that.

Yet as evidence it didn't weigh. It was his single word, and he was a suspected person. He had made the great mistake common to all innocent persons—that of thinking that their own words weigh for something.

Had he been in Reese's place he would have laughed at such a defense. Had he been engaged by a suspected murderer, he would have laughed at relying for acquittal upon such a plea. But because he was innocent, he had advanced it confidently, certain of being cleared. And now his much-relied-on evidence had fallen flat. His story had only tended to incriminate him the more.

He felt it; he saw it; he heard it in our labored breathing. And yet, also, he saw the belief written upon our countenances, in our eyes. It was not evidence that he had given us; it was something greater, it was truth. We knew it. He knew that we knew it. Slowly the courage that had ebbed from him at sight of the first incredulous amazement on our faces came back to him. He read the unwilling belief in his honesty that replaced amazement.

"Ask her," he cried shakily, "ask her."

But there was no need to ask her. Miss Gilman had risen from her chair and was pointing at him.

"Then you didn't do it," she said. "You didn't do it!" She turned to Dr. Reese. "He—couldn't have done it—he couldn't have done it."

"You mean—that the door was locked? You didn't tell us before!"

A hush followed his words; the jurymen stared at her wonderingly. As for myself, I would have leaped forward to restrain her speech, but that emotion held me paralyzed. Not that I believed for a moment in the theory of Minot, but that I was afraid the others might; that they might snatch upon some unguarded word and twist its meaning. But I could not move, so overwhelmed was I.

She shook her head.

"Not locked. But a cane was placed against the handle. I didn't think—never thought about it. It was uncle's habit. He would wedge a cane against the doorknob, its other end resting on the floor. It saved him from getting up to unlock the door. He always did it when he was working. You see, if any one came to the door and tried it, they would think it locked. But if he wanted them to come in—his study, wherever he happened to be, had to be cleaned once a day, you know—why, he could just call out to them to enter. Then, by pushing hard, as people will when the door doesn't give at first, the cane would be dislodged and entrance would be made.

"But if he wished to be undisturbed, he would say so at once. The cane would hold the door against any ordinary attempt at entrance, long enough for him to cry out, at any rate, that he wished to be alone."

"And yesterday?" said Reese, as she paused.

"Why yesterday—when I got there—the door was closed. And when I turned the knob first the door didn't open. But I pushed against it—the cane fell to the floor. It had been there, blocking the door. It must have been there when he," and she looked at Minot, "tried it. And as neither he nor any one else could have placed the cane there after killing uncle—he has told the truth. And I—I never thought of it till now. It was such a little thing it didn't impress me. I was so used to it. But now I see how important——"

Slowly her face, that had been white, flamed with color.

"You don't think, you don't dream," she cried, "that I—oh, you can't! It's too awful!"

She hid her face in her hands a moment. When she lifted her eyes again they looked straight at Minot.

"Why should you say such a thing? Why

should you accuse me?" She looked at Reese, at Carney, at the jurymen. "Why should I do it? My own uncle, whom I loved? Who had taken care of me—who—oh!"

Again her face was hidden in the agony of her grief and horror.

"Supposing," said Minot coolly, "that Miss Gilman wanted to sell those plans to some one? For a private fortune for herself? How about that?"

"She delivered them to the English agent, didn't she?" snapped Reese.

"She might 'a' lost her nerve after bumping the old man off," sneered Minot.

"Silence!" almost roared Reese. He spoke to the girl. "Miss Gilman, you are sure that the sound of running feet, the noise at the window, was almost simultaneous with the shot?"

"Just before it," she answered.

Reese turned to me.

"Wrenham, it was undoubtedly Minot that you heard going by your door. Could he have had time to go out the major's window upon the balcony, after firing the shot, and come around to the French windows, into the hall, by your door?"

I shook my head. Almost murderous as my sentiments were toward Minot, I must tell the truth.

"The footsteps sounded too soon after the shot," I said.

"And don't forget," said Minot jeeringly, his sang-froid fully recovered now that the girl had corroborated his testimony as to the locked door, "that the footprints I made on the balcony show me starting from the French windows and returning to them."

Reese turned to the jury.

"Mr. Foreman and gentlemen," he said, "you have heard the evidence. There were four people upon the second floor, Tony Larue, Mr. Sidney Wrenham, Minot, and Miss Gilman. Larue was playing his violin at the moment the shot was fired. That is clearly established. Wrenham had been upon the balcony earlier, but has proved that he was not there when the shot was fired. Minot's footprints are above those of Mr. Wrenham, and Minot, therefore, was there later than Mr. Wrenham. And as Minot was there just a moment before the shot was fired, it is clear that Mr. Wrenham could not have fired it. Indeed, the fact that a cane was placed against the door in such a fashion that it could only have been placed there from the inside, is proof that neither Minot nor Wrenham had any part in the killing.

"It might be argued that Wrenham, whose footsteps lead from his window along the balcony by Major Penrose's room to the French windows, could have entered the room and fired the shot and then continued to the French windows. If Minot had not been on the balcony after Wrenham that theory might sound good. But Minot was on the balcony after Wrenham, therefore Mr. Wrenham is exculpated.

"The testimony of Miss Gilman and Wrenham as to the time of hearing the footsteps is proof that Minot did not fire the shot. What he just said about his double track of footprints has little bearing on the situation. He might have entered the major's room by the window and retired the same way. It wouldn't have been necessary for him to go through the major's door first. But it is the element of time that clearly exonerates Minot.

"Of course, there is something in Minot's mention of his double footprints. He could not have entered the major's room without forcing the windows, which were closed and latched. He could not have done that—nor could Wrenham or any one else—without disturbing the major. And it is unreasonable to suppose that a retired army officer would sit complacently waiting for a burglarious visitor to shoot him down. But unreasonable things sometimes happen. When we know that something happened, and know equally that it could only have happened in an unreasonable way, then we accept the unreasonableness of the happening.

"If it were not for the time element, we would have to believe, knowing that he had a motive that might inspire murder, that Minot had somehow forced the major's window, let himself in, and made his escape by the balcony. But we know that he could not have done that. He didn't have time. So we come to his stopping at the major's door, after he had spied through the major's window.

"He says the door was locked. Miss Gilman at once accepts his statement as proof of his innocence. And so, gentlemen, must we. We know that a cane wedged against the doorknob would make the door, to a gentle, cautious touch, seem locked. We know that a cane could not be placed against the knob in such a fashion as to wedge the

door tight, save from the inside of the room. That is elementary knowledge. Minot could not have pushed the door open, shot the major and replaced the cane against the inside of the door.

"Until Miss Gilman testified to the presence of the cane there, it looked as though the evidence was all against Minot. But she states that the cane was there when she rushed to her uncle's room. I, myself, have seen the cane lying on the floor of the major's room; so have you jurymen, but we attached no importance to it. But now it is of extreme importance. Until Miss Gilman mentioned it, there was every reason to believe that Minot, having spied upon the major, came around to his door and shot him. I believed that.

"Owing to Wrenham's and Miss Gilman's previous testimony yesterday, about the time, I did not believe that Minot had made his escape from the room by way of the balcony. I had figured that he undoubtedly had spied first, and then entered the room by the hall door. But now—with Miss Gilman's testimony confronting that theory, we have to discard it. Murderer though Minot may have been at heart, he did not kill Major Penrose. There remains but one other person who was upon that floor.

"Gentlemen, that person is Miss Ruth Gilman. A moment ago, all she had to do, to avert even the breath of suspicion, was say that Minot lied about the door. But you saw her and heard her. You saw how she at once came to Minot's rescue and saved him with a word. Would a woman who had slain her own uncle do that? Would she not, instead, have said that the door was not locked, and told the technical truth and cast all suspicion upon Minot?

"Of course she would—had she been guilty! But none of us here need waste time over the foolish charges of Minot. He himself, considering that she saved him by a word, must realize that his suspicions are mad. Miss Gilman is innocent.

"Yet I can not recant my testimony to you. I say that Major Penrose was shot down in the midst of work by a hand other than his own. He did not kill himself. He could not have done so. While at work on some calculations—that did not have to do, Miss Gilman tells me, with the submarine plans, but were some figures on a military bridge which the major was interested in—while it was thought necessary that he pretend work on the plans of the submarine it was not necessary that he waste time in aimless calculations—he was shot down. But not by the hand of his niece. Had she killed him would she so frankly admit that the door was locked? Certainly not! None of us would ever have suspected that the cane lying on the floor had been used to bar the door.

"The evidence all pointed to Minot. Yet she saved him, at imminent risk to herself. A murderess, cold-blooded, crafty, would not have done that.

"So, gentlemen, we come to the conclusion that some one other than the four persons on that corridor floor killed Major Penrose. Who, I can not guess. The mystery is too much for me. According to the testimony, there was no one else above the ground floor. And those on the ground floor could hardly have committed the crime. The cook, the waitress, the chambermaid—all accounted for by their own and their mutually corroborative testimony. Captain Perkins's voice was heard to cry out from this floor just after Miss Gilman cried out.

"It might be argued that Captain Perkins could have fired the shot and run down to the office here, and then started upstairs again. But Captain Perkins is not the spry officer he was twenty or thirty years ago. I am his physician. I know that Captain Perkins could not run along that corridor without shaking the building." He smiled faintly. "If Captain Perkins had ever run down those stairs one of the people downstairs would have known it. The stairs would have cried aloud in agony.

"But all this is folly. Minot testifies that the shot was fired while he knelt outside the door. That meant that the murderer was inside the room at that moment! Gentleman, whoever was in there must have got out. Yet there are no marks on the balcony save those already accounted for, made by Wrenham and Minot. And he could not have left by the door, because of the cane later found wedging the door shut by Miss Gilman. And the very nature of Miss Gilman's testimony, her quick exoneration of Minot, proves that she is not the person to have done this; that she did not enter the room while Minot was making his way along the balcony, to kill her uncle while the detective knelt outside the door,

later to pretend that she had been in her own room, and had run to the major's room on hearing the shot. It is impossible for me, and for you, too, I hope, to believe such a thing of her."

He paused and faced the foreman. That worthy spoke.

"Yet you're certain that it wasn't suicide, and that it couldn't have been accident, doctor?"

"I know it wasn't suicide. As for accident—the testimony is absolute that there was no jar of the building sufficient to cause the tumbler that held the revolver to overturn. Indeed, as you know, the tumbler wasn't overturned. It was merely shattered, with its broken base still lying in its socket."

"And it ain't possible that any one could have been concealed in that room and made his getaway after the door was opened by Miss Gilman?"

"He'd have been seen," said the coroner-doctor.

"And no one's invented an invisible coat yet, have they?" demanded the foreman dryly.

"Not to my knowledge," said Reese.

"Then if it wasn't suicide and there ain't no sane way of figuring that it was accident, it must have been murder." He stared at the doctor a moment. "Dr. Reese," he said, "with all respect to you, we ain't goin' to bring in no such verdict as murder. We don't believe Miss Gilman done it. And I don't believe any of us here take much stock in fairies. And only a fairy, or a devil, or somethin' like that could have murdered Major Penrose. It was an accident.

"You ain't infallible, doctor, with all respect to you. You say it wasn't suicide, and you know more about such things than we do. We'll take your word for it. But when you say it's murder, and then prove it's impossible for it to have been a murder —well, we can't swallow that, doctor. But accident—that's something like."

He turned to his fellow-jurymen.

"Members of this jury," he said, "do we render a verdict that the late Major Samuel Penrose, U. S. A., retired, came to his death by accidental shooting, or don't we? If we bring in a verdict of murder against a person unknown, we make people think that this pore little girl did it, and we didn't have nerve enough to come right out and accuse a lady. Was it an accident?"

A chorus of affirmation answered him. He turned to Reese.

"This jury, coroner, has the honor to report to you that the deceased upstairs come to his death by accident."

Thus informally, grotesquely almost, the jury came to its verdict. Yet I and every one else, I rather imagine, felt that the verdict was entirely unsatisfactory. Involuntarily we all stared at Ruth Gilman, to see how she would take it. And I was the one to catch her as she rose, swayed and pitched forward in a dead faint.

I turned her over to Dr. Reese and Nelly. They carried her upstairs, and the doctor came down a little later. The jury had already scattered to their homes or the village stores to gossip; Minot and Ravenell had been gruffly ordered out of the hotel by Captain Perkins and had departed.

"How is she?" I demanded of Reese.

"She'll pull through," he said. "But some one ought to help her take charge of things—her uncle's body, you know, all that. He is to be buried in Washington, she told me. Asked me to wire friends there to meet her."

"I'll go on with her," I cut in shortly. "Tell her I'll attend to everything."

"I did," he smiled. "And she seemed certain that you would."

"But how is she—mentally? Aside from the shock that she's been suffering."

"Well, can't you guess?" he asked. "Accused of murder—no, not accused, but—she's level-headed. She sees things. That's why she fainted. My God, Wrenham, you must know how she feels. You love her! It's written on your face."

"Yes," I admitted simply.

"Well, think of her position. You and I know, the jury knows, the other witnesses know, that she didn't kill her uncle. But the public, who must read the evidence—thank God there were no newspaper men present—but later the newspaper men will get hold of the jurymen. There'll be talk. The public will ask, the public who don't know her, who've never seen her sweet, honest, brave face—who never will see it—the public will ask: 'If she didn't do it, who did?'

"Wrenham, you love her. It's up to you to get the finest detectives in America and put them on this case. It's up to you to clear her. Also, in the meantime, until she is cleared, it's up to you to pretend that

she's cleared already. She won't believe you, but the fact that you don't doubt her —you don't, do you?" he asked savagely.

"Good God, no!" I ejaculated. "Why do you ask?"

"I loved a woman," he said drearily. "I married her. I suspected her. The evidence was all against her—oh, absolutely, no sane man could have doubted it! I sent her away. I drove her from me. And—and Wrenham, the evidence still stands against my wife, but—but I know! She wasn't guilty. She never pleaded, never denied—went away when I sent her. She died. And still the evidence stands. And yet—oh, my God, Wrenham, I know. I know that she was innocent! And so—though it wasn't suicide, though it wasn't accident, though Ruth Gilman was the only one who could have killed her uncle—I know she didn't. And if I know it, who do not love her but who only remember that I misjudged the woman I did love—Wrenham, never doubt her. Trust her!"

"To the end," I said.

"But clear her! The shadow—always over her—she feels it now, poor girl, upstairs, white, stunned. The shadow will always be there. Wrenham, you're clever. You created Weatherby Jones. Make him real. Make him solve this problem of real life. If he can't, get a real human being and make him do it. Clear her!"

I bowed my head in assent. Then I raised it.

"Who's the correspondent for the Portland paper here? No press association man, is there?"

"No, just a Portland correspondent."

"Has he wired anything yet?"

"We're a little village," smiled Reese. "No one has wired the papers. The correspondent has been on a hunting trip. He's away now. But when he comes back—I see your plan. Oh, yes, I could shut his mouth. But you can't muzzle the press; you can't hide things from it. Sooner or later it leaks out, and the longer it's delayed, the more pains you've taken to hide it, the worse it seems. Moreover, Penrose was an army man. The papers will want something. I'll do what I can, but—Wrenham, it's up to you."

His manner changed.

"Here are some addresses she sent me. Friends in Washington who'll take care of that end. She wouldn't even let me wire yesterday of her uncle's death, any more than she'd talk about Minot or Ravenell. Duty, her uncle's honor, came first. When she'd kept his pledge for him, and had given Britain the plans which one of Britain's sons had helped create—Wrenham, she's one in a thousand. In a million! I wish you luck."

THAT night a special car attached to the regular train bore Major Penrose's body, Ruth Gilman, and Nelly the cook, hastily engaged to act as nurse and companion to Ruth, and myself, acting as courier and general factotum, to Portland. We reached Washington the following night, and the next day Major Penrose was buried in the family plot in the cemetery outside the Capital. Knowing that the girl was with friends, I would have left Washington immediately after the funeral but that she sent word she wished to see me.

At the house of the friends with whom she was to stay a while, she received me. White, dark hollows under her eyes, her mourning somehow accentuating her slimness, she looked fragile.

She gave me her hand.

"Words," she said, "are useless wherewith to pay a debt. I owe you so much and I can only say—thank you."

"Some day," I replied, relinquishing her hand, "you may say less than that to me, and still make me happier. At present your thanks are reward enough for what little I've done."

"Little! So much!" She sat down and a blush colored her cheeks. "I won't pretend to misunderstand what you mean," she said. "That wouldn't be fair. Not when you've done so much for me. To say less than 'thank you' would be to say——"

" 'Yes,' " said I. "But I shouldn't have suggested, so soon, I mean, when you are upset."

"Why not?" she asked sadly. "We haven't known each other long, but so much has happened. I guessed how you felt—in the path when you rescued me from those brutes," she shuddered.

"And you?" I queried boldly. "Will it be—oh, I know I shouldn't ask you; not yet! But I want so much."

"Could you want a girl who had thought so evilly of you? Who had so little self-respect that she went to your berth in the night, and——"

"I know all about that," I interrupted her. "You thought I was a spy. You thought you might find something in my suit-case or pocketbook that would tell you whether I was or not. You were acting from the highest motives; not only were you trying to help your uncle keep his word to a dead man, but you were trying to prevent a country other than England from obtaining possession of what belonged to the United States and Great Britain. Honor and patriotism! I hope no action of mine is guided by lesser motives!"

"You knew, then? And still, you—cared?"

"Cared? Oh, my dear, if you knew how much! If you'd let me tell you——"

"Sh-sh-sh!" Her hand touched my mouth, to silence me, for a blessed second, and I kissed it before she could draw it away.

More deeply, she colored. And then the blush receded and pain appeared in her eyes.

"If they had called it murder," she said—and I knew that she referred to the verdict of the coroner's jury—"it would not be so bad. The world would say, 'If it was murder, she couldn't have done it, because the jury weighed the evidence against her right then and there.'

"But accident—when sooner or later the papers will publish accounts of the conflicting testimony—they are content to call it accident, now, because all the details have not come to light. But when they do—when the world knows that I was the only one who could—don't you see? The world will say, 'That jury took pity on her because she was a girl. Accident? Murder, more likely. And she did it.'

"Don't you see? It was chivalrous of them to render that verdict, but mistaken chivalry. Better for me to have been tried. I could not have been convicted as I had no motive. My name would have been blackened, yes. But the courts would have made it as white as possible, again. But now those who—love me, can not silence the tongue of slander with the statement that a jury found me innocent. Always it will seem that the jury protected me by calling it accident! To be tried for murder would have been dreadful. But at least, the man who—who married me would know what he had to face. His friends would say, 'He married her; he must know she's innocent.'

"But now—accident! And the man who married me would have to face the pity and scorn of his friends. People would despise her and him. They would say, 'Poor fool, he didn't know about her. He was fooled by that accident verdict. But every one knows.'

"Don't you see? When a charge has been faced and defeated, one can get the benefit of the doubt. But when the charge has not been legally made——"

She lifted her burning eyes to me.

"It can never be," she said simply.

"No? What do we care what fools say?" I cried.

"We do care. We must care. Marriage concerns more than husband and wife. There might be—children," she breathed. "And their mother's name would be a thing for slanderers to bandy about. I couldn't. For your sake, for—others'."

I knew she meant it, and desolation stretched before me.

"But if," I said, "I could find the real murderer——"

"Oh, then," she cried, "then I would say yes."

"I'll find him," I promised grimly. "If I spend the rest of my life, I'll find him."

I rose to my feet, and she held out her hand. Her figure shook and her lips trembled.

"If—if you do—come to me," she whispered. "But not until then. You understand. You're young. Sooner or later, if we don't see each other, you'll forget. At least, it won't be so hard—for me, too. And you don't want to make it hard, do you? Oh, Sidney!"

Once only I kissed her. Then she pushed me gently from her, and I left the house.

XVI

FOR the dozenth time I reread her letter. It was dated from Washington, early in May.

My Dear Sidney:

This is the last letter I shall write. It is not fair to you and, oh, my dear, it is very hard for me. Your letters make it harder; and if I should see you, as you beg, it would be almost unbearable. You must give me up.

You say that the papers have forgotten all about my uncle's death, months ago. But have you forgotten what was printed the week after his funeral, when bits of gossip from the villagers of Folly Cove sifted to Portland and thence to the whole country? Have you forgotten that, while none of them made

any direct charge against me, all of them commented on the fact that a qualified physician, Dr. Reese, had sworn that my uncle did not kill himself, and that all the evidence went to prove that it was not by accident that he died?

Have you forgotten that, and what sneering comments were editorially made about the manner in which women murderers were treated in this country? How it was easy for any woman to kill, provided that she were reasonably young and not too ugly?

You say that your friends, knowing that you were down at the Inn at the time of the death of my uncle, must realize that you would have to be absolutely certain of my innocence to marry me, and that you would be more likely to know of my innocence than people who merely read the newspapers. That is all very well, but aren't they liable to think that you are blinded by love?

You say that the papers have forgotten all about the affair. Don't you know that our marriage would but revive the gossip? And I couldn't bear it—for your sake. I could stand it myself, knowing of my innocence, but for you to have a wife whom constantly you would feel it necessary to defend—I could not.

I know that my friends believe in me; your friends might come to believe in me, too. But always there would be the doubt. I could not stand it. It is hard to stand it alone, but I am alone. I have not dragged another into the mire. And I will not.

Give me up, Sidney, and give it up. You have employed the best detectives in the country. They can come to no conclusion—I read between your lines—but that my uncle died the victim of a murderer—or murderess. And the last means me. They say it was no suicide, according to the testimony, and that it could not have been accident. Also, they can discover no traces of any other person besides those already accounted for, having been in the hotel. And you are where you started. So give it up.

You have spent months in trying to arrive at a conclusion that will clear me. And you have failed. There is no solution humanly capable of discovery. It makes me think—oh, Sidney, I lie awake at night and wonder if there is such a thing as a real devil, and why he chose me as the victim of suspicion. What have I done that I should walk beneath a cloud? My uncle! Whom I loved better than any one on earth—until I met you, Sidney, dear. My uncle! I wonder if Fate has laid a plot to ruin me, to make me miserable, and why!

But, oh, my dear, I should be a thousand times more miserable if I thought that I had rendered you an object of contempt. And marriage to a woman who will always lie under the suspicion of murder would make you contemptible. I could not do it. I will not do it.

It is hard, Sidney, but because I can not bear too much. I will not write to you again. And you will not write to me—not if you really love me. For your letters but reopen the wound in my heart, and —oh, Sidney, best of men, truest of lovers, good-by.

Unhappily, RUTH.

And so it ended. I folded it up and placed it in my pocket. I left my rooms and wandered out in the bright May afternoon. It was over. I had tried; I had brought every bit of my own brain to the solution of the mystery, and I had failed. Weatherbee Jones, my own creation, could not solve this mystery. Nor could any of the real detectives whom I had sent to Folly Cove.

It was ended. The only girl whom I would ever love, whom I would ever wish to make my wife, was too brave and devoted a spirit to let the shadow over her cloud me. Not that I would have refused to walk beneath the shadow, with her.

I had written her. I had reasoned with her and argued with her. I had tried to make her see that nothing mattered if we loved. I had offered to go away with her, anywhere, far from the United States, with only my agent knowing my address. But she would not do it. It was not lack of love that made her refuse; it was the abundance of it. She could bear her undeserved fate herself, but she would not let me share it. It was the end.

A moving-picture theater's flaring bills caught my eye. Hardly knowing that I did so, I bought a ticket and entered.

It was dark inside, save for the light that played upon the screen. There, in the darkness, I could gather my wits, try to plan some method of overcoming her resistance. And yet, at the end of an hour, I had thought of no way of doing it. I had known as much when I entered the place.

Restless, I rose. As I did so, I noticed that a war picture was being shown. German soldiers were advancing along a country road. They came to a bridge. As they crossed the slight wooden structure they broke ranks, and instead of marching in order straggled across in apparent confusion. As I passed the couple next me in the row I heard one of them say:

"If they kept in step they might shake the bridge down, you know. Vibration."

Then I wedged by them and gained the aisle. Outside I decided to drop in on Billy Odlin. Since my return from Maine with Major Penrose's body I had resumed the old intimacy with him, and his Madison Avenue house saw me quite frequently. He greeted me warmly.

"Well, how's the claustrophobia, Sid?" he demanded.

"Just been to a movie," I told him wearily, "and the crowd didn't phase me at all."

"Then I did right in sending you to

Maine, eh?" He laughed. Then he sobered. "Still fretted about that affair? The lady won't yield her position?"

I told him—he knew all about the Folly Cove Inn mystery, and my regard for Ruth Gilman—of her last letter.

He frowned sympathetically.

"At that, Sid, though, she's right," he said when I'd finished. "It wouldn't do. Not that I'd not stick by you, old man, but —well, it wouldn't do, for either of you. She'd eat her heart thinking of the false position she'd put you in, and you'd worry about her. Sid, the best thing you can do is forget her. No, not yet a while!"

"Forget her? Never," I said.

"That's right; don't—for a while, anyway."

"That's twice you've said that. What do you mean?"

"Remember what I told you last January? That a great crisis might cure you of your claustrophobia?"

"Well?"

"Hasn't this affair been enough to take your mind off your own petty worries? Oh, of course, you've worried because you couldn't have the young lady, but you've worried mostly—you're a white man, you know, Sid—about her. Eh? Meanwhile, you've forgotten your own nervousness. You went to a movie show today, didn't you? No nervousness? Well, that's what I mean. If you continue this way a little longer the trouble will never come back. Don't forget her yet."

"I won't," I said shortly.

Yet he had told the truth. My love for Ruth Gilman and my thought on her behalf had rid me of my nervousness. But I wished to talk of her no more. My heart was too sore. Billy picked up an instrument from a table and placed it on the mantelpiece.

"What's that?" I asked idly. "Doesn't look like a surgical tool."

"It isn't," laughed Billy. "Man was here tuning the piano up-stairs today. Left his tuning-fork behind him. I brought it downstairs to have it ready for him if he calls. Why, Sid, what's the matter? What's wrong, old chap? You're white as a ——"

"Shut up," I cried, "Let me think!"

For a gleam of light had come to me. I heard again the words of the youth in the movie theater, explaining to his girl companion why the German infantry broke ranks when crossing a bridge. Vibration!

I almost staggered as I gained my feet.

"Billy," I gasped, "let me use your 'phone —long distance—I've got it! I think I've got it! I want to tell her."

It took me only twenty mintues to get Ruth Gilman, in Washington, on the telephone. I spoke to her only one minute.

"This is Sidney," I said. "Ruth, I think there's a chance—a bare chance—that I know how your uncle was killed. Can you catch the next afternoon train for here? You can? Bring some one along with you. Nelly still with you? Bring her. We're going right through to Boston on the midnight train and from there to Portland. Don't build too much, dear, but I think—I hope—you must hurry and pack for the train? Then good-by."

I hung up and turned to Billy Odlin. He eyed me curiously.

"Sid, I've not pestered you while you waited for the connection. But now—you haven't gone crazy, I'm sure—but what on earth has possessed you? Do you really think——"

"Listen," I said to him.

He listened while I talked for five minutes. As I ended, he shook his head.

"Only one chance in a million, Sid, I'm afraid."

"But isn't that better than no chance at all?" I cried. "And if God is good, and lets the millionth chance occur, Sid, it clears her—forever! For there was no motive for her to do it. All I've got to show, to convince the whole world, is that it could have happened without her doing it. Just that! And that, if God wills it, I'll show tomorrow afternoon!

"Now, then, let me have pen and ink. I want to write a telegram to Dr. Reese."

REESE had complied with the request in my telegram to him. In the office of the Folly Cove Inn, next afternoon, were gathered all the witnesses of the tragedy, the twelve jurymen who had brought in the verdict of accidental death four months ago, Sheriff Carney, the coroner, and of course, Ruth Gilman and myself.

Ruth leaned upon the arm of Nelly, the ex-cook at the Inn, now a sort of personal attendant of the girl I loved. I cleared my throat and the little assemblage became silent.

"I'm not going to make a speech," I began. "I'm merely going to tell you that I think I can solve the mystery of Major Penrose's death. You all know that I've had detectives down here and that they have failed. What you don't know, but possibly have guessed, is that I've thought of practically nothing else save this mystery since it occurred. I have racked my brain trying to reach a solution. I have thought of every possible explanation and at last I think I have hit upon the true one.

"Major Penrose, despite Dr. Reese's evidence, was not murdered. Only one person, unless we believe in the possibility of the murderer having been invisible, which we don't, could have killed him, if he was murdered. That person is his niece, and we all know that she is innocent. But we must believe that it was not suicide. Dr. Reese's evidence is proof enough of that, and that evidence we can not doubt. So then, of the three methods by which the major may have died, murder, suicide and accident, we eliminate the first two. There remains only accident.

"The testimony at the inquest was conclusive, it appeared, that there had been no jar of the building sufficient to overturn the glass which held the major's revolver. Therefore, we all dismissed the idea of accident at once. Yes, even you jurymen, who brought in a verdict of accidental death! You did not believe that accident was the cause of death. But because you would not, could not, believe that Miss Gilman had committed murder, you called it accident. And it was.

"You see, we all failed to consider that the revolver could have been discharged in any fashion save by a jar of the building that overturned the glass, and as no such jar had occurred, we privately, no matter what our public convictions, dismissed the idea of accident, and believed that some one, somehow, other than those known to be in the hotel, had committed the murder.

"For none of us stopped to think that the revolver might have been discharged without there having been any jar sufficient to dislodge the glass from its socket. Only a jar that would have overturned the glass could have discharged the revolver, we reasoned. The bottom of the tumbler still remained in the socket; therefore the glass had not been overturned. Therefore, there was no accident. So we believed.

"But we forgot this: we forgot that it was not necessary for the glass to be overturned to discharge that cocked and loaded weapon! If the glass broke, if its sides were shattered, the revolver would naturally fall over upon the wash-stand, wouldn't it? And the fall would discharge it just as surely as a jar that overturned the tumbler would have discharged it! Isn't that so?

"And that tumbler was shattered! Yet, because there had been no jar of the building, we permitted ourselves to lose sight of that all-important fact—the glass was shattered! We paid no attention to it; we didn't even investigate it. There had been no jar, the tumbler was not overturned, merely shattered. Therefore it was unimportant. We didn't even bother to speculate on why and how that glass came to be shattered. We assumed—at least I did—that the murderer must have broken it when he snatched up the revolver. And we were so busy trying to figure out how the murderer made his escape that we didn't bother about the glass.

"Yet that shattered tumbler was all-important. For if we could prove that an accident had shattered it—but there could have been none, you say? Only a jar of the building, and there was no jar. So, gentlemen, we all figured. All of us, including myself, until yesterday. But yesterday——

"There seems little connection between a moving picture of German infantry crossing a little wooden bridge in France and an ordinary piano repairer's tuning-fork, and the death of Major Penrose. But there is, and I will show you the connection.

"Early yesterday afternoon I saw, in the moving pictures, German soldiers breaking ranks to cross a bridge. I heard a young man tell his girl companion that they did so lest vibration shake down the bridge. Half an hour after that I saw, in the office of a medical friend of mine, a tuning-fork. I did not recognize it for what it was at first glance, but, on being told, the words of the young man in the moving-picture theater came instantly back to me—'Vibration!'

"And then flashed into my mind the one and only solution of the mystery of Major Penrose's death. Why I had not thought of it before I can not tell you. Why I thought of it at that moment I can not tell you. But I suppose that somewhere in the back of my brain lurked a dissatisfaction at our too easy assumption that the murderer

had broken the glass in his grab at the revolver, an assumption that was so plain that none of us voiced it. We took it for granted—at least, I did, and I think I am right in saying that the rest of you did. That is, if you thought of it at all, if you had not lost sight of it entirely in the presence of the greater problem—Who did it? How?

"But I have thought of nothing else save this mystery for four months. I have weighed it again and again; I have looked at it from every angle, and I suppose that, having rejected every other happening as having no bearing on the situation, my brain unconsciously seized upon this incident of the broken glass at a moment when vibration had been mentioned and had been suggested by the tuning-fork. But we don't care how or why I happened to think of it. It is enough that I did."

I paused for breath and to wipe away the perspiration that was streaming down my face.

"But if vibration broke the glass, what caused the vibration?" demanded Reese. "There was no jar."

"Have you forgotten," I demanded, "that Tony Larue played the violin that afternoon? That he was playing it at the moment the shot was heard?"

Reese stared.

"And you've banked everything on that? On a chance that may never happen again, if it did happen four months ago?"

"On what else could I bank?" I demanded. "There is no other solution."

"But even if it were possible—if it *did* happen—only by its happening again can we convince the world that it happened then. And that—why, Wrenham, from your telegram I thought you had some evidence! But this—there isn't a chance in a million that——"

"So my friend Dr. Odlin assured me," I cried. "But when there is nothing else to do but take a chance in a million, what can one do? Doesn't a drowning man snatch at a straw? You've brought the major's revolver? You've loaded it with blank cartridges? Then we'll try it. And if we fail—doctor, the name and happiness of a woman depends on success.

"If Major Penrose died as I think he did, it was God's will, for He rules all. But I can not think that it is His will that an innocent woman should suffer shame. And remember this, doctor; what has happened once can happen again. It may not happen, but it can. The chances may be a million to one against its happening twice, but—it's possible! And the possibility is what we're going to try and achieve. Shall we go up-stairs?"

"But I don't get this at all," complained the voice of Carney. "It's Chinese to me, and to most of us here, I guess."

"Listen," I said. "I'm not much on science. I've forgotten about all the physics I ever learned at school. But I remember this much—all matter vibrates. Everything vibrates, even sound. And in the text-books at school they tell you that a sound will shatter glass. It is that knowledge that was brought back to me by the word of the youth at the picture theater, and by the sight of a tuning-fork while the recollection of his word was fresh in my memory.

"The tumbler that held the major's revolver was shattered. There was no jar to shatter it. He could not have shattered it himself because he was sitting at his desk, writing, in the very middle of a word when he was killed. No one could have thrown anything into the room to shatter the glass because the door was shut and wedged tightly, and his windows were closed, and there were no traces on the balcony of any one having been there save Minot and myself, who were accounted for. Unless then, the major's niece had lied, there was no one in the room to have fired the shot and broken the glass. But we—we knew that she had not lied! We know it still, no matter how this experiment comes out. But if it comes out well the fact that the major could have died by accident is enough! It will clear her, forever! It is only because the world at large thinks that she and she alone could have caused his death that it deems her guilty. Prove that there was another way——

"Everything vibrates! And this is what came back to me from my study years ago at school. Sound will shatter glass if the vibration of the sound is equal to the vibration of the glass. Huge buildings could be destroyed by sound, if one could only create the properly vibrating sound. And here is the principle.

"Let us say—I do not pretend to be exact—that the mass of a glass vibrates four hundred times a second. Let a sound be made that vibrates four hundred times a

second, near to the glass. Those vibrations of the sound—waves, so to speak—will accelerate the vibration of the glass. For instance, as the edges of the glass draw together, the sound vibrations will push them closer than their own vibration would do.

"Keep that up a moment. Each vibration of the sound adds to the pressure upon the glass of its own vibration. Instead of the edges drawing closer by the one-thousandth of an inch, let us say, the sound vibration causes the edges to draw closer by two-thousandths of an inch. And that strain, repeated, not normal, will sometimes shatter the glass. But the sound vibrations must be exactly as numerous as the glass vibrations. Otherwise, the sound vibrations, instead of accelerating the glass vibrations, will impede and stop them.

"For instance, let us say that the sound vibrations measure eight hundred to the second and that the glass vibrations measure four hundred. The edges of the glass draw together. They are struck by the first wave of the sound. They draw closer together. But as they react and draw apart, they are struck by the second wave of the sound. They are struck just as they are swinging back into the normal, prepared to spread outward instead of inward.

"But that second blow from the sound vibration checks the tendency to swing outward. It stops the vibratory movement for a fraction of a second. The next sound vibration combines with the natural vibration and causes the edges of the tumbler to draw closer again, but when they swing back—the same thing over again. The faster vibrations of the sound check the retreating, so to speak, vibrations of the glass.

"So, then, it is only when the sound waves and the vibratory waves of the glass are equal in number that anything can happen. For the two work in unison. The glass vibrates inward. The sound wave, striking upon the glass at the same moment that its own natural inward vibration occurs, drives it a little farther inward than natural. So, when, the pressure of the sound vibration is released, coincident with the cessation of its own inward vibration, the edges swing back and outward, unimpeded by a following blow of the second vibration.

"As a swing is accelerated by pushes that are all of equal strength, and yet flies higher each time, so does the glass act. With each continuing vibration of sound its edges go farther in, then farther out, than is normal. The strain becomes too great—the glass is shattered.

"Do I make myself clear?"

Reese nodded, but the others stared at me blankly.

"I guess it's all right," said Carney, "but—suppose you come up-stairs and show us."

"But why didn't the other tumbler break, too?" queried Reese.

"I can only account for that," I answered, "by the supposition that the presence of the revolver in the broken tumbler, the pressure of it as it leaned against the side, made it more susceptible to the sound vibrations. Come!"

THE door of the major's room was closed. In a tumbler upon the wash-stand reposed the revolver which had killed him—this time loaded with blank cartridges. At the end of the hall—I was no scientist, and I did not know whether or not the breathing of a score of persons would affect my experiment—were grouped all of us save Tony Larue. And from his room came the strains of that wildly passionate Portuguese love-song which he had played upon the day of the major's death.

Slowly the music rose. It burst into wild crescendo. I felt the fingers of Ruth Gilman dig into my arm. I felt the sweat rolling, cascading almost, down my face. Yet I moved not a muscle to wipe it away. From the corners of my eyes I saw that the strain had affected the others.

White, grim, eyes staring, we waited. And as we waited, I prayed. Prayed God that He would suffer no harm to come to Ruth Gilman. I thought not at all of myself, of the happiness that would be mine if her name were cleared. I thought, thank God, only of her. Of what it meant to her. And as the music rose I felt an emptiness in the pit of my stomach. One chance in a million! A million to one that, even if it had happened once, it could not happen again. And I had summoned the girl from Washington, had, in the enthusiasm of my own belief in my solution of the mystery, encouraged her. Fool!

The text-books had said it was possible—yes. But what is possible may be highly improbable. Was there a chance? And again I prayed, prayed the just God who will not suffer the innocent to come to harm to

make my experiment come out well. Prayed? I vowed that Tony Larue should be taken to New York and examined by Billy Odlin as part payment of my debt of gratitude. If only his poor warped brain, with its love of music, could strike the right note —and hold it.

But he was not playing as he had played last Winter. He was playing better. Some wild discord must have shattered the glass, if my theory were right, and now there was no discord. He was playing the same tune, but playing it fairly well. If only he had not practised it in the meantime! If only—I love good music, but now I prayed for the hideous screeching that his violin had emitted last January. For, although I had slept while he played in his room the day of the murder, I judged that it was not smooth playing like this.

Again the music rose. It reached a high note; it held it; it retreated, advanced again —the violin screeched! It screeched again. This was more like what I remembered of Tony's playing. I must have been exhausted to have slept through anything like this the day of the murder. For he attacked the same bar again, and again his bow brought forth a shrieking wail that——

Sharp, staccato, above the wail of the violin, sounded a report. And I was first to reach the major's old room. God had been good; He had let the improbable possible occur again; He had heard our prayers. There on the floor lay the revolver. It had been pitched there by its own discharge. And it had been discharged because the glass that held it had given way. The millionth chance had won.

For, partly on the wash-stand, partly on the floor, partly in the socket, lay the tumbler that had been shattered by the vibrating sounds from the violin of Tony Larue!

MY wife tiptoed into my study.

"Do I disturb you?" she asked.

"You couldn't," I told her.

She rewarded me as I hope I deserved. When I released her she pointed to the blank sheet in my typewriter.

"Haven't you written anything in these two hours?"

"Can't seem to get an idea," I answered. "The plot won't come. I don't believe, anyway, that I can write a Weatherbee Jones novel. I've only put him in short stories, you know. He doesn't seem to fit a long yarn. But the magazine that's been running him wants a novel—a detective story—and of course that means Weatherbee Jones. And I can't do it."

"Wouldn't another detective do as well?"

"Oh, I suppose so," I said glumly. "But I don't seem able to think of any plot for a detective story that would run as long as that."

"Does this item suggest a plot?"

From behind her back she produced a newspaper. She indicated a column article. It told of the flight from his creditors of Kearney Blake. And Kearney Blake had been the man who had financed the Greenhams in their efforts to obtain the submarine plans from my wife and her uncle.

"Somehow," I said, "he doesn't inspire me as a hero."

"Oh, I didn't mean that. He's the villain, and you—why, you're the hero."

"Eh?" I stared at her.

"Well, I'm sure Weatherbee Jones never did anything as clever as what you did when you reasoned out how uncle was killed."

"You think so," I said. "But how about the editors who want Weatherbee Jones? How about the public that wants him? And, here—because we could never bring the murder of that Englishman who disappeared home to Kearney Blake, no one is punished. That won't do."

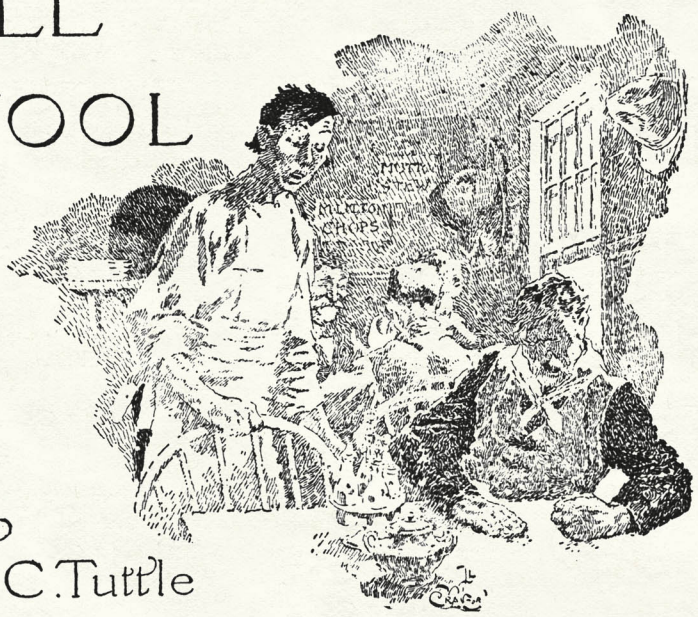
"No? A few years ago Kearney Blake was an honored man. Now he is a fugitive from justice, in eternal dread of arrest. Isn't that punishment? Sid, try it. All about us, and Folly Cove."

I stared at the blank sheet in the typewriter. From there I stared at the autographed, framed letter that a man high in Britain's military councils had sent to me, a letter of thanks. It brought back again, from the very beginnings, my acquaintance with my wife.

"It doesn't sound so badly," I said slowly.

I wonder, Reader, if it does.

ALL WOOL



by W. C. Tuttle

Author of "A Bull Movement in Yellow Horse," "Psychology and Copper," etc.

ZEB WHITNEY laid the ace of diamonds down on the rock and grinned at Ricky Saunders.

"Go on, Ricky. Play that li'l ol' jack. I got high, low, and that jack will jist put me out. That'll make fifty thousand yuh owe me and——"

Ricky laid his cards on the rock and peered over Zeb's shoulder.

"Look at that sheep, Zeb! What do yuh reckon ails him?"

"Never mind th' sheep," replied Zeb. "Yuh can't git me to turn around so yuh can eat that jack. Go on, play it."

"I tell yuh somethin's wrong," insisted Ricky. "That sheep jist turned uh flip-flop and he ain't got up since."

"Mebby that's th' way sheeps do," remarked Zeb. "Yuh see me and you ain't been nursin' sheep but uh short time and we ain't hep to all their proclivities."

Ricky sat down and picked up his cards.

"I'd shore like to know what hit that sheep. Honest, he jist——"

Sping!

A bullet ricocheted off the rock they were using for a card-table and whined off down across the foothills.

"Duck!" yelled Zeb, as he went crabwise down the opposite side of the rock and slid around behind the stunted pine tree which had shaded their seven-up game.

"Come down here, yuh blamed mutt!" he stormed at Ricky, who sat there looking at the scratch on the rock where the bullet had glanced. "Ain't yuh got no sense a tall?"

"What was it, Zeb?" inquired Ricky innocently, as he slid down beside Zeb and pulled out his papers and tobacco.

"Somebody was shootin' at us," stated Zeb. "And danged good shootin' too if anybody should ask yuh."

Ricky shaped his cigaret and fumbled for a match.

"Say, Zeb, I wonder if them same jaspers didn't hit that sheep? By golly! I'll bet that was it. Mebby—aw say, Zeb, if that was uh rifle-bullet why don't we hear th' report?"

Zeb smiled patronizingly and relieved Ricky of his tobacco.

"Ricky, them high-power rifles kin shoot three miles, and they don't make much noise a tall. At this distance yuh wouldn't hear it a tall, sabe?"

Ricky got up and climbed back on the rock. He gazed off in the direction from which the bullet had come and then sat down and began dealing the cards.

"Come on up, Zeb," he urged. "Three miles is uh long ways to see uh target and th' man who can hit me at that distance is plumb welcome to cut uh notch on his gun-stock, and besides it's too danged hot out there in th' sun."

Zeb climbed back and sat down against the tree.

"Ricky, I plumb wish we hadn't taken this job."

"Unha," agreed Ricky, intent on his solitaire layout.

"Yes, sir, I am," continued Zeb. "I knowed something was wrong when Jim Watts offers us uh hundred apiece uh month to dry nurse these darn animated wool gardens. Ricky, uh hundred dollars uh month is too much money to pay uh sheep-herder. Didn't yuh ever notice it?"

Ricky laid down the cards and laughed.

"Too much? Why, Zeb, I'd herd sheep for uh million dollars uh month. Honest, there ain't no large amount uh money that would be too big to tempt me to herd sheep."

"Ricky," pronounced Zeb, "yo're as funny as th' dobie itch. No man pays that price unless thar's uh mighty good reason."

Ricky swept up the cards and put them in his pocket, and then settled himself comfortably.

"Zeb Whitney, every day is th' first of April to you. If I was as suspicious as you are I'd git arrested. Jist because we're uh long ways from home and in uh strange land, and cause uh feller likes our looks and gives us uh job takin' care of his woolen meal-tickets at so much per care, you immediately and soon gits th' idea that there's uh brick under th' hat. Look at th' doughnut fer uh while, Zeb, and quit lookin' at th' hole in th' center."

Zeb shook his head solemnly.

"Did yuh notice that there ain't no dogs connected with this outfit? Did yuh notice how scared that greaser was when we come and how quick he rolled his blankets and beat it? And also did yuh notice," he continued before Ricky had a chance to reply, "that Watts said he would give us a fat bonus if we kept th' herd here for two months?"

"What's th' answer?" yawned Ricky.

"Sheep war."

"Haw! Haw!" laughed Ricky. "Sheep war, eh? Who are th' sheep goin' to fight? By golly, Zeb, if these sheep want to start anything I'll——"

"Have uh little sense!" growled Zeb. "Listen. I seems to remember readin' uh few weeks ago about trouble brewin' between th' sheep and cattle men some place —believe I reads it in th' Breeder's magazine."

"Uh course this would have to be th' place," replied Ricky sarcastically. "Yuh don't remember where it was, Zeb, but this shore must be it. Trouble jist simply stalks in yore footsteps—curses!"

"Well, anyway," stated Zeb, "Watts will be back here in uh couple uh weeks with fresh grub and then I'll have uh li'l heart-to-heart talk with him."

"Yes, and jist about git into an argument with him and lose us our jobs. Let's haze them burr catchers back to camp and git some grub."

THE hazing part was easier said than done. It had been easy to let the herd wander away from the bed ground in the cool of the morning but it was a different task to round up three thousand sheep in the evening without the aid of dogs and herd them back to the shelter of the little valley. Ricky and Zeb were cow-punchers by nature, and this walking and running after sheep was not by any means delightful. It was dark when they got back to camp and both were fagged out.

"Now, I reckon you'll remark that uh hundred uh month is too much pay, eh?" exploded Ricky, as he threw himself down on a blanket inside the tent and nursed a sore hip where an excited ram had hit him on the run. "Touch off that fire and let's git something to eat."

The fire had been laid since morning. Zeb, knowing that in all probabilities they would both be tired when night came, had thoughtfully laid a fire in the sheet-iron stove before leaving.

"Take that bucket and git some water from th' spring," ordered Zeb. "And don't forget to strain th' wool out of it before yuh comes back."

"I don't know where it is," wailed Ricky. "I never saw any spring. Watts showed you where it was but I was up here all th' time watchin' that greaser. Come on and show me where it is, Zeb. I'd shore admire uh nice cool drink from th' wool-covered bucket that hung in th' well."

Zeb grumbled while he lit the fire and then picked up the bucket.

"Come on and I'll show yuh our water supply."

They went out of the tent and scrambled down the bank of a deep washout behind the tent.

"Don't slide into it," warned Zeb.

"Aw, slide yer grandmother!" retorted Ricky. "Any time I slide you can——"

Ricky failed to state just what he would do in case he did happen to slide, for at that certain moment the whole world seemed to fly up and hit them in the face and they both flopped head first into the spring. A few seconds later something sailed down and lit with a loud smash in the bottom of the washout.

"Gi-gi-git yer darned boots out of my mouth!" gurgled Ricky. "What do yuh think my face is—uh welcome mat?"

"What in the name of seven kinds of purgatory was that?" mumbled Zeb, wiping the water and mud out of his mouth.

"Swallered all th' water, ate all th' wool and had uh boot-heel for uh chaser," announced Ricky drunkenly.

"What in thunder hit in th' washout?" asked Zeb.

"I ought to know," replied Ricky sarcastically. "Unha, I reckon I ought to know, bein' as I was under about seven feet uh alkali water with yore boots in my mouth."

"I heard it hit," stated Zeb.

"Unha," agreed Ricky. "Sounded like uh hardware store done leaped before it looked. Let's go back to th' tent and see what happened."

They climbed back up the bank and started for the tent, when Zeb grabbed Ricky by the arm and gasped in astonishment.

"Where?" he whispered.

Ricky rubbed a muddy hand across his eyes.

"She ain't," he remarked inanely. "Zeb, she's done went away."

"Giant powder!" exclaimed Zeb, sniffing the air. "Somebody done put dinnamite in our stove, Ricky!"

Ricky walked around the hole in the ground where the tent had stood.

"Tent's gone," he announced foolishly. "Good-by tent! Jerusalem! Zeb, our grub is all gone, too! Blewed up. Rifle gone, too, and—say, Zeb, you got yore six-gun—unha, yo're gun's safe but mine was on th' grub-box."

"Sheeps gone too," stated Zeb.

"Blew—aw, what do we care. I reckon they heard th' noise and hit fer th' hills. What do we care for th' sheep, eh?"

"Blankets gone," groaned Zeb. "Nothin' to eat and no place to sleep. Now meby you'll agree with me that this ain't no white man's job, Ricky."

"Man size, anyway," replied Ricky, sitting down and rolling a cigaret.

Zeb watched him in silence until the smoke was made and then an idea seemed to strike him:

"How much smokin' yuh got on yore person, Ricky?"

Ricky held up a limp sack containing about two more cigarets.

"And I ain't got uh bit," stated Zeb. "She was all in that de-funct grub-box."

"Well," remarked the philosophical Ricky, "they can't blow our camp up no more. It ain't as though they had only blew up part of it. Golly, Zeb, I'm shore hungry! What about uh little supper, eh? Give me yore gun and I'll see if I can pick uh fat blatter in th' dark while you builds uh little fire, eh?"

"She tastes to me like it was uh sinful waste uh lead," stated Ricky about an hour later, as he raked a piece of half-cooked meat out of the coals. "Doggone it, Zeb, uh sheep ought to be raised fer wool exclusive. As uh tender morsel I opines that she runs uh dead heat with owls and rawhide. Pass th' salt please."

Zeb threw a piece of smoking meat at Ricky's head and rolled over on the ground.

"Ricky, what are we goin' to do? Will we roll out of here and let th' sheep nurse themselves or will we stay here until Watts comes or until we starve to death? Golly, he can't blame us if we do leave. What yuh say?"

"Leavin' all jokin' aside, Zeb, jist what does this all mean?" asked Ricky. "Got any real idea, Zeb?"

"Sheep war," stated Zeb. "Or at any rate I believes she is. I takes it that th' cattlemen here are uh heap sore at th' sheep and wants to drive 'em all off th' range. I reads it all in that article back in Blue Joint. I reckon that is why we gits this job so easy. Watts ain't got no other place to range his woolies and he's plumb got to have herders. Greasers won't put up no

fight a tall, and so he pays uh big salary to white men to guard his property, *sabe*? I figgers it that some of th' hangers-on of th' cattlemen done went and loaded our stove with giant powder and takes uh chance that we'll git elevated so much that we won't look at no sheep-herdin' job no more, Ricky. That's uh dirty mucker trick I takes it."

"Unha," agreed Ricky. "I shore hates to quit in uh case like that. Mebby we'll starve or go crazy and start blattin' like uh pair uh two-legged woolies, Zebbie, old top but I'm game to sit in th' game for uh few days yet. What say?"

They solemnly shook hands across their little fire and then Ricky produced that greasy deck of cards again.

"Doggone yo're hide," he drawled, "I'll play yuh to see if she's uh hundred thousand or quits. That last jack wasn't le-gitimate, Zeb. It's got uh corner torn and yuh knowed it."

THE next three days were a nightmare of chasing sheep through the dust and heat and then eating half-cooked mutton for breakfast, dinner and supper, and of sleeping on the bare ground with nothing but the sky for a blanket. It gets cool in the small hours of the morning in the range country, albeit the thermometer rises to the century mark in the shade at midday.

During that time they had glimpses of cowboys riding across the upper part of the range but there had been no further demonstrations of violence.

On the morning of the fourth day it was a gaunted, sorrowful pair of shepherds who trailed that big bunch of sheep out of the valley and up the hills. Zeb strode in the lead and hurled imprecations on all wool-bearing animals, as one old ram detached himself from the band and tried to go back to the bed ground.

"'At a boy!" yelled Ricky, as Zeb bounced a piece of basalt rock off the ram's head. "Git back yuh old curly horned animated bock-beer sign!" he whooped as the ram lowered its head and dove for him.

Ricky made a frantic effort to escape, and although the ram failed to hit him square they both went down in a heap and rolled down the hill. Zeb forgot his peeve in the excitement and doubled up with mirth.

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" roared a strange voice, as Ricky succeeded in getting on top of the ram. "Haw! Haw! Pretty good for uh shepherd."

Zeb turned and faced three cowboys on horseback, who had ridden up unnoticed. They slouched in their saddles and grinned at Ricky's efforts to choke the ram. Ricky kicked the ram in the ribs and then limped up to where Zeb was.

"Haw! Haw!" mimicked Ricky in a sneering tone. "I knowed uh jackass oncet which had uh voice like that and also about th' same idea of humor."

"Sweet-tempered little shepherd, ain't he?" laughed one of the punchers. "Eatin' raw sheep meat ain't calmed his disposition none whatever."

"I likes 'em raw," stated Ricky. "I also like cow-punchers when they're not too raw, but they're usually uh little too light fer uh man-sized re-past."

"That's uh plenty," snarled the one at whom Ricky had seemingly been making his remarks. "We never came over here to exchange pleasantries with shepherds. We're here to tell yuh to move yore woolies off this range right now, *sabe?* Tonight is th' night. After this there ain't goin' to be no more sheep on th' Willow Creek range. If you won't move 'em, we will, *sabe?*"

"You fellers," drawled Ricky, "reminds me of dynamite in uh tin stove. It makes uh lot uh noise and messes up uh lot uh good grub and—oh well, if yuh don't want to hear what I think of yuh, jist keep on goin'," he remarked, as the three turned their horses and galloped off across the hills.

"Well, what do yuh know about that?" groaned Zeb. "I reckon tonight is th' night we move, Ricky."

"Unha," agreed Ricky. "I reckon yore right. Dang bust the luck! I sprained my thumb on that old ram. Wow! She shore hurts."

Zeb shoved his hands down in his overall pockets and frowned at the sun.

"It's twenty miles to Mill City, Ricky. Did yuh ever think about what a walk that is?"

"Gosh, uh sore thumb is terrible, Zeb!" wailed Ricky. "I ain't in no shape to walk a tall now. Twenty miles! Gee, Zeb, I never did nor never will walk that far with my insides cryin' out fer grub th' way they are right now. I reckon I've plumb lost my appetite."

"I'm gittin' sort a finicky myself," agreed Zeb. "I don't seem to look upon uh piece uh sheep meat th' way uh hungry man should."

A continuous repast of mutton and salt is almost sure to make even the best of digestive apparatus go awry. They had eaten it roasted in the coals, baked in clay, boiled in the water bucket and fried on a piece of the sheet-iron stove which had survived the explosion. The morning meal had been thrown away untasted.

That day they laid in the shade of the lone pine tree, too miserable to even play seven-up. At dinner-time they grinned and pulled up another notch on their belts. Both of them were inveterate cigaret-smokers—or rather had been until, as Ricky remarked:

"Dynamite is uh sure cure fer th' cigaret habit, Zeb. She cures but she don't remove th' cravin'."

That night they wended their weary way back to the bed ground and left the sheep out on the range. They had decided that there was no reason for bringing in the herd. If the cattlemen were bent on chasing them out of the country, why not let them have the trouble of rounding them up?

"Want some boiled mutton?" asked Ricky, after they had thrown their tired bodies down on the ground above the spring.

Zeb sat up and reached for a rock but the effort was too much and he flopped down again.

"Ricky," he murmured, "if I ever gits my strength back again—I hates to do it, Ricky—but I'm goin' to massacree you."

Ricky got up painfully and built a little fire.

"She seems more homelike thataway, Zeb. If I passes out I shore don't want to do it in th' dark. Judas Priest, I wish I had uh smoke."

"Old man Lute was uh goldarned brute, and he couldn't git his longhorns up th' goldarned chute," sang Zeb, in a low mournful voice. "I wonder if they're bluffin' or if they really means to hold uh party down here tonight?"

"I ain't got uh danged thing to wear," wailed Ricky. "My tailor done told me this mornin': 'Mr. Saunders, I can't possibley git that swaller-tailed——' "

"*Sh-h-h-h!*" cautioned Zeb, sitting up and grasping Ricky by the sleeve. "Listen! Hear anything?"

A faint tinkle like the light tap of metal on stone sounded from up the washout, and was immediately followed by a smothered exclamation.

Zeb rolled over and slid feet first down the washout and pulled Ricky with him just as a bullet ploughed through their little fire and a streak of orange flame flashed further up the gully. Zeb ducked low and started up the washout in the direction of the gun-flash.

"Where yuh goin'?" whispered Ricky, trailing along behind.

"Keep down low," commanded Zeb. "We got to git in behind 'em. Come on and keep quiet."

They sneaked along for a few hundred yards when Zeb stopped and peered over the bank.

"I got it all figgered out, Ricky. Them jaspers never walked over to th' party. It's all of seven miles to th' nearest cow-camp. I'm figgerin' that they—look out! Git down low!"

"What yuh see?"

"Jist what I expected. Them jaspers done left their hosses over by that bunch of cottonwoods. Look! See it?"

"See what?"

"Come on, Ricky, and keep down low. They've left one feller over there with th' hosses and, Ricky, he's smokin' uh real cigaret!"

"Uh cigaret," murmured Ricky. "Mama mine, I'd spank uh female grizzly's cub in th' ol' lady's presence for one long drag on uh cigaret. Ouch—gol dang——"

"*Sh-h-h-h!*" sibilated Zeb.

"Aw—if you'd got yer knees in uh cactus patch you'd say *sh-h-h-h-h!*" retorted Ricky in an undertone.

They sneaked around behind the patch of cottonwoods and in behind the four horses. Those range-bred horses made no move except to muzzle Ricky as he whispered—

"Steady li'l bronks."

The cowboy sat on his heels some distance in front of the horses and puffed away at his cigaret. Ricky got one good whiff of that cigaret and then took one long step and dove straight for the unsuspecting cowboy. Ricky's right arm described a short arc as he plunged, and the cowboy rolled over without a sound.

Ricky got up and rolled him over and felt of his heart.

"Fine work!" he exclaimed. "That loaded quirt I took off that saddle was jist th' thing, Zeb. Look what I got."

He held up a sack of tobacco and a book of cigaret-papers.

"And that ain't all either," he continued. "I found this roll uh bills in th' same pocket and——"

"Ricky, we ain't thieves," stated Zeb.

"Not any," agreed Ricky. "But, Zeb, this ain't stealin'. Somebody's got to pay th' freight, and it's uh cinch that I ain't goin' to search fer Watts to collect uh few days' pay. We simply got to have uh little money and if it eases yore mind any, Zeb, you can consider this my money, *sabe?*"

"They're comin' back, Ricky!"

Loud voices raised in a heated argument floated across the sage-brush flat and coming closer all the time.

"You take that big roan, Ricky, and I'll take th' black. Slip th' bridles off the other two and cut their cinches."

It was but a moment's work to slip the rigs off the extra horses, and then they mounted and moved off slowly in the shadow of the trees until they were behind the cottonwoods. Suddenly there was a shout from the cowboys and they knew their work had been discovered. Ricky pulled up his big roan and turned in the saddle.

"Walk, dang yuh, walk!" he yelled at the top of his voice and then, spurring their horses, they streaked off across the moonlit foothills in the general direction of Mill City, followed by a scattering volley of pistol-shots and unprintable remarks.

IT WAS noon the next day when they rode into the little town of Mill City. They had taken the wrong road and had ridden miles out of their way before they met a person who set them on the right trail. They rode up in front of a Chinese restaurant and Ricky handed his reins to Zeb and slid painfully to the ground.

"I'll order everything he's got," he announced. "You put them horses in a stable some place and hurry back. Gosh, I'm starved plumb to death."

Zeb rode on up the street to the one livery-stable. He was too hungry and tired to take off the saddles so he left the horses outside.

"Unsaddle 'em and give 'em uh good feed," he ordered the stable man, and then started back to the restaurant.

He had almost reached the door when he saw Ricky come out, propelled by a big bearded person, who whirled his partner around roughly and started down the street, shoving him by the shoulder. Ricky was protesting loudly and already several people were walking curiously toward them. Zeb quickened his pace until he was walking at Ricky's side.

"What's th' trouble?" he asked.

"I'm arrested, that's all!" exclaimed Ricky, and Zeb, acting on the spur of the moment and without any preliminary wind-up, whirled and smashed the officer on the jaw with his right.

The officer dropped like a rock. It was a clean knock-out. Zeb gave him one look and then grabbed Ricky by the arm.

"Come on!" he yelled. "Run, you son-of-a-gun, run! We've got to git to them hosses quick!"

He dashed off down the dusty street and Ricky pounded along behind. Several people on the street had seen the blow struck but they made no move to stop the pair. The suddenness of it all and the limp form of the officer lying there on the board sidewalk drew their attention more than did the two dust-covered figures racing for the livery-stable.

"Pure bull luck!" panted Zeb. "Them hosses ain't been unsaddled yet. "Git a-goin'!" he yelled as he climbed into the saddle and spurred the black around the corner.

Ricky needed no urging. His big roan was right on the heels of the black when they hit the down grade toward Sweet Grass Valley.

Not a word was spoken until they had put at least a dozen miles between them and Mill City. At the forks of the road, Zeb pulled up and turned in his saddle.

"Which one do yuh reckon th' posse will take in case they hit our trail, Ricky?"

Ricky rolled a smoke and scratched his head foolishly.

"I don't reckon it makes much difference which one we take," he remarked. "They ain't goin' to foller us far. Hittin' uh deputy ain't no hangin' matter, Zeb."

"No, but hoss stealin' is," reminded Zeb seriously.

"Who said anything about horse stealin'?" demanded Ricky.

Zeb squinted his eyes and looked Ricky over carefully from heels to hat.

"Say, Ricky, jist about what in the devil did that feller arrest yuh for?"

"Hittin' uh Chinaman," chuckled Ricky, between puffs.

"Hittin' uh Chinaman!" exploded Zeb. "What fer?"

"Zeb—" Ricky leaned over and put his hand on Zeb's shoulder and a humorous light twinkled in his gray eyes—"I hadn't no more than sat down in that restaurant until one uh them danged slant-eyed celestials comes over to me and says, 'You likee some nice roast mutton?' "

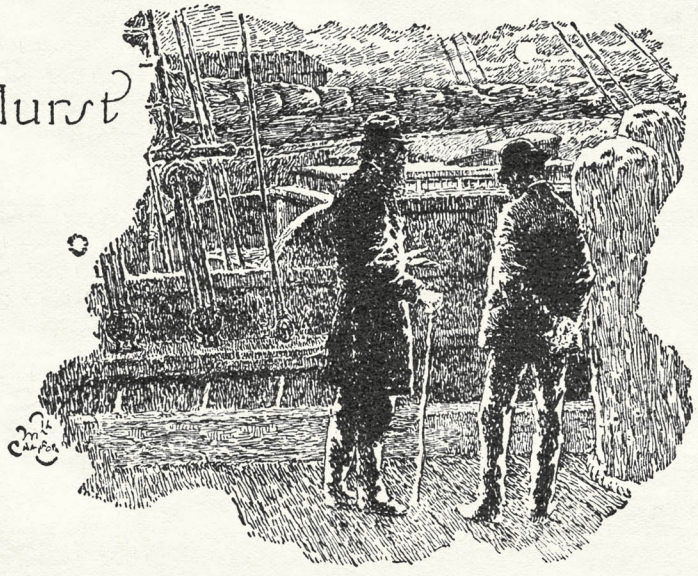
Zeb reached over and shook hands solemnly with Ricky and then turned his horse down the left-hand fork of the road.

"Ricky," he laughed, "let's git a-goin'. This country is all wool but she ain't wide enough fer me and you."

TASTE of the SALT

by

J. B. H. Hurst



Author of "The Tide-Mating," "The Marrow-Bone," etc.

THE man sat at the window of an office in Seattle, watching the sunset. It is not possible to describe a Puget Sound sunset, because God made the Sound and the sunset and men made language; neither can I show you how the mountains seemed to have moved forward until they merged with the calm water.

In that wonderful light people were going home, and this added to the sadness of the man at the window, because he had just lost the only home he had ever known, and the evening was waking the memories of a whispering avenue of years. The very beginning of memory was a craving for home, when he was a ragged little orphan in an unsympathetic city. Later, when an ordinary seaman on a deep-water windjammer, something idealistic had blended with the craving—he did not only want the roof, but also the something else which goes with it.

And when he was twenty and a second mate this idealism had crystallized. He was a very strong man: a "bucco" mate, beloved of skippers, disliked by sailors; yet the craving for his own cave, his own fire, and his own woman tortured him so that he left the sea, being paid off in Seattle. It

was the golden period of real estate and he made money. Then he met the sort of girl he had dreamed about and married her.

Now, the winning of the prize we seek affects us all differently. Some of us strut and stick our chests out. Some of us blush and hang our heads—each has his way of denying the god of the chances.

When tortured by his loneliness, this man had chanced to buy a bundle of old books, among which was a copy of The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius, in the reading of which he had found a certain relief. You may say that any man who strives to follow the Emperor is a nuisance, and you may be right, occasionally. But you know, of course, that people who try to be philosophical when times are hard are very much so when times are the reverse, because philosophy is the sheet anchor that keeps a man from destruction when circumstance is doing all it can to blow him on a dead lee shore, and it is not cast off when the weather clears up. This is the law, and it is a good law.

So, whilst he was very happy in his dream-finding, the man began to plan little systems of life which he hoped would solidify the foundations of his home. But it began to bank up to windward when he found that his wife did not like children. She would exclaim in assumed delight when she saw a pretty child belonging to another woman. Indeed, on such occasions she would act as if she had never seen a child before. By this you may know them.

The man tried to find an excuse for her. He bought her many pretty things, but, because he felt the coming of bad weather, he sought, as he had taught himself to do, comfort from the Roman stoic. Then the silly set she mixed with jarred the directness of his sailor's soul, and soon she began to nag him for more money in order that she might gratify her taste for such intellectual pursuits as bridge, dancing and "movements" which ranted about "progressiveness" but which looked remarkably like the spasms of a colony of snails imagining they were race horses.

She also gave musicals to her "set." The set, by the way, consisted of about two dozen exceedingly selfish women and six milk-fed men. The man would have enjoyed the musical performances—they were given by a good orchestra which he paid—had it not been for the antics of the audience. As soon as the music started every one of the meatless men felt that it was his duty to let his neighbors know all that he thought he knew about the piece, the composer, etc., and every one of them tried to do his duty.

The women's method of attracting attention was to wait till some one was looking and then fall into a sort of rapturous soul-trance. They did this to show how spiritual they were. Then all hands would start a sibilant conversation.

To any one who loves music as the man did, any noise is sacrilege, so he was not to be blamed for likening his guests to a swarm of loudly hissing snakes, who had managed to crawl into heaven. But it was rather undiplomatic of him to tell his wife this.

Across two thousand years the Emperor spoke again, and the man decided to grin and bear it. Yet he could see no decency in waste, and he thought that if he did not go after business so hard there would be more chance for others. This he also explained to his wife, and he tried to show her how much happier they would be if they lived simply and for each other. He mentioned that the man or woman who needs but little does not have the bother of taking care of a lot of things, which lack allows more time for thinking. His wife was somewhat unkind about his opinions, especially about one which he put on paper and afterward showed to me. It read:

> List of all the clothes required by a sensible man living in Seattle: One suit, dark gray best, does not show dust. Two shirts. Four collars, twelve handkerchiefs. Four pairs of socks. Two medium-weight union-suits. One pair of shoes. One tie. One hat. One rain-coat. Suit-case, tooth and hair brush, razor, suspenders.

As he elucidated, one can only wear just so many clothes at one time, and when you can get your suit pressed and cleaned while you wait, and the laundry will return the wash the day you send it out, why be bothered with a roomful of gear? I agreed with him entirely. Besides, his ideas suited my pocket. Then he spoke truth when he said—

"And a man looks like the devil in a dress suit."

His wife threatened to sue for divorce, and the man, made almost abject by the horrible thought of losing his long-hoped-for home, promised to make no further attempts to assert his opinions. This was

pathetic, but they had lived together for a number of years by this time, and the two-fisted second mate who would have likely hit a sailor for presuming to think for himself had joined the dead gods whom we secretly worship.

Then, the deluge. Oh, man born of woman, remember that she knows you much better than you ever know yourself, and never be servile when you should spank. Besides, she will find more love in one brute she tries to tame than in a dozen who need no taming.

So, she did sue him for a divorce, and the man, dazed like a fighter from a heavy blow, made no defense, but in dumb and foolish fashion turned all his property over to her, except fifty-three dollars and forty cents, which remained in his pockets after paying his debts.

She was, therefore, a fairly rich woman, who would easily find consolation. And —he sat at the office window after every one had gone home, watching God's picture on the sky of Puget Sound, with the wakened memories hovering like birds of prey among the shadows that were closing over his life.

THE colors faded and the mountains loomed against a faint ribbon of lingering light. How desperately lonely he was. And this was the end. The end of it all, since a home was the only excuse for existence. He was a beaten man, with the foot of fate on his throat and all the thumbs turned down. Well, he would die as decently as possible.

He turned away from the darkening window. The noises in the passages told of the coming of the office cleaners. He had never stayed so late before. He had loved his home too dearly.

Yes, he would "go away." He would make his last voyage—into the dark, half hoping and half dreading that he would reach a port where he had never been. He would go away. So, and he must say good-by. He couldn't go without saying good-by to her. The male of mankind is a foolishly sentimental animal.

As he grasped the telephone his heart throbbed like that of a lover about to meet his love. Perhaps she might be as sorry as he was. He called the number of his house, and the woman who had been his wife answered.

"I wanted to say good-by, because—" he began stammeringly.

There was an exclamation, and the noise of the receiver being snapped on the hook.

He tried to smile.

It would be strange not to see the familiar office again. He would go and buy a revolver. It would be strange not to see the place again. He looked around yearningly. Then he locked the door and walked downstairs.

He reached Second Avenue and the spirit of the city came over him. Nearly all the world's cities had he seen, but Seattle was the fairest of them all. His lips trembled.

"Perhaps because I have known my only home here," he murmured, "but how I do love the old town. I'll walk around a bit and say good-by before I buy that gun—for you'll listen when I say good-by, won't you, Seattle? God bless you, if there is a God—Seattle, Seattle, you grow more beautiful every year. And you haven't betrayed my regard for you. Your hands held out opportunity when first I came to you, and now you are asking me to try again. God bless you for the chance you offer me. Maybe I'm a quitter—but I'm not man enough to take it."

Then he walked slowly up the avenue to Union Street and turned east. He passed the buildings that had risen on the old university tract—a hilly meadow when he had first known it—and went on till he came to the steps which continue the street up a slope of trees. At the top of the steps he turned and looked toward the Sound. Then he wished greatly that he had not forgotten how to cry.

Came reaction, nerving him. He would shoot himself, but not because life had beaten him, but because he had power to beat that life. He took off his hat to the city, outlined by her many lights.

"Good-by, old town," he said, "you never yet betrayed a man who put his trust in you —they trusted you and you made them wealthy and happy. Would to God that women were like you."

Then he walked down the steps again, to find a store where revolvers were sold; but when he reached Second Avenue he found all the stores closed, and this chafed him somewhat until he remembered an old store down on the water-front which always kept open late, and where one can buy everything from a needle to an anchor.

So the man went down Spring Street, crossed First Avenue, Western Avenue, the railroad tracks, and came to the line of docks. But this happened to be the one night when the keeper of the curious old shop had decided to go home early.

"Don't care to monkey with drugs," thought the man, "but it seems I must."

He hesitated, wondering which drug-store. Then he sneered at himself for bothering about so small a matter.

"I'll walk along the water-front to Wall Street," he muttered, "then I'll turn and get up to First Avenue, where I'll hit the first drug-store I come to and buy something to poison a dog."

Now Seattle's water-front is haunted by many strange characters: flotsam and jetsam of all the seas, waste of all the lands, and—others. And as the man walked north—passing shadowy places and well-lighted places, quiet docks and busy docks, and all the bringings of the ships—many of these people drifted by him. But he was too full of his own life-wreck to notice others, until he sensed the continued presence of a man at his side.

Rather annoyed, he walked faster and tried to forget the stranger, but the other persisted in keeping up with him. So he turned and spoke gratingly.

"Who in hell are you," he asked, "and why are you following me?"

The stranger filled a worn briar pipe. He appeared to be rather embarrassed.

"Well?" grated the man.

"I'm a mender of broken hearts," said the stranger, and his voice was soothing.

"A mender of broken hearts," repeated the man mechanically. "What a curious business. What do you mend them with?"

The stranger lit his pipe. His shyness left him. His attitude changed from that of an intruder to that of a welcomed guest.

"With threads of pain," he said.

The man sighed. Then, wondering why he did so, he asked—

"Where do you get the threads?"

"From the tangled skein that falls from the tired hand of Experience," replied the stranger gently.

"Experience?" asked the man.

"Exactly—we all have so many threads that we never put to any use, which fall from the hand of our experience and lie almost forgotten. Yet these threads, which we gathered with pain, are just what we need when we are troubled. To nearly every man comes a great sorrow, when he feels that life is not worth living any longer. His heart is broken. But if he would only seek among the threads of his experience, he would find the one with which to mend it.

"That is why we have experience—because they dwell more on the wound than on the mending, because they are so often too tired, too sad and even too indifferent to look for the right thread in that tangled skein—because the easiest end to their sorrow appears to lie in a revolver bullet—that, and those, are the reasons for my strange trade."

"I see," murmured the man. "You find the right thread for them when they can not find it for themselves. It's a pretty idea, but you can not find mine."

"You need my services," said the stranger gently.

"What—what do you know about me?" stammered the man.

The stranger did not answer.

They had reached Wall Street. The dock and the warehouse were very quiet. The topgallant-masts of a sailing ship showed over the roof.

"Shall we take a look at the ship?" asked the stranger.

"She's a bark," said the man testily.

"I am not good at telling the rigs of them," said the stranger.

"Sorry I was rude," apologized the man.

"You were not rude, merely technical," said the stranger.

They turned on to the wharf and walked between the cars on the railroad spur and the warehouse until they came to the bark. She was of about a thousand tons, and she was loaded and ready for sea.

"I suppose you invented your queer trade?" asked the man suddenly.

"Why, no," answered the stranger. "We are not very well known, because we do not advertise, but we are quite an old profession."

"Who started it?" asked the man, interested.

"A discoverer, who made the discovery, many years ago, that sorrow is the tenderness of the teaching, and that unsought pain properly borne is the music bearing men to heaven."

"So, it isn't a new religion that you are teaching to the poor devils on the water-front?"

"Oh, no," said the stranger, "it is a very old truth."

The moon had risen and the water was making music against the piling. The man felt the thrill of that subtle something which only the sailor knows—which gets into his blood when he is young and arouses the yearnings of his ancestors who lived on the rocks and craved the high tides.

"It's nice here, isn't it?" he said rather banally.

"And the thread which was magic years ago is the one you need," said the stranger softly. "It lies at your feet. Why not pick it up?"

"Go back to sea?" asked the man.

"That is what I mean," said the stranger.

"What good would that do me?" sneered the man, "when I couldn't forget?"

The stranger said nothing.

The captain of the vessel put his head out of the companion, looked at the sky and came up on the deck.

"Nice night," he said genially.

"Very," said the man.

Then, to the stranger:

"You're a well-meaning sort of prophet, but you're an awful bad guesser. But I will go on board and smell tar for a few minutes, before—before I attend to some rather important business. Coming?"

The stranger shook his head and held out his hand.

"The stitches will hurt," he said, "and the mending will take some time; but the understanding of the healing will come to you suddenly, and in your gratitude will I have my reward."

He turned and went up the wharf, leaving the man strangely impressed.

"Some sort of religious maniac," he muttered, trying to get rid of the impression.

"Can I come on board?" he said to the captain.

"Certainly," said the captain.

THE man grasped one of the mizzen shrouds and swung himself on to the poop. He introduced himself to the captain, then he drew in a full breath which was strangely satisfying. He looked aloft and followed the familiar leads of the ropes. The atmosphere of the past enveloped him.

He walked to the rail and stared forward. He sniffed appreciatively. Then he listened with a curious sense of pleasure to the whistles of the steamers moving in the harbor—he had heard them every day during his years ashore but they sounded different now—and he found a certain fascination in the lights. The captain came and stood by his side.

"You followed the sea?" said the captain.

"Yes—I quit to live ashore."

"You showed your sense. It's all work and no money worth speaking about."

"And everybody swearing its his last voyage, and then—going back to it in a week or two," said the man.

The captain laughed.

"Sure," he said. "There never was a proper sailor yet who didn't wish he was ashore when he was at sea, and then pine to be back to sea again when he got ashore—and that's because a man's crazy to go to sea in the first place."

This time the man laughed, and surprised himself by doing it.

"Why is it that way?" he said.

The captain shrugged his shoulders.

"Why is any sort of craziness?" he said.

"—— the devil!" muttered the man. "Another Saturday night and no beer. Turn in, turn out and turn to. At outs with the rest of the afterguard and scrapping with the men. Wet, cold, and poor grub. Poor pay, bad whisky and worse women—that's a sailor's life till he gets too old to be of any use. God—what happens to him then?"

The captain grinned in the moonlight.

"That's right talk," he said, "but you're young yet. You ain't thirty-five. I hope you're broke, though, because I want a second mate, and I can tell you have your ticket."

"My profits last year," droned the man, "were over twenty thousand dollars."

"Lord," said the captain, "and a second mate's pay out of here is five pound a month."

"Which," answered the man, "is less than twenty-five dollars. It looked like good wages once."

"Funny, isn't it," said the captain. "Let's go below and have a toothful."

The man hesitated. He looked ashore at the deserted wharf, then he looked up aloft. Then he followed the captain into the cabin.

"Scotch or rye?" asked the captain.

"Rye," said the man absently.

"Pleasant passage," he drank.

"Fair wind up-channel," said the captain.

"Which reminds me that I've got to get a second mate from some place to make the insurance all right."

"Where are you bound?" asked the man.

"Falmouth, for orders."

The man noted the familiar objects of the orderly main cabin.

"Looks like home," he thought.

Then he shivered as the significance of the last word came to him.

Was it worth while? Fate had knocked him down, hard. Was there anything worth getting up again for? How had that queer chap who talked about mending broken hearts happened to follow him along the water-front? The sea did seem to be calling him back. Was it, or was it suggestion? The night, the ship and the strange man he had met? But was a broken heart worth mending? Was it not better to end the pain with a bullet or some drug? Had life left him anything worth living for?

Why the devil had he listened to the queer stranger, filling him with absurd ideas? Yet, he might try it—just to see what happened. He could get the gun and quit, if he grew tired of the trying. Might as well. There would be a certain interest in the experiment, and deep in his consciousness was something that warned him very solemnly against suicide. But he would shoot himself if he felt like it. That privilege was his. His heart was beating rather rapidly.

"You can sign me on in the morning, if you like," he told the captain.

"Wh—aa—t?" stammered the captain.

The man spoke indifferently.

"It's a fool notion," he said. "But I need a holiday, and I want to take it at sea. If I go as a passenger on some steamer, I'll get talking business with somebody, and I want to forget all about business. Besides, a steamer isn't the same—to get the real sea you've got to sail. You know what I mean. You'll find that I'll be about the best second mate you ever had. I'll get my old ticket out of the safe-deposit vault. Of course—" he remembered the fifty-three, forty in his pocket—"of course I don't need any advance; but, being a business man, I'll draw that five pounds a month when you pay off. Do you want me?"

"You bet I want you!" said the astonished captain. "We'll get along fine, I know. You've a way about you that mighty few mates have, and you're husky."

"Oh, I'm husky enough," said the man wearily.

He had another drink with the captain—delighted that the sailing of his ship was not going to be delayed for lack of a man with a second mate's certificate—then he walked slowly up the lonely wharf. All the awful hunger of a human soul for another soul to love it drenched him, made agonizing by the fact of his being hated by the love he craved. And the touch of the streets of the city he was leaving added to this pain, so that he hesitated at the door of a drug-store. Then he passed on.

"No," he muttered, "I won't disappoint the captain. I'll get a revolver tomorrow."

Then he sought relief in "meditating" on the clothes needed by a sensible man on a voyage as second mate of a small barque from Seattle to the United Kingdom; a relief which, however, was not enhanced when, the morning following, he went through his papers in the safe-deposit vault.

There were certain foolishly-held-sacred letters there. But he found his old ticket. How his mind went back to the day he had trembled in the examination room in Liverpool, when he was so nervous that he had told the examiner that he always stowed casks athwartships! How the kindly old man had smiled when he had hastily reversed the stowing of those casks! Yes, and the ticket was all he would take with him.

He struck a match and burned the letters. They made a tiny pile of ashes on the concrete floor. Some business papers he left in the box, careless of their end. The key he kept, because he had decided to tell no one of his going away

He met the captain at the consul's. H. B. M's. representative knew him rather well, and told him to quit kidding when he explained that he was there to "sign on."

"I'm not kidding," he replied. "I'm going—oh, I'm taking a voyage for my health."

"Your health!" exclaimed the astonished official. "Then why don't you go as a passenger?"

The man drew his friend aside and made a desperate effort to be jovial.

"It's my heart," he said. "I was pushed into this by a new sort of doctor—met him

last night. Think he did something to me like hypnotism. Suppose he figures that the gentle exercise of being second mate will be better for me than loafing as a passenger, because it combines everything from fists to language. It's a new treatment. The doc told me he specialized in hearts. Hope he knows his business. But keep it quiet, won't you?"

"Of course I'll say nothing about it if you don't want me to," answered the consul. "But er, I know an awfully good alienist. Wouldn't you like to meet him?"

"Later on perhaps," said the man absently. "Later on, perhaps, but not just now."

Then he signed the ship's articles, told the captain that he would sleep on board that night, shook hands with the perplexed consul and went about the pleasing task of putting his theory of "the clothes needed," etc. into a canvas bag such as is affected by sailors the world over, passing the rest of the day south of Yesler Way, and feeling like a blind soul trying to steer a course across the dark sea of eternity, with the star of hope missing.

In the evening he shouldered his purchases aboard into the crude second mate's cabin with its wooden bunk, its remarkably unsanitary washstand and its chest of drawers. The night had set in wet, and he lit the tiny lamp and surveyed the habitation of the past—the bare deck, the painted bulkhead, the barrenness after the comforts of his one home.

He threw his "donkey's breakfast" into the bunk and wearily spread his blankets. He did not sleep very well, and going on deck at six in the morning was an effort. He drank in the beauty of the city, glowing in the sunlight after its rain-bath. He would have to attend to the buying of that revolver.

So he went ashore that evening and bought it, and found a peculiar amusement in the buying when the clerk asked if he should charge it.

A TUG came alongside at daybreak. They cast off from the wharf. The men worked with a gladness. They were homeward bound. Seattle was only an incident to them. A joyful alacrity stirred them. They pulled and hauled as if they wanted to, and they "sang out" on the ropes with the abandon of a school of boys given an unexpected holiday.

But the second mate felt the throb of the opposite pole of emotion. In him was a hideous sense of loss mingled with the anger of a man who discovers he has been cheated. He had played as it had seemed best for him to play, but Fate had sat in the dealer's chair and most expertly worked a cold deck on him. Yes, he knew this, and he could do nothing but get up and quit the game, for Fate uses the weapon called indifference so cleverly that every beaten man is afraid to meet her eye.

Homeward bound, and he was leaving the home he had made and the city he had learned to love more than most men love the village they are born in. He was superintending the hauling in of the after lines when the full force of his loss struck him. Then, he looked and saw that the wharf was thirty feet away that a rapidly widening division of water separated him from all he held dear, from where his life-dream had become real. Over him came such a craving to go back that he nearly jumped overboard. The craving was almost as imperative as that of the drug user for his drug.

They towed down the Sound, and slowly Seattle went away from him as when a friend dies we can watch the something leave the face. And, with the sunset of the open sea before them, they cast off from the tug and set sail. They hoisted both topsails at the same time—taking the halyards to the capstans—and each watch tried to outdo the other with the beautiful chorus of:

> Rolling home, rolling home across the sea,
> Rolling home to dear old England,
> Rolling home dear land to thee.

All of which the man enjoyed about as vividly as one might enjoy hearing the nails driven into one's own coffin.

It was a lovely night. A full moon, a four-knot breeze, every sail drawing and nothing for the man to do but walk the deck and think during his watch on deck. But his thinking was only a form of consciousness in an agony of emotions. The mender of broken hearts was a fool, and he himself a greater fool for listening to him, and a greater fool than that for following his suggestion.

He missed the evening papers and the

food and comfort he had become accustomed to. How beautiful Lake Washington would be on a night like this. The quiet whisper of the wind in the sails was irritating, and the gurgle of the passing water was positively disgusting. He shuddered, and his fists clenched in the memory of a dreadful dream which had now become real.

When he was really happy on his honeymoon, he had dreamed that he had been torn away from his wife, and that he was back at sea. He had wakened in terror from that dream. Now he could not wake. And he would land in a distant port with very little money. How was he ever going to get back to Seattle? He would never get back. He was only a wandering sailor: port to port, drink to drink, and to the end of God knows where.

Then, there was a worse thing. The tough second mate of the past was dead. He had lost his nerve, and he gave orders in a tone that brought no rapid obedience, and he was in mortal fear that one of his men might start a fight. And in this way the days passed, until he began to be positively afraid of his watch. He dreaded to give an order. He was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. And in his cabin was the revolver, inviting him to forget.

SO, GROWING more tired and sick every day and haunted by the mockery of his life-wreck, he lived. They had good weather. The northeast trades took them almost to the Line. South of the equator the doldrums bothered them but little. The southeast trades were good. They crossed into the forties with the royals set.

They began running around Cape Horn with moderate breezes. Then they ran into a gale and shortened her down to two lower topsails and the foresail. It was the second mate's watch below during the forenoon. During that watch below he did not sleep, but sat in his bunk with his revolver in his hand. He had suffered overmuch. He had had enough. This was the finish. The culmination of the strain had been reached. He would end it.

He lay back and closed his eyes. The wind was on the starboard quarter and she was running nicely before it at about ten knots. A very ordinary gale. He felt the surge of her as she lifted to the seas. The thrill-music of the wind murmured laughingly. He put the revolver to his head. Then he laid it down. Marcus Aurelius had taught him that there were times when suicide was a virtue, but it would not be decent to make a mess for some one else to clean up. He would do it in his watch on deck, in such a way that his body would fall overboard. The mender of broken hearts was a poor surgeon.

One bell was struck and the boy came to call him. Eight bells and he went on deck. After a while the mate came to relieve him for dinner. He said he was not hungry, and remained on deck. The watch was "standing by." The captain went below. The man was in charge of the ship.

He walked aft and looked into the binnacle. She was all right. It was just an ordinary blow, a fine fair wind. He had brought his gun on deck with him. He stood aft by the wheel-box with his hand in his pocket and the gun in his hand. He would step over the rail and fall astern when the bullet entered his brain. Yes, it was no use suffering any longer.

For a few minutes he stood watching the following seas and the screaming birds about the frothing wake. Then he looked up and forgot the revolver. He had never seen such a bank of cloud. It had risen about half way from the horizon and was moving toward the ship with sinister swiftness. Its parts whirled among themselves and looked like patches of hardened grease.

The man turned and walked forward, thinking. The ship had high bulwarks, and she was not taking much water aboard. Again he studied that horrible sky. He felt very nervous. She was making good weather of it, but there was certainly a nasty sea, and a little more wind would make it very nasty. In the wave valleys were the familiar white streaks.

The ship was climbing the cold, gray Cape Horn hills and gliding down them, but she was not doing it any too swiftly. He looked at the advancing cloud. A child would know it for more wind, with snow and hail. If one of the sails blew away, the vessel's speed would be so lessened that she would fail to keep ahead of the sea. In other words, she would be "pooped" by the overtaking waves, and that would likely mean disaster.

The man hesitated. Then a rush of anger stirred his soul. Years before he

wouldn't have cared—he would have done the right thing and done it at once. Years before! Then he saw himself as he was: the plaything of a woman's whim, the thing she had thrown aside—broken by the throwing—a pitiful, whining woman-worshiper, a poor, sniveling cur, without a backbone. And men's lives and a valuable ship and cargo had been entrusted to that thing's care.

That sinister sky of greasiness, that swirling squall was almost upon them. There was but one thing to do. In a little while the wind and sea would be too much for her. They would have to heave to. It was a job for all hands, under the captain's orders. Shouting to the man at the wheel to mind his steering, the second mate ran down the companion to the captain's cabin.

"There's a lot more wind coming, sir," he said.

"I'll be on deck in a minute, mister," replied the captain.

As the second mate went on deck again, the first of the hail bit at his face. He walked aft to the wheel. Although it was but afternoon, it had grown almost dark. The captain came up hurriedly. He got one look at the sky before the hail blotted everything.

"Call all hands," he shouted. "And, mister, take your watch forrard and get the gear of the foresail all ready for hauling up. We're going to heave to."

Then the wind hit her, screaming viciously like some maddened animal of a gigantic mythology. It took the bark in its teeth and shook her, as she ran for her life with the great gray seas running with her, curling over the rails and thundering on the deck.

The driven hail swept past, howling weirdly as it cleared. The ship yawed wildly, in spite of all the man at the wheel could do. The second mate struggled forward with his watch. The captain's voice was flung along the gale like a wee, lost thing.

"Another hand to the wheel."

The second mate motioned to one of his men to obey the order. He pointed up the fore rigging and bawled a whisper into another man's ear—to get on the fore yard and cut the stops on the gear.

The man fought his way into the shrouds, and his progress up the rigging was a sort of crawl on his stomach, the wind pinning him against the ratlines. The rest of the watch gathered at the clew-garnet. The mate's watch came on deck and manned buntlines and leachlines.

The mate took charge and the second mate slid away to leeward to slack off the sheet, whilst the mate slacked the weather sheet, doubtless feeling grateful to his favorite deity because there was no chain-fore tack to unhook. The men's voices swelled into a wind-disintegrated chorus as they pulled.

The sail acted like a huge sheet of armor plate, pale with fright and quite frantic. So violently did it pull that a whole watch on one buntline were at times unable to take in any slack. And in the wind were screamed fantastic messages, commands, jeers and coarse witticisms from the ghosts of the many sailors Cape Horn has caused to die.

As the weight of the foresail was taken off her, her speed decreased, so that the following seas began to come aboard in tons. There was no thought of furling the sail at that time. The thing to do was to wait for a smooth, if any smooth came, than brace up the yards quickly and bring her to the wind.

The mate took his watch to the fore braces and the second mate took his to the main. The crew, since they were to leeward, were in comparative safety, but the positions of the two officers were dangerous—slacking away weather-braces in that hurricane-stricken sea being no job for a nervous man; and of the two the second mate had by far the worst of it, for the reason that he had to work where the heavy seas that the poop succeeded in defying vented their anger on the main deck.

For a few minutes they waited, hanging on to anything they could.

The captain stood at the break of the poop, watching the seas. Suddenly he raised his hand. The mates did not need to pass the order to their men. They began slacking away and the men pulled with avidity.

The yards were carried forward by the wind. They were braced up very rapidly. The captain motioned to the men at the wheel. Then he pointed forward. The mate's watch, being the smarter, had belayed their braces. Now they scrambled into the fore rigging and started aloft for

the fore yard. But the second mate's watch was caught. And the sea that came on board filled her fore and aft.

The "singing out" of his men coming to windward like fainting echoes had ceased. He had shouted "belay" and was hitching the upper topsail brace on to the pin, automatically, with his mind maundering on his broken dream, when he felt it coming.

He looked up and saw a great precipice of water curling twenty feet over the rail.

The noises of the wind and the hard-striving vessel seemed to still. The Ego of him stood out from the stream of his consciousness and knew the awful loneliness of an unloved soul that seeks annihilation. He was lost in the blackness of a callous universe. The cringe of self-pity fettered the feet that had been given him to climb with. The marvelous law of personal responsibility seemed too hard. Indeed, it appeared to be cruel. It always does to the quitter.

Well, he might as well let the sea carry him overboard and end it all that way. Then the sea crushed him to the deck.

He felt the ship stagger under him. He was dashed against the combings of the after hatch. He gasped, and his mouth filled with water. Then it all came back—the old, forgotten taste of the salt. The fight-stirring tang of it.

Bruised and angry, he struggled to get on his feet. The end of one of the braces was washed past his hand. He grasped it and tried to pull himself to windward. He opened his eyes and tried to see through the dark green water that covered him.

The taste of the salt persisted, stirring him greatly. The taste that had given the world its adventurers, the man-making smack of it.

About him crowded an unseen throng, whose blood ran warmly in his veins: Vikings, buccaneers, gentlemen wanderers, explorers, navigators—Hawkins's men, Drake's men, Nelson's men—men about whose mothering had blown the sea-breezes of a certain little group of islands in the North Sea—the taste of the salt of their homeland that had given them a taste for the salt of all the world—these crowded around him and gave him thunderous welcome back to manhood.

He gritted his teeth and clawed along the brace to the rail. The woman-craving weakness fell away from him as a dream falls from waking senses. He had steeped his soul in that dream and learned the foulness of it.

A flash of rage shook him as he realized how pitiful are the lurings and the follies of women which had meant all to him. But such things meant nothing to him any more. His back stiffened to the inspiration of the daring of clean, strong, self-reliant living, and the pride of the self-control of it.

He got his head above water, and laughed joyously in the wind's face at the thought of it. He could meet his future as the men who had made his country had met it. And in the glory of his re-finding he crushed the false beat of a woman's heart, and the false smile of her lips beneath his heel forever. And, he could look Fate in the face and laugh at her dirty work. He was no longer a beaten man, and her indifference was amusing.

He mouthed the taste of the salt and breathed deeply. Then he softly cursed the mender of broken hearts, as one lovingly curses one's best friend.

"The —— old son-of-a-gun," he muttered. "He was right—the old thread of experience that I had let fall—the old sea days when I learned to be a man—painful, it seemed, did the learning of it—that thread fixed me all right. The mending hurt, as he said it would, but it mended. —— his old skin!"

So he paid the fee of gratitude.

The water cleared. The man shook himself like a vibrant dog. In the voice that had made men jump in past years. He shouted at his men as he splashed down to leeward where they were hanging on.

"What the —— are you things? You look like a hospital on a holiday. Do you want the other watch to do all the work. Get forrard! Get!"

They obeyed him as sheep obey. As they passed the galley, the cook stuck his head out of the lee door. The man stopped and grinned at the cook, a respect-compeling grin. Taste of the salt was calling for its sweetening.

"Why," thought the man, "it's nearly fifteen years since I quit the good old stuff."

He leaned in at the galley door.

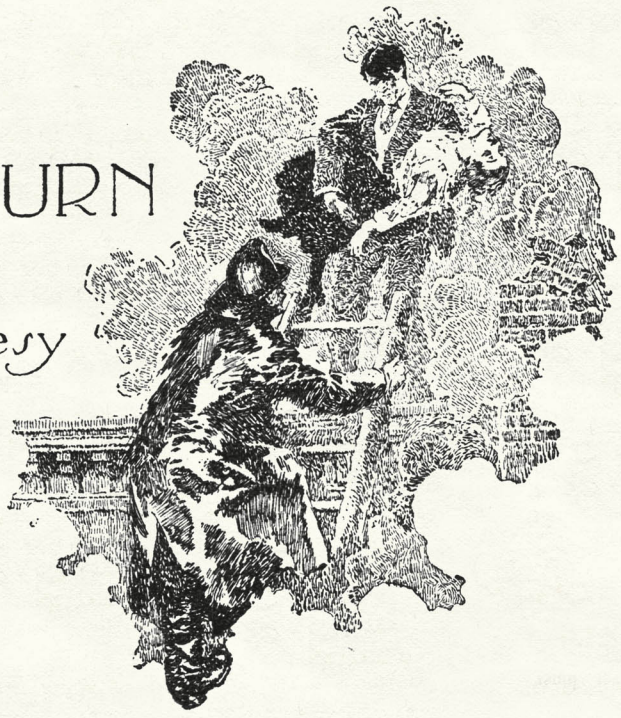
"Cook!" he shouted.

"Yes, sir," said the cook very respectfully.

"Give me a chew of tobacco."

THE RETURN

by J.U. Giesy



Author of "The Signal Fire," "Not Down on the Bill," etc.

WELLS was next thing to a tramp. You knew it just as soon as you saw him. You wouldn't doubt it unless you looked into his face, rather than at his shabby clothing. Then, if you were quite observant, you might perceive that his eyes didn't quite match up to the ne'er-do-weel type of man. There was a sort of vague trouble in those gray eyes, which spoke of a mind that refused to wholly approve of Danny's present course.

It was a course which had brought him by various stages to a place where he had a single quarter in his pocket, a couple of drinks of cheap whisky in his stomach, and no very definite knowledge as to where he was going or what for or why.

But Wells was not intoxicated, either by whisky or emotion this evening. In fact he was depressed. It had been a long time since he had been intoxicated, really. That was in the early days of his downward course, when he had money enough to pay for the oblivion brought by a rapid sequence of far better brands of alcoholics than he had tasted for a good many days.

In fact he had just left the saloon where he had spent the last two hours on the strength of a single paid-for drink, because the remaining quarter represented a night's lodging in certain localities of which he knew, with enough for a scanty breakfast in the morning, held out.

He half regretted his exit from the noisy shelter of the barroom now. It was coming on to rain—a fine, drizzling rain, more chilling even than a heavier downpour would have seemed. He stepped under an awning and turned up the collar of a much-wrinkled coat.

"Move along now, you bum."

Danny recognized the voice of authority, even before he glimpsed the blue and brass of the bulky figure from which it came. He made no reply. He stepped out from the awning and went slowly along close to the shop-fronts as more protected than the farther width of the pavement, while the officer continued in the opposite direction, swinging his club.

In front of Danny a shop door opened. The lighted interior went dark. A woman's figure stepped forth and locked the door, then turned toward Wells.

And at that instant from beyond her, a man's figure came into view, shambling

along the rain-darkened sidewalk in none too certain a way.

Danny noted that the man eyed the girl —for the woman seemed little more—as she turned from locking up the shop. He could see it all plainly in the glare of the lights. And then, as she would have passed on her way, the fellow stepped up and faced her with what he no doubt meant to prove an ingratiating smile.

She gave him a glance and turned her head with a quickening of her steps. The masher fell in at her side. Danny saw her gaze dart here and there as if seeking a means of escape or relief.

A hot and indignant little thrill ran through him. He had seen now certainly that she was merely a girl—young, clean-looking—the right sort of woman, even as the one who annoyed her was the wrong sort of man. The gray eyes under Wells' stained soft hat sparked. He stepped forward quickly and intercepted the two. He touched the brim of his hat with the fingers of one hand.

"Lady—is this individual annoyin' you?" he asked.

"Aw! You go to——"

Smack! Danny struck quickly. The blow was wholly unguarded and very nicely aimed. The intruder lay down in the rain on the concrete pavement. His hat fell off. The rain still coming down beat resuscitatingly into his face. He blinked and sat up, then began scrambling to his feet.

"Go on now, lady," said Danny Wells. A hand fell on his arm as he doubled up his fist again and stood waiting.

"Here, youse! Didn't I tell you to move on? What'je tryin' to do? I'll run you in fer disturbin' th' peace." The officer had started back on his beat.

"He did it for me." Danny became aware that the girl had a soft contralto. "This—this man, accosted me, officer. The gentleman came to my help."

"Ah, ha, Miss Baynes, an' is it yerself that says so?"

The bluecoat turned toward the girl whom up till now he had apparently considered as having no real part in the affair. Then he spoke to the man Wells had knocked down, who was now retrieving his hat.

"Beat it, before I hand ye one over th' bean myself, ye fresh guy," he admonished, touched his helmet and sauntered on down the street.

DANNY found himself standing on the pavement with Miss Baynes. Suddenly he felt acutely embarrassed.

"Well—" he began in a stammer; it was in his mind to make his escape.

"Thank you." Again the contralto voice sounded in his ears.

Danny flushed. It was a long time since any voice, let alone a woman's, had thanked him for anything. He swallowed some of his embarrassment and forced himself to answer:

"I'm glad I was handy. That sort of fellow makes me tired. Can I do anything more for you, miss?"

"No. Not but you've done a very great deal. I was on my way home—just going to the corner to get my car."

Danny forgot all about his rain-sodden coat and his stained hat. The girl was really very pretty, brown-haired, blue-eyed, pink of lip and cheek.

"I'll—walk up there with you, if you like," he proffered, and paused, surprised at himself.

"Thank you," said Miss Baynes again.

She glanced up into Danny's thin face and moved tentatively forward. Danny fell in at her side. On the way to the corner he learned that she owned the small book - shop and news - stand, the door of which he had seen her lock. She was a business woman. In return for the information, he rather shamefacedly confessed that he was "doing nothing—just now." He neglected to state that he had done nothing worth while for a considerable time.

The girl frowned, scanning his lean length.

"If you'd care to drop into the shop tomorrow," she said slowly. "You're out of work?"

"Yes, ma'am." Danny nodded.

Then the car came along and he put her aboard, giving the conductor a nickel out of his quarter for her fare in rather a quixotic fashion. The act was a sort of flash from those days when he had once done things like that. He rather regretted it, when he stood alone once more under the thin rain. He shrugged and turned away.

Never mind where Danny spent that night. There are stray corners in a city, where the homeless may crouch if not rest. He had a cup of coffee and three "sinkers" for breakfast, and a dime still left, when it was time to drop into the shop.

But he was of two minds about that. He wanted to and he didn't. It seemed to Danny almost like trading on fortuitous circumstance to do it, and yet he rather wanted to see the girl.

For two years he had been a rolling stone, and it had seemed long since any one had treated him like the gentleman he had once been at heart. Most people had judged him by his clothes. As a result the judgment had been bad. No place or position had held Danny long during the last twenty-four months. His wardrobe showed the effects.

In the end, however, he went. He came into the little place where the girl had her business, in a half-hesitant sort of way. He let the door swing shut behind him and glanced about in unobtrusive fashion, because there was a man ahead of him, looking over the magazines and papers spread out on a counter-shelf.

It wasn't much of a place, Danny decided. Someway it didn't impress him just as it ought. It lacked something, or everything which ought to go with such an enterprise he felt. And yet he didn't quite know what it did lack, either. It was neat as a pin. Books, magazines, papers, were stacked primly in their places. Everything was orderly, as orderly as a—a graveyard. The comparison occurred to his mind and he nodded. That was it exactly. Everything was too orderly. It made the place seem dead.

The man before him spoke in a rather petulant fashion. He asked for a certain sporting weekly, known as well by its color as its name.

"I'm sorry, but I don't carry—that," said Miss Baynes.

It struck Danny that her voice sounded listless, tired this morning, as she spoke.

The potential customer grunted and turned toward the door. And something popped all at once in Danny's brain. He had heard the man's request. He had heard the girl's answer and its manner and tone. In a flash came comprehension.

"Just a minute," he interrupted the other man's departure. "If you want that regular, we'll arrange to have it for you. We'd be glad to do it, if you like."

The disappointed one paused. He barely glanced at Danny, for which Wells was glad. He knew he didn't look like the proprietor of a shop.

"Why—ye-e-s," the assent came slowly. "I'll be going by at noon. If you could——"

"Sure!" Danny put a world of heartiness into his tone. "We'll have it ready for you all right—and every week after this."

"Thanks. I'll stop."

The man went out and left Wells facing Miss Baynes. Neither seemed to know just exactly what to say. Danny was conscious that he had taken a remarkable liberty, and to judge by her expression, Miss Baynes was aware of it also, yet hardly capable of meeting the situation. Wells, from his greater experience, rallied first.

"That was awfully cheeky, I know," he said, flushing a trifle under the regard of the blue eyes; "but I wanted to save you a sale and a customer if I could."

"I suppose you did," Miss Baynes returned, accepting his explanation, "but I don't carry that paper, and I don't want to. It isn't a nice publication at all. I—I don't like it—or people who read such things as that." The color flooded swiftly into her cheeks.

"Good Lord!" gasped Danny and paused. "What's that got to do with it?" he went on. "It ain't what you like, you've got to keep in a shop, Miss Baynes, but what other people want. A fellow has to study his trade, find out what they want and then—give it to them, without thinkin' whether he likes the same things himself or not. That's business, Miss Baynes. Did you see how he fell for my suggestion? You got to make folks feel your interest. That gets theirs. Why, the only way to sell anything and make good is to have what the trade which passes your doors wants. Now that man will be back here at noon. Where can I get him the copy I told him we'd have?"

"Oh, you can get it at the News Company's office of course," said the girl, and sighed. "But—I don't believe it's any use. I guess they know I'm not making good, too, or something. This morning they only sent me half of my regular order on everything which came out today."

Something surprisingly like moisture came momentarily across the blue eyes.

"I think it's mean. They charge me just as much for delivery as on the full order, because I asked the man, and then only send me half. And anyway—they are the only people in business, I guess, who charge for delivering the goods they sell!" A

spiteful little ring of trampled spirit crept into her tone at the last.

Danny Wells looked straight into the clouded visage and smiled. Something took hold of Danny. Last night he had thought this girl one well to do. Now he found her a fellow creature in distress, fast drifting toward the rocks of business misfortune, to judge by her words and tone. It was a bond of sympathy—something in common. A new expression came into his face, his eyes. It was something like resolve.

"Say," he burst out; "tell me where their place is. I'll go get that old guy's paper for him and ask them straight out about your order. A man can talk to them better'n you, I guess."

"Oh, will you?" Relief rang in the words. "I—I was hating to, myself, because, you see, I know I'm not doing very well. And —please don't think me selfish. I asked you here this morning. I thought we could talk about you and find some way to help you get a job or something. And now—I've just talked about myself."

"Never mind that," Danny told her. "How do I go where I can get that old boy his pink 'un? Put me wise."

She gave the necessary directions and saw him depart. In half an hour he was back. He had three of the particular issue under his arm as he entered.

"I found out all about your orders," he announced as he spread the pink sheets out on the shelf in plain sight.

"Yes?" Miss Baynes paused.

"Yes. The manager down there and a fellow he called the 'promotion man'—guy that runs around giving dealers tips and taking orders and things like that—uncorked a lot of lingo I finally managed to understand. It seems when a stand has an extra large lot of numbers left unsold—numbers they have to send back—what they call 'returns' as I made it out, why, they just sort of automatically cut that stand's order down. That's a rule of their house all over the country. As for the delivery charge, why, the manager said everybody charged for delivery, only people didn't get next to it mostly, because most of 'em do it by adding the charge into the price of the goods. I don't know but he's right."

"Oh," said Miss Baynes in a tone of relieved comprehension. "I was afraid something was wrong. I didn't know they just did it, like that."

"Well—they do." Danny turned to face her. "You been sending a lot of these 'returns' back?"

"Ye-e-e-s," Miss Baynes confessed.

"Your business ain't good?"

"No-o—not very."

"And yet," Danny pressed out of a keen sympathy of understanding, "I reckon this little place means a whole lot to you?"

For a moment the girl's lips quivered.

"It means everything in the world—just about," she said slowly, at last.

"And what did you know about this game before you started?"

"Nothing." The word exploded suddenly. "But—I thought anybody could sell magazines and books."

Danny perched on the counter shelf, where he had laid down the pink edition.

"Sit down," he said, waving his hand to a chair he judged Miss Baynes sometimes occupied, because there was a piece of fancy-work half finished, lying on its seat. "Say, suppose you tell me all about it, if you will."

The girl sat down. She eyed Danny for a space of seconds, and then all at once, almost as if glad to do it, she began.

It was just a plain little story, of a father who had run this small shop and died—of an only child, herself, and a semi-invalided mother, and a little house. She had taken over the shop and was trying to run it, to make a living, but she had been the housekeeper before her father's death. She knew little of business and had been forced to learn each step as she went along, and, well, it looked as if she were going to fail.

Danny heard her through with a sober mien. Some way the story took hold of him immensely for all its commonplace. There were as many tragedies in real life, every-day business, he thought as she spoke, as in the pages of the books and magazines she was failing to sell. There was tragedy and humor and pathos. Here was this girl battling for her mother and herself, and here was—he. His life had been a sort of tragedy, too, if you looked at it in a certain way. Well, he wasn't talking about that. But the girl needed help. Why shouldn't he help her? He had nothing else to do, and in his younger life, he had been accredited with having a rather facile and original brain. Why shouldn't he put it to work on waking up this sleepy, neat, almost prim little shop and gaining trade—

success—a living for this girl whose face had taken on so wistful an appeal as she talked? If she'd only listen to advice, accept help——

He stood up.

"What you need is business education," he announced. "You've overlooked a lot of bets. One of them I've mentioned already. You must study your trade, learn its likes and then have what they want. I —well, once I held a position—and made good in it too—where a lot depended on my knowing what the public wanted. If you're willing to let me help you out a bit, I believe I can straighten all this out."

He waved a hand about the place in an embracive way.

"Why," he grinned, "we've made a right start already. We've got that chap's pink 'un for him when he comes along at noon."

He paused. A peculiar expression had come into the girl's face. She was sitting wide-eyed, like one seeing something within, rather than any object without. A slow, uncertain smile crept across her lips.

"Where are you stopping, Mr. Wells?" she inquired.

"Anywhere I get a chance," Danny grinned. "Any old place I can hang my hat is home, sweet home, to me."

"You haven't much money, have you?" She flushed as she asked the personal question.

"Ten cents," Danny declared.

"Then—" all at once she began speaking very quickly—"this all seems so strange but—there's a back room here and a cot—where father used to lie down when he wasn't well. You could sleep there and—I couldn't pay you much at first, but you could live on it, I guess, till you got something else to do; and—I would so much like to try and make the shop pay."

A roof, a bed, food assured at least. Danny felt a grip come into his throat, and —he would be helping the girl. His eyes felt someway suddenly moist, but his grin belied his other feelings.

"Sure!" he made hearty acceptance. "I'm on the job already. Now the first thing is to get started right."

Miss Baynes nodded. Her face brightened with fresh hope. They were both young, easily buoyed as yet, man and girl. She got up.

"All right. It seems almost as though Fate had brought us together, doesn't it, Mr. Wells? What do we do?"

"The first thing is for me to put you next to the rudiments of the selling game, and then help you to put them into practise," said Dan. "Now—why don't you put something into your show-window besides junk?"

"Junk?" The girl's voice was uncertain.

"Sure—pencils, pen-holders, rubber-erasers, scratch-pads, ink? Everybody knows a place like this carries them. We'll get 'em out and load up with a genuine display of the latest fiction, instead. That will make 'em take notice a bit."

Miss Baynes looked doubtful and he went on.

"Display is the key-note of the selling game, Miss Baynes. The fellow who said it paid to advertise knew a whole lot, all right. Advertising is the life of business, and it don't make any difference whether you do it in a show-window or on a street corner or in a daily paper. You've got to make a loud noise nowadays to let folks know you're alive. If you want to sell a thing—show it to the crowd. Display it. Let 'em see it's there."

Once more he waved a hand about the shop.

"Now—you've got all your books and magazines piled up as systematically and precisely as though this was a storage stock-room, which it is—not. See?"

Miss Baynes nodded quickly.

"Yes—they look so much neater that way."

Danny paused and regarded her smiling. His grin came back across his lean features.

"That's the woman of it, but it ain't business," he rejoined.

"Business is selling something somebody wants, to that somebody when he wants it —plus making him want it. Advertising makes him want it. That's the whole thing, except that, as I've said, you must get wise to what people will want as nearly as you can. You've got to study the individual trade, get next to it, and—supply it. That man this morning is an example. He'll be back and we've got what he wants. Maybe he'll want something else when he comes. That brings me back to the magazines, I guess. Display 'em in the window—outside your door—get a little counter outside and put some of 'em out there on display. People will see 'em and remember they meant

to get one, and had forgot all about it till they saw yours."

"They might walk off with them, don't you think?" said Miss Baynes.

"Not while I stick around here they won't." Danny's grin altered a bit.

"We-ll," his companion assented, "all right. We can try it at least."

THEY set to work cleaning out the mass of sundries from the window. That done Wells got into the window and built pyramids and castles and fortifications of the latest issue of a popular magazine which had issued that day, buttressing the general scheme of his decoration with stacks of fifty-cent books.

The morning's delivery of magazines had just been unwrapped when he had arrived, and among the wrappings on his trips to and from the window, he discovered a number of single sheet facsimiles of the magazine cover, many of them of an enlarged size. He held one up and eyed it with appreciation.

"What's this?" he inquired.

"A poster," said Miss Baynes. "They send them out now with a lot of the magazines, each issue. Throw it away."

"What for?" Danny turned his regard from the picture to her. "Say—I rather guess not. A poster is a poster. They stick 'em on bill-boards to advertise things to sell, or—shows. Why not use 'em to sell magazines? Oh, fine! Say, you got any little metal clips around this joint?"

Miss Baynes nodded. She produced what he required. Danny took them.

"And some string. All right! Never mind."

He pulled a piece from a ball of wrapping cord, went back to the window and fastened it across the sash, near the upper half. Then he came back, took up all the posters he could find, returned and hung them from the clips, pendent from the string.

"We'll use our posters after this," he announced. "Let the other fellows throw 'em away. We won't. They're the bill-boards of the magazine trade all right. I see why they put 'em out. We'll make 'em pull trade. Wait till I get my sidewalk display boxes fixed and we'll trim them all up with the posters from week to week. Why—the publishers are tryin' to help you folks sell the books by making these poster-sheets attractive. Throw 'em away—well I guess not! We'll hang 'em up."

He paused and wiped his face with a kerchief none too clean and grinned.

"Now I'm going out and get a sandwich. It's almost noon. When that guy comes back, sell him his pink sheet and tell him again you'll have it for him every week. Make him feel your interest and want his trade. That's part of the selling game too. I see there's a table counter in that back room. This afternoon we'll get it out in the middle of the floor here and build a display of popular books, right down where everybody who comes in can see 'em at a glance."

He put on his coat, picked up his hat and went out.

He came back. The only pink thing about the shop was the girl's face.

"Did he come back?" Danny questioned as he took off his hat.

Miss Baynes nodded. "Yes and—I sold the others too. And that first man bought three other magazines to take home to his wife—he said."

"Sure he did," Danny assented. "Your getting his paper for him pleased him. He wanted to reciprocate. That's human nature—man nature at least. Now you've got him started, he'll keep on. Get their interest, make 'em feel yours. That builds trade. How'd he come to buy 'em?"

"Why, I—I asked him if he'd read a story I'm a good deal interested in myself," Miss Baynes confessed. "And that led up to a discussion of that and other stories and books and papers."

Danny grinned and nodded.

"Good girl. Any time you know some mag's got a fine yarn, or one by a popular author, or one you get stuck on yourself, why—tell it. Slam it up against everybody who comes in to buy any old publication. That way you get behind your stock and push. A dealer can boost any certain publication like that to beat the band, and double his sales and his profits at the same time. You're catching on. Ask 'em if they've read this and that, by thus and so. Do that and fix up your stand so that no matter what a man's thinking about when he comes along, he can't fail to see what you've got before he gets away. That's display again. I'll tend to that."

So it began. Danny kept his word. He made a lot of changes. He built the sidewalk counter and displayed the latest issues upon it and a metal frame he had built

across the entire front of the shop. He put other rods across the interior and displayed other magazines and posters, and art supplements and pages on those. He kept his window changed every few days.

And Danny changed too, with the shop. After a few days, Miss Baynes made a tentative offer, in rather embarrassed fashion, of a suit her father had worn. Danny accepted it frankly in the spirit it was given.

With clean clothing, something long latent in the man seemed to reassert itself all at once. Out of his first week's wages he bought clean collars and a new tie and hat. A new expression crept into his eyes, a new timbre into his voice, a new quality into his bearing. He was doing something, at last. He had now a definite object. And though he did not at first really know it, he was rebuilding a failing business no more than he was rebuilding the failing character of himself. Only, he knew he felt better than he had for years, happier, more contented, more the man.

And business did improve under his supervision to a considerable extent. Then one day as Miss Baynes came in he was primed with news.

"I had a long talk with that 'promotion man' of the General News Company, this morning," he began.

"Yes?" Miss Baynes unpinned her hat. "What about?"

" 'Returns' mostly and things like that. We've been making them too soon."

"Too soon?" Miss Baynes fixed her blue eyes more widely upon him. "Why—how could we do that?"

"What gets my goat," said Danny grinning, "is why I didn't get hep to the thing myself. I must have been asleep. Didn't you ever have any one stop and ask for a number you'd just sent back?"

"Ye-es," said Miss Baynes slowly. She smiled. "Why, we—we could——"

"Sure we could," Dan agreed. "We got a month's limit on most of the weeklies, and from sixty to ninety days on the monthlies. Why don't we use it? Keep a few a while. Then if somebody comes along and wants one, we'll have it, and maybe a new customer who might not come back if he had to go somewhere else for his stuff. D'ye get that? That fellow told me of a man who does it right along. It's got so well known around the city that they've got a saying about it: 'If Chepp don't have it, it ain't in town.' "

Miss Baynes sat down.

"I've lost a lot of sales like that," she confessed.

Wells nodded his head.

"We won't let our stock run out after this. That fellow gave me a lot of tips. No matter how many we order, if we sell out we get some more. They keep a few to meet that sort of a situation, he says. In a place like this where we can get to 'em almost at once, we can get more and probably sell all of 'em or most. We'll watch our trade of course and get a definite idea of how many we can sell of any publication, and make that the basis of our order, and then if we sell out, get more, but we won't ever get clear out of stock."

Miss Baynes nodded assent.

"It seems awfully simple when it's explained like that, but—you know there are magazines which don't allow any return credits—some of them the best sellers too. Your plan wouldn't work very well with them. What can we do about those?"

"Sell 'em," said Danny with conviction. "That chap told me a whole ear full this morning. I just went after information for fair. He touched on that very point too. We buy a few at first, feel our trade, get our order number estimated. That's the answer. If we sell out, we get two or three more. We work it the same way on publications which only give half credits—these women's papers and things like that."

"You think of everything, don't you?" The blue eyes regarded him in something like admiration.

Danny grinned.

"Well, we were both thinking this morning, and what I didn't ask, that guy handed out. We went over it pretty well. Now I got one kick to make about you yourself. Outside that we're doing real well. You got to display yourself a little bit more."

"Display myself!" Miss Baynes appeared actually startled. "Why—what do you mean?"

"Just that," said Wells. "Don't be mad, but—you're an awfully pretty girl you know. You're too much inclined to be just coolly formal with your trade. You're boss here of course, but I'm giving it to you straight. You want to be more cordial—friendly. Get to know your customers so you can call 'em by name. That fellow told me today

of a man with a stand in a poor location, who does that right along. It's his main business asset, and it's a good one all right. You go into his place and the first thing you know, you've told him your name. The next time he knows you. Try it. Talk to folks. Give 'em a smile. Get to know your man—what he likes and dislikes. Get him to feel that you value the patronage he gives."

"But a girl can't be friendly with—just everybody like that," protested Miss Baynes.

"A girl?" said Dan. "Miss Baynes get that girl stuff out of your mind. You ain't a girl. You're a business woman, and business ain't social convention. It's selling something and making a profit. You don't need a formal introduction to pull a smile and a pleasant word to a man while he buys something you have to sell. And he'll be a lot more apt to come back again, if you sell it to him like that. Try it and see if I ain't right."

Miss Baynes sighed.

"You've been right about everything else," she admitted. "I'll—I'll try."

Danny nodded approval and grinned.

"If you're out of practise on smiling at folks," he suggested, "why, you can work up the habit on me."

He got a rather spontaneous example which flashed across his companion's lips at his words.

"Fine!" he accepted quickly. "Give one of those with each purchase and sales ought to pick up."

IN A way he was a prophet. Six months went by. Trade did improve—"returns" were less, sales larger, profits more. On several occasions the "promotion man" of the General News, dropping in, complimented Danny and Miss Baynes on their improved showing. Wells developed until he appeared quite the small business man himself. There was a confidence about him, a clearer skin, a keener eye, a firmer, more elastic quality to his step.

He still slept in the little room at the back of the shop, but he had lived for six months on good, wholesome food, drunk practically no alcoholics, read a lot of good literature and worked toward a high and almost altruistic motive, aside from making his own meager wage and living thereon the while. Danny Wells had a new view-point of life and a good many of its details at the end of six months, up to and on the day and evening, when Miss Baynes left him in charge of the shop, saying merely that she was invited to attend a theater that night.

Danny was glad she had the chance to enjoy an evening out. He did a good business until he closed at nine. Then he went back and read for an hour and retired.

He awoke some time after with the sound of shouting in his ears, a smell of smoke in his nostrils and a vague realization that something was very much wrong.

Scrambling out of his bed, he dressed in a hurry, found his way into the shop and gazed into a street filled with fire-fighting apparatus, and beyond that, the usual gawping crowd. He turned back, gained the rear door and stepped into the alley, strangely lighted now by a dull red glare.

He glanced up. The three-story building next to the one-story front which housed the shop was spouting flame and smoke. That explained the situation fully to Dan. He went on up the alley and around to the front.

Fire lines blocked his further progress. He halted and watched the conflagration. The fire was on the side of the building next the shop. He thought briefly of going back and collecting his few remaining belongings, but gave it up. The fire had made great progress and it looked very much as if the wall of the larger building might momentarily fall. He stood and waited for the crash, leaning against the rope, his eyes turned up to the licking sheets of fire.

A hoarse bellow roused him. He turned toward the sound. And his glance fell on a figure inside the ropes and running toward the front of the little shop where he had labored for six months. It was a woman's figure. It was familiar. Danny's heart leaped into his throat. It was Madge Baynes, returned from the theater to find her place of business threatened, seeking to get into it despite the ropes and the police, one of whom had bawled to her an order to come back. Even while realization of so much came, she had covered the short distance and was fumbling with the shop-door lock. Then it was open. She had darted inside.

A policeman swore. Danny came to life. There was that wall. It would fall any

minute now. It was an old thing. He had noted it often in the last six months. If it fell before Madge came out—if it fell she had gone to her death, unless——

In a swift duck he was under the rope and running. Behind him he heard another hoarse shout of command. But he gave it no heed. The girl was inside, under the menace of the fire-eaten wall, her life a thing of seconds perhaps. He flung himself ahead in a mad rush to reach her and drag her forth to safety, gained the door she had unlocked and flung himself through.

"Madge!" his voice rose in a short gasping shout.

He had thought of her as Madge for months, though he had never addressed her save as Miss Baynes. He was unconscious of the use of her given name now. It was a purely involuntary, subconscious outburst of feeling, anxiety spurred.

"Dan!" her voice came in the darkness.

A match sputtered briefly. Shading it, the girl moved toward a little safe back at the end of the store.

As Wells sprang forward, she knelt and began twirling the combination.

"Strike another match, won't you, Dan?" she panted. Oddly enough, she too used the man's first name.

"No time!" Wells snapped even as he complied. "You've got to get out. We'll be crushed by that wall next door any minute. Come on—Madge!"

"In a minute," she said. "I've got to get in here first. There's money, Dan—and papers—my insurance policy on the shop. Hold the match closer, I can't—there!"

The door of the safe swung open. She darted in her hands and pulled out a drawer, seized its contents and thrust it into the throat of her dress, picked up a small metal box of money, rose and swung shut the door of the safe.

"I—looked for you, first," she began, "but you——"

"Come!" Wells seized her by an arm. "Madge!"

Cra-a-a-a-sh!

A thunderous roar beat in on Danny's ears, far away as it seemed, but growing louder with an incredible swiftness which blotted out all conception of time. Above his head, and the head of the girl who suddenly clung to him in the pitchy darkness it came down like the bolt of an unseen doom.

The little structure where they stood seemed to quiver in an insensate dread of the falling blow, and then to rock and sway beneath it as it fell. Caught in a maelstrom of released force, it shook and shattered, its frail roof bursting beneath the cascade of brick and mortar and flaming wood which poured down as the burned-out wall toppled and plunged below.

Danny acted from no set purpose, but wholly by instinct, rather. He swept Madge from her feet and forced her, voiceless in her sudden terror, back and down against the safe, and crouched there above her, shielding her body with his own.

Suddenly he knew he was buffeted by blows, struck and bruised by falling bricks and timbers. His breath choked back into his throat in a strangle of hot dust and smoke. He began to cough and kept on coughing beyond his volition, for what seemed a long, long time, and was in reality but a matter of seconds.

Then he caught a great inhalation, cooler, fresher, into his lungs. There was a vent somewhere for the gases, and the admission of the outer air of night.

"Madge," he called softly and gained no answer.

A tongue of flame licked out in the dusk behind him from a fallen and still burning brand. It showed him that he knelt in a tiny space, provided by the wall of the partition between the shop and the room where he had slept, and against which the safe had stood. That frail barrier had kept them both from death—or had it?

"Madge," he called again.

Still no answer. Danny moved in a painful way to let the light of the burning timber fall on her face. It showed pallid and streaked by something which trickled down across its whiteness as he watched. He understood sickly. She had been struck. His body had not fended her wholly. She was unconscious. Despite the pain of his bruises, he gritted his teeth in a savage resistance of this newer trick of fate and gazed around and up.

Tangled timbers met his view, and beyond them—stars. There was a possible way out then, through the shattered roof above their heads. He did not wait. He stooped and with sore flesh crying protest, lifted the form of the girl, and after unbelievable effort as it seemed managed to clamber on top of the safe.

He could reach to some of the timbers from there. Could he carry Madge up and through their tangled maze? He essayed the task. There was another one-story building next door. If he could gain that, they would escape.

Afterward he had no very clear recollection of his acts. He knew that he struggled, and climbed, and tugged, and lifted at the inanimate body of the girl, now dragging her by the arms, now shoving her limply, with his arms gripped about her hips and thighs, but gaining, always gaining, while he dripped sweat from his efforts and the little space below him which had offered the first refuge, became a pool of flame, from where tongues of lapping heat reached up to drag him back.

Then he stood on a shattered wall with the girl on his arms, across his breast, hanging a limp weight. And he stepped over upon a débris-littered roof which was still intact.

He knew he staggered to the street-front of that roof. There was a shout. Then, while he stood dizzy and swaying, with the cool air playing about him and his burden, a ladder shot up, a helmet appeared. Its wearer seized Madge, and his arms felt suddenly as light as his head, which insisted on spinning around like a top. He fought back the sick qualms which tried to engulf him and followed the fireman and Madge down to the street.

He stood there in the center of a crowd and shivered, as the night air dried his sweat-soaked body. A clanging gong hammered in his ears and split the crowd. A police machine backed up to the curb and a man asked him for Madge's address. He gave it and got into the ambulance with her and rode away, and became conscious of the weight of the little metal cash-box in a pocket of his coat, yet did not remember putting it there.

Then his mind cleared. He went with the ambulance men when they carried Madge in to a little cottage, and explained it all to a white-faced woman with anxious blue eyes a good deal like those Madge had so often turned on him. He even telephoned for a doctor at her request, and after that he waited through the night while the doctor worked and spoke vaguely about a possible fracture of the skull from the brick which had struck the girl on the head.

He sat stiffly in the little parlor most of the time, speaking now and then a word of encouragement to the white-faced little mother. She made him think of his own mother, somehow. She made his throat ache a bit too, because she was very quiet and firm of lip, and brave.

Then he dozed a bit after a time, and waked as the doctor was leaving with a promise to call again, later, and went out with him to his machine. He asked him frankly for his opinion. The man shook his head. Danny understood, and suddenly dashed a hand across his eyes, and gazed into a morning of brilliant sunshine, which seemed strangely hazed.

WEEKS passed wherein Madge Baynes lay in the borderland of death. And many things happened during those weeks. The insurance on her stock in trade was paid. The little shop was rebuilt. Danny stayed now at the Baynes' home at night. He had become a sort of son to the little white-faced mother, on whom she leaned for comfort, courage and strength.

Then Danny reopened the shop in the rebuilt structure, with a new plate-glass window he had induced the owner to install in place of the former divided glass. And he started out to surpass himself in winning for the two women, who now held a place in his life.

His first notion concerning "returns" took a new angle in his mind. He began to make a feature of carrying back numbers as well. He discovered he could gain them very cheaply from a great many sources. He sorted them and sold them singly or in bunches at a reduced price, which brought him a good profit none the less. He had more than one talk with the "promotion man" of the General News, with whom he had now made friends.

And Madge was to live. Once more she was herself. Every night Danny reported the day's business to her now, while she sat propped in a chair and listened—a pale, drawn-faced Madge—gaining a little each day. She heard him and thanked him each evening for his work of the day, even as on the first time she knew him, or her mother or anything at all, she had faltered forth a broken appreciation of his great service in saving her from death. Sometimes, too, after his report was ended, she chatted with him for an hour. At such times strange

thoughts and fancies filled the mind of Danny Wells.

Then opportunity knocked at his door. The "promotion man" came to see him with a proposition. He was going away—to a better position. He had watched Danny's work. He could get him into his place when he gave it up. Danny could be "promotion man" for the General News at a good salary if he liked.

"Anybody who could make a 'come back' in a joint like this was, is the sort of man we need," he said.

Danny told him he would see. That night he told Madge all about it, after he had finished the day's report.

She heard him in silence to the end.

"Danny!" she cried then; "that's splendid, and of course you must take it, and I'm glad—really—only——"

She caught her breath and paused.

"Only what?" said Dan.

"Oh, it's awfully selfish, Danny dear," Madge faltered, flushing a trifle and looking down; "but—I was just thinking about the shop."

Danny grinned. He cleared his throat and shuffled his feet. He had expected she would feel that way about it, and he had planned for this very moment, all day. He had even rehearsed just what he was going to say and how he was going to say it; and now he found himself acutely embarrassed, with a slow red creeping into his cheeks to match that in the face of the girl, making them tingle. And his collar felt suddenly tight.

"Selfish nothing!" he burst out at last in a sort of desperation. "I'd be a fine fellow, I guess, to leave you all up in the air with the shop. But you see I've got that all thought out. I—I—well maybe I'd better tell you something about myself."

Madge's blue eyes questioned him mutely, and he stumbled doggedly on:

"I was a man in a good position once, but I—got in with a pretty swift set. I lost my job and got into debt, and the people I thought were my friends when I was making good turned me down. So after a while I just said I didn't care for anything at all, and I went clear to the bowwows like I was when you saw me first. But that's the worst of it Madge. I never did anything to anybody, worse than I did to myself. And the other night, when I held you there in my arms after we'd got out of the wreck of the shop, why, I knew—that—there was something in the world I cared for after all—something I cared more for than I did for all the world; and afterward, when the doc said you might die, why, I said to somebody—or something—maybe to God—that if only you could get well, and I could come back—climb up out of the gutter far enough to—well far enough so that you might—might not be afraid or ashamed to— Oh, Madge girl, can't you understand?"

"Danny," she whispered softly. "Oh, Danny—Danny dear." There was a great light in her face.

Danny nodded.

"That's it. I want to have you always where I can hear you say it—just like that. I, well the promotion man says I made the shop come back, and now I want to make my own come back next, and then I want—just you, Madge—you."

She laughed, a sound between joy and tears.

She put out a thin white hand, which lost itself in Wells'.

Danny rattled on:

"And I'll take this job, and we'll sell the shop—we can now it's making money—and I'll take care of you and the little mother."

He drew the hand toward him, transferred it to his other palm, and slipped an arm which trembled the least bit in the world about her waist.

She yielded to him. She lifted her face to the eager appeal of his.

"Danny," she called him, with the world-old call of her kind; "Danny, my Danny, dear."

He held her—just held her—his one thing for which he really cared.

"Happy dear?" she whispered after the course of uncounted minutes.

Wells laughed.

"Happy?" he repeated. "Happy? Say—trot out the fatted calf. The Prodigal has returned."

IN THE GRIP OF THE MINOTAUR

A FOUR PART STORY ~ PART III

by Farnham Bishop & Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur

AT THE dawn of civilization, long before the rise of Greece, King Minos of Crete, by virtue of his great fleet, ruled the Mediterranean world. He drew tribute from many cities, one of which was Troy, ruled by old King Dardanus whose beautiful daughter, Ilia, was desired by Prince Ambrogeos of Crete.

From out of the north came a strange wolf-prowed ship to Troy. It carried Ragnarr, a Norse prince, Valgard, his right-hand warrior, and twoscore giant Northmen. They first visited Troy Fair where Ragnarr rescued from drunken lumbermen Rala, a pretty little acrobat, who straightway attached herself to him as a life-servant.

Ragnarr was then entertained by King Dardanus. He met Ilia and each loved the other almost from that moment. Meanwhile Ragnarr learned from Dardanus that King Minos of Crete was crushing tribute from Troy.

Dardanus needed ships which Ragnarr's men could build and arms which the Pharaoh of Egypt alone could furnish. Dardanus promised Ilia to Ragnarr if the Norse prince would bring arms from Egypt and help overthrow Minos. Ragnarr agreed, and on the eve of his departure he gave Rala to Ilia as a maid.

That same day a Cretan galley landed at Troy, bringing Admiral Rhodonthos and Prince Ambrogeos, come to claim Ilia. The Northmen defeated the Cretans in a street brawl. Ambrogeos swore to bring Ragnarr to account for presuming to be the equal of the Prince of Crete.

Then Ambrogeos demanded Ilia from Dardanus. Ilia hated Ambrogeos. But when she learned that the price of her refusal would be the overthrow of her father's kingdom she sadly consented to their marriage.

She was to remain in Troy until the return of Ambrogeos from Egypt, where he expected to form a pact between his father and Pharaoh by marrying the Egyptian princess, promising Dardanus, however, that Ilia would take precedence over the daughter of Pharaoh.

Ragnarr learned from Rala of the perfidy of weak old Dardanus. The hour for Ilia's marriage was at hand. Through an underground passage the Norse prince led his Goths into the temple where Dardanus and his court had assembled for the marriage ceremony.

The Northmen broke into the great hall. Ragnarr cut down Prince Ambrogeos, then defied Dardanus and all his guard, while Ilia went to his arms.

Dardanus was terrified. Admiral Rhodonthos told old Dardanus quickly what the vengeance of Minos would be, then the body of Ambrogeos was borne away to the Cretan ship. Dardanus explained to Ragnarr that every year twenty youths and twenty maidens were levied from Troy by Minos to feed the Cretan Minotaur, a terrible monster that none ever met and returned to describe. Now Minos would demand a life from every household in Troy for the deed committed by Ragnarr.

Raising his sword Tyrfing, the Norse prince swore by a great oath to sail to the island of Crete, give himself up to meet the

Minotaur and slay him in single combat. Then would he return to Troy and claim Ilia, his bride.

For he knew not that Valgard had already told Ilia that the *Gray Wolf* sailed at flood tide in two hours, and that Ilia had promised to come to a grove on the river's bank by the southwest gate and meet the ship.

Princess Ilia was caught by her father in her effort to escape, but Rala won through to the ship and with the Northmen sailed away for Crete. Arriving at the island, Ragnarr gained audience with Minos by using a proclamation of friendship, signed by King Dardanus before Ragnarr and he broke their compact.

Ragnarr found royal welcome in Knossos, the Cretan capital, for no word had yet come to Minos concerning his son's reception at Troy. In the days that passed Ragnarr entered into Cretan sports and met Princess Ariadne who soon became infatuated with this proud young giant from the Northland. And at his request she led him one night into the labyrinth where lived the Minotaur, that he might hear the monster's voice come booming up through those endless stone halls.

Meantime Prince Ambrogeos recovered consciousness at sea. Straightway, on learning how it chanced that he was thus sorely injured, he set back to Troy, and, going before Dardanus, demanded Ilia immediately. There was nothing the girl could do but consent. So Ambrogeos sailed away with her toward his homeland, swearing that on their wedding-day his enemy and her sweetheart, Ragnarr the Norseman, should die in the clutches of the Minotaur.

But ere Ambrogeos arrived at Knossos, Ragnarr, while hunting, by accident killed the sacred bull of Crete. His men were straightway imprisoned, and, according to the Cretan law, despite the pleas of Princess Ariadne, Ragnarr was condemned to fight a wild bull.

In the arena where such combats took place, there first came other contestants, among whom, to Ragnarr's astonishment, was Rala. And his blood boiled with rage as the girl was gored to death before his eyes. Then Ragnarr's hour arrived. As the bull charged, he seized the brute's horns. Slowly, to the amazement of the Cretans, the strength and skill of the blond giant won. The bull's neck snapped—broken. Then, just as Ragnarr was about to win his freedom, into the arena rushed Ambrogeos, just landed from Troy, who shouted out the story of Ragnarr's attack upon him, a prince of Crete, and of the Norsemen's contempt for Cretan power. He demanded that Ragnarr be thrown to the Minotaur.

Purple with rage, Minos ordered Ragnarr seized. Barehanded the Northern prince desperately fought off the Cretan soldiers. But at last an ax crashed down on his skull and night descended upon him.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MINOTAUR

RAGNARR woke with a sense of choking. On all sides of him, and above, nothing but the same dense dark which his eyes could not pierce. His head ached horribly and his limbs felt numbed and heavy with their recent bonds.

He rose, put out his hand and encountered a wall of damp and slimy stone. He groped along the masonry, and there was another wall at right angles to the first.

Four paces and he came to a third. One, two, three to the right, and his touch met stone again. Imprisoned! But where and why? Now it came back to him, and he clenched his fists and ground his teeth in helpless rage.

Scene by scene he reviewed the events of the day, and his heart swelled within him. Oh, these Cretan folk were devils! The vague, mysterious tales of a devouring Minotaur, the cowardly, fanatic hunters; Rala, dead and bleeding from a score of wounds! Faithful little Rala, who had served him with such true devotion, who had saved Ilia from a hated marriage, and, knowing her danger, had sailed back with him to the land of her captivity, in the vain hope of lightening his labors only to find a cruel death! By Tyr! They should pay for every drop of her blood if he might find a way of escape.

Escape? What escape was there from this thick-walled cell, whose roof he could not touch nor see? Once more he groped about the walls searching for a door, but there was none.

And now a fearful thought crept into his

mind. Where were his men? Were they slain, or captured like himself? He beat his breast in futile anger.

A scraping sound, a beam of light across the gloom; and on a level with his shoulder a shutter stood open in the great thickness of the wall. Through the little passage, scarcely a foot each way, a hand thrust a flat loaf and a squat earthen jar. He reached for them, and had hardly clutched them when the shutter slid to again.

Ragnarr took a long draft of the cool water, dashed a few drops on his aching brow, and bit into the sour, ill-baked bread. As he ate his over-wrought nature yielded to the action of the food and he grew calmer.

Having eaten half the bread he laid the remnant and the water-jar between him and the angle of the wall where he could not miss them even in the dark. Then he stretched out on his side and fell asleep.

Suddenly he awoke from a confused dream, in which he seemed to hear the voice of Ilia calling his name. He sat up sharply, and saw, far above him, a tiny point of light. As he stared at it, "Ragnarr!" a woman's voice called softly down to him. But the voice was not Ilia's.

"Ragnarr!" it came again.

He sprang to his feet, and saw, illumined by the mysterious light, the face of Ariadne.

"Ay, princess?" he answered hoarsely.

"I have come to free you," she said in low, hurried tones. "Climb this rope which is fastened to one of the columns, and I will lead you to your men, for I have the key to their prison. I have drugged the guards with wine, and we may pass unhindered to your ship, which lies moored to the quay beyond the water-gate."

As she spoke a stout rope descended, striking against his shoulder. In a moment more he had climbed the rope, untied it, and dropped it through the narrow trap-door that was the only entrance to the cell.

"Come swiftly," urged Ariadne at his side, "for the guard is changed at dawn. Haste! We may be discovered."

But Ragnarr did not move. "Princess," he said firmly, "I came to this land with a purpose which still remains unfulfilled. Before I go hence I shall accomplish it if you will lend me your help yet further. I can not go till I have seen and slain the Minotaur."

Ariadne stamped her foot in vexation. "There is no time," she cried impatiently, "nor can the Minotaur be slain by man. I have risked much to set you free, and you ask me to risk far more, setting your life and mine upon the hazard. Let us fly while we may!"

"Do not think," he answered gently, "that I make little of your kindness or of the perils you have run for my sake. But my honor is pledged, and I must redeem it. First lead me to the Minotaur. Then I will do your bidding, whatever it may be."

"So be it!" she replied, her face lighting joyously. "Follow me!"

Raising her lamp she led him to the right, then to the left, through dim, unlighted passages into a long, close corridor, black as midnight. Around a corner, up a short flight of steps and down a narrow twisting passageway he followed her. From this they emerged into a square hall, its columns looming vague and ghostly about them. Across it and out the door at the further end they went, entering another passageway, with doors opening off on either side.

Suddenly Ariadne seized Ragnarr's hand and drew him into the shadow, screening the flame of the lamp under her cloak. Footsteps came toward them, nearer and nearer, till it seemed they must be discovered.

Then he who approached turned and thrust open the door of a lighted chamber, the glow from which shone out into the passage. Fortunately they were just out of its rays.

The door closed again, and Ariadne hurried on, holding the Northman's hand tightly in her warm clasp.

At last they came to the end of the corridor and emerged into a second hall, the lamplight revealing a spectral procession of painted warriors on the wall. Out again, down a flight of steps, now in one direction, now in another they turned and twisted, till Ragnarr's head was whirling. Now they skirted the edge of a small court, hiding their light, and taking cover behind the massive pillars. As they reached its end a wild cry rang out beyond and below them, a mingled scream and roar, reverberating from wall and roof in strange, wild echoes.

"We are near our goal," said Ariadne with a little shudder. "It is his voice!"

Down a long flight of stairs, through more and ever-twisting ways they went. Up again, and past a curtained room, the light radiating out between and around the edges

of the hangings. As they passed, a woman's laugh rang out, and they hurried on and ever on, till a blank wall rose before them.

Here Ariadne held the light up to a row of wooden panels, and pressed the second, which swung in, revealing a narrow, winding stairway between this and a second wall. Up they went, each turn bewildering the puzzled Northman more. As they climbed, again and again the frightful voice of the Minotaur rang out, clearer and ever clearer.

On the topmost step Ariadne paused and stayed Ragnarr with a warning hand. Standing beside her he could see no floor before them, only a drop into unfathomable blackness. Raising her lamp she pointed to the left, revealing a sheer wall along which ran a three-foot shelf, just to one side of and on the same level as the top of the spiral stair. Ragnarr drew a deep breath.

"A good trap," he muttered.

"Do not stumble," she whispered, "or all is over. Take three short steps along the shelf, face inward and stop."

He did so, and she drew in beside him. Holding the lamp down by her side, its light illuminating the dangerous path, she fumbled at something level with her head. At last her fingers touched a hidden spring, and a narrow rectangle of dim light glowed in their faces.

"Look!" she whispered.

Peering through the slit, Ragnarr looked down into a great wooden hall, bare of all ornament. At its further end, on a raised platform, sat a colossal naked figure on a mighty throne, at whose feet knelt a group of motionless men, all naked like the monster.

From the shoulders down it was human and cast in gigantic mold; its head and neck were those of a Titanic bull, with arching horns. It glowed a ghastly luminous red in the uncanny light; and as they watched, its mouth opened in a yawning gape, emitting smoke and darting tongues of flame. The cavern of its jaws measured a full five feet; and monstrous hands lay on its parted knees.

Two of the kneeling priests arose, opened the doors of a metal cage, and drew out the bound and rigid form of a girl. Ascending the steps of the platform, they held her upright between the cruel hands, which clutched her close, and bore her in a swift upward sweep into the fiery jaws. The mouth closed with a savage clash, and her dying shriek rang in an unearthly, vibrant scream, which the engulfing throat deepened and magnified to terrible intensity.

CHAPTER XVII

THE ESCAPE

A WAVE of sickened rage and loathing swept over Ragnarr.

"Find me a sword!" he gasped. "Or take me to this fiend that I may slay him with my hands!"

Ariadne, more used to such fearful sights, forced a smile, and asked:

"To what purpose, Ragnarr? This is no creature of flesh and blood, nor can a man fight him."

"What matters it?" he returned furiously. "Let it be the fire-demon himself, I will match my strength with him and kill him —or be killed!"

"Know then, that this is neither man nor beast, flesh nor devil, but a cunningly contrived image of bronze; and the fire within him is fed by the priests of his temple. You can not slay him, for he does not live."

Ragnarr turned from her, his heart convulsed with loathing of this cursed race that made such hideous engines to torture and consume the helpless innocent. Even this beautiful woman by his side, who had already rescued him from death, and now sought a second time to save him—was she not one of them, for all her splendid courage and her kindness toward him? What evil fate had brought him to this land, sworn to fight a monstrous, unfeeling thing, the ghastlier for its very lifelessness?

Divining his feelings, Ariadne laid her soft arm across his bare shoulder.

"Come," she whispered gently. "Let us abandon this wicked land forever! Your ship lies east of the palace, where the widening river forms a basin, which has been made into a slip. My father had her rowed thither that he might examine her. Now she is waiting, provisioned and ready, to be taken down to Palaikastro, where the galleys are drawn up high on the shore in the stormy Winter, and in Summer the great fleets gather. Let us be swift!"

They went back as they had come, till they reached the stairway to the lower floor; descending this, they turned to the right. A few steps and they came to another stairway. Almost at the bottom there

was a landing, and eight more steps at right angles to those above. Here a wide corridor ran through the entire length of the vaults.

"We are in the eastern end of the palace," said Ariadne. "To the right is the guard-room and the water-gate; to the left the whole capitol, even to the western entrance. Your men are imprisoned here." And she pointed to the massive door before them.

Hurrying toward it she drew the bronze key from her bosom.

"We must make haste," she murmured. "See, the dawn already sends its light even into these vaults."

"Halt!" rang the sharp challenge of a sentry who sprang out of the dark before them.

"Too late! The guard is upon us!" cried Ariadne, and, shrinking back into the shadow she disappeared through a hidden panel in the wall.

Ragnarr, who had eyes only for the sentry, did not see her go. He rushed forward, stooped just in time to let the soldier's spear fly harmlessly over his head, and seized him by the throat, choking off his shout of alarm. Against the wall beside him loomed an enormous earthen jar, seven feet high, full to the brim with olive-oil.

He heaved the sentry high in the air and plumped him head foremost into the mighty jar, where the fellow sank gurgling to his death. Ragnarr turned and looked for Ariadne, but could find her nowhere. Time pressed and he must free his men.

A row of smaller vessels of bronze, ranged along the wall, each one a burden for two ordinary men, contained the wheat which fed the soldiers. Ragnarr broke the clay seal of the foremost, poured out its contents and raised it up.

Crying aloud on his comrades, he dashed the heavy jar against the door. Again and again he struck, the clangor of bronze on wood reverberating down the corridor.

Now the Northmen within, recognizing his voice, raised a great shout and threw themselves upon the door between his blows. At last it came crashing down, and the prisoners surged out just as the watch came running from the guard-room with lowered spears. Ragnarr hurled the great bronze vessel full upon them, bringing down two men, whose spear-shafts tripped as many more.

"To the stairs, comrades!" he shouted, and up they went in a seething mass, Ragnarr, the hindmost, fighting desperately with a great double-headed ax snatched from a soldier. Man after man went down beneath his blows, and lat last he gained the landing.

On the stairs the Northmen made a stand, hurling upon the guardsmen's heads the jars and wine-pots which lined the walls. At length, Valgard, who had climbed to the floor above in search of weapons, staggered down again, half-dragging, half-carrying a huge chest, intending to cast it down and crush some of their foes. Stumbling, he dropped it on the stairs, and it burst open. With a great cry of joy the Northmen fell upon it, for it was full to the brim with swords and axes. In a moment all were armed and threw themselves upon the guard, who gave way before their terrible strokes and fled down the corridor in disorder.

The early morning light shone through the light-well above, down onto the stair, and Ragnarr, looking downward, noticed a large square grating set in the floor of the landing. Through it he could dimly see a great, round cavern; and suddenly he remembered how Rala had once escaped from the same palace through the drains.

He seized the bars and wrenched with might and main. The grating came up in his hands, and he raised his voice in a ringing shout:

"To me, men of Sigmund!"

The Northmen came running back by twos and threes, leaving such of their foes as had not fled stretched on the floor in death. Ragnarr pointed to the drain and bade them plunge themselves into it swiftly. The palace was not yet awake, and no water flowed through its wonderful drainage system. One after another they descended and crawled through the great tunnel. Last of all Ragnarr entered and lowered the grating carefully in place behind him.

Hardly were they safely hidden when fresh Cretan forces, roused by the fugitives, rushed toward the staircase.

"They have reached the upper level!" cried an officer. "Up, and after them!"

And scattering through the numerous winding ways of the palace they raised the hue and cry, their numbers swelled at every turn by fresh arrivals.

The Northmen had not far to crawl, for the man-hole by which they entered was close to the river and the water-gate. Now,

Valgard, who was in the lead, saw a round patch of light before him; and soon he crawled out, just at the river's edge. One after another the men followed, till all stood on the bank.

Not fifty yards upstream the river formed a great basin, as Ariadne had said. Here, close to the water-gate in the stone-faced bank, lay the *Gray Wolf*, and beside her in the slip a dainty, high-bowed craft, the royal barge, her gilt work covered with canvas against the weather. Neither had a watchman aboard.

As the fugitives dashed for their ship a cry went up from the sentinel on the east bastion of the northern gate, and a company of spearmen ran out from the guardhouse to cut them off. But the Northmen had not a third as far to go as their foes, and reaching the *Gray Wolf's* side, swarmed hastily aboard, and brought out the oars.

Just as the last stragglers reached for the gunwale a flight of arrows descended from the tower, and three of the sailors fell. The galley's archers seized quiver and bow from the arms-chest, and loosed in reply.

Valgard, laying hold of a shield, leaped back on the bank, and, covering the wounded men as best he could, lifted them on board. Two were not more than lamed, but faithful Tyrleif breathed his last in Ragnarr's arms.

Now the foremost spearmen came up and thrust at Valgard with their pikes. For a moment he was hard bested; but Ragnarr, who by now had snatched the sword Tyrfing from its hiding place, rushed to his aid and struck down four of the Cretans in swift succession. The *Gray Wolf's* bowmen held the others back, till both men had climbed aboard again in safety.

Hastily they shoved her clear of the royal barge; and just as she swung away Valgard reached out with a long oar and sent the stout butt crashing through the frail craft's light timbers, on the off-shore side. Now the rowers urged the *Wolf* strongly along the curving bank, while Ragnarr, at the steering-oar, turned her deftly to starboard.

As the stern pointed shoreward he flung himself against the long sweep, the rowers tossed their blades and around she swung, her nose pointing down-stream. The river, swollen with the recent rains, swept the wolf-ship swiftly away toward the sea.

With loud and angry shouts the palace guardsmen flung themselves aboard the royal barge and pushed her out. Their weight forced her low in the water, and the river surged in through the broken side. Before they could bring her round, she filled, rolled over, and sank; and the luckless soldiers were tossed and whirled like straws by the foaming current.

Faster and faster sped the *Gray Wolf*, leaving the great pile of Knossos far astern. Now the river ran narrow between the shoulders of the hills, and it took clever steering to bring her through. But through she won, and urged by the force of the pent-up waters, bounded out into the widening reaches of the lower Kairatos. Now they neared the mouth and saw a great three-masted galley anchored in the fairway, close to the shore, the new risen sun reflected from her gilded railings. As they bore down on her the Northmen heard a loud yell of rage go up from the Cretan's deck.

It was the *Dolphin*, and on her raised prow stood Rhodonthos. Swift as thought he drew his dagger and cut the anchor-rope, shouting orders to his well-disciplined crew the while. The long sweeps ran out just as the *Wolf* was on her. Ragnarr thundered a command and his rowers tossed their oars.

Tugging mightily at the steering-paddle, Ragnarr swung her nose to port, then shoved her over again. The *Gray Wolf's* prow crashed through the *Dolphin's* starboard bank of oars from stem to stern, snapping and splintering the stout ash-blades and hurling the wretched rowers from their benches. Before a Cretan could loose an arrow, she was past, her own oars dipped and swung, and urged her exulting out to the open sea.

Swiftly the three-master set her canvas, but vainly, for there was not a breath of wind. The *Dolphin* lay crippled and helpless, the curses of her crew still ringing sweetly in the Northmen's ears.

But still they were not free. Thrusting off from either side of the harbor, other Cretan galleys followed in pursuit. Their rowers were many and unwearied, their long, lean hulls flashed through the water, gaining steadily. Now a little breeze blew from the southwest, scarce flapping the Northman's heavy square sail, but swelling the lighter canvas high on the Cretan mast-heads. Out-pulled and out-sailed, the gallant *Wolf* still strove.

Suddenly old Valgard, toiling at the stroke oar, shouted with joy: "Tyr aids us! Look, master, where he comes striding through the sky!"

"In oars!" cried Ragnarr, after one glance over his shoulder. "Down sail, and put four reefs in it, for your lives!"

A great black cloud was sweeping over the heavens with the swiftness of an eagle's wing. Before it, the breeze swelled into a gale; and with a roar the tempest fell upon pursuers and pursued.

Struck full by the first great wave just as she was turning to meet it head on, the nearest Cretan heeled over, till as the storm-wind thrust against her high-set sails, she rolled her lee gunwale under, and the undecked hull filled and went down with sickening suddenness.

The others saw and held to their course. One, stripped of her sails by the furious blast, drove out to sea. Another, whose canvas held, was run under and swamped, her tall spars sinking rapidly beneath the water, the cries of her panic-stricken crew drowned by the shrieking tempest.

The stanch *Gray Wolf*, steady and strong, under storm canvas woven for Baltic blasts, swept like a leaf before the gale, leaving her bruised and shattered foes far astern. Over the rolling waves she scurried, due northeast, till the low shores of Crete dropped down behind the dark horizon.

CHAPTER XVIII

KAMAS DECIDES

"FAREWELL, Perimon! You must use both your eyes, and the keen vision of Theleos besides, if you would win my silver bracelet. I saw four ships to your two last night, remember."

"Aye, captain, but your four passed on up the straits, and one of mine entered the port," answered the subaltern.

"He who sees a ship that passes need not fear surprise from one that stops," retorted Kamas. "I will return to relieve you again in four hours; now I walk along the beach to stretch my limbs before sleep."

The captain of the shore descended the tower stairs to the guard-room. Here the first night-watch were turning out, buckling on sword-belts, flinging quivers over their shoulders, and taking spears from the pegs on the wall; while those they relieved stretched themselves out on the floor and pillowed their heads on their hide shields. Picking his way among them, Kamas stepped to the door, yawning.

Suddenly he stiffened, and peered out into the graying dusk. A lean, shadowy form was creeping silently along the water, just barely visible to a trained eye on the shore.

"He does not see it yet," chuckled Kamas to himself, still thinking of his wager with Perimon; then stared in amazement, for the distant ship, which had been stealing in from the west, now altered her course and came straight toward land, without waiting to make the harbor.

This was strange. No enemy attacks a strong city with one ship; yet who but enemies would thus seek to avoid the coast-guard, unless it were strangers, who did not know the coast? But as this craft crept in, her low hull and square sail looked somehow familiar.

Kamas drew in his breath sharply.

"By the goddess!" he muttered to himself. "It is the *Gray Wolf*, none other! But how can those Northmen be still among the living? Minos is not wont to let his foes depart with the breath in their bodies. But be they alive or ghosts of slain men, this matter must be looked into!"

He stepped out into the thickening dark and strode swiftly along the sand, his sharp eyes striving to keep the ship in sight before night shut in completely. After about eight minutes he stopped and crouched behind a boulder. Peering over it cautiously he could see the *Wolf's* outlines quite clearly now. She had come into a little cove, within a stone's throw of him, and the creaking of the blocks, as the yard was lowered, reached his ears distinctly, broken now and again by the voices of the sailors. He could not understand what they said, however, for they spoke in their own tongue.

A command rang out in a voice which he knew, and a boat came over the side, for the water was too deep for wading. Kamas could just make out the dim figures dropping over the gunwale, as the dark drew about the ship, merging her grayness with the dusk of night. Now the other boat; and as the wooden bottoms grated on the shingle tall forms sprang out and stood waiting, while others rowed the boats back. Four times the short trip was made, till the entire ship's company, save the anchor-watch, had disembarked.

Up the shore they moved, and slowly drew off round the shoulder of a headland. Leaving his shelter with the utmost caution, Kamas followed them, at times drawing back behind a shrub or boulder, as the landing party stopped to reconnoiter. At last the hindmost man was out of sight round the hill. Now came the murmur of low voices, and Kamas knew from its uniformity that they were making a longer stop. Then while the talking continued came sounds of trampling, the breaking of sticks, and after a time, faint snappings and cracklings, and a whiff of wood smoke. But he could see no light.

Carefully Kamas skirted the hill along a sheep-path which wound through the undergrowth, till the loudness and distinctness of the voices told him he was close upon them. Still he could not see the fire which he heard sputtering, though the smoke was pungent in his nostrils.

The path curved about a projecting ledge of stone, round which Kamas edged quietly, setting his feet down with cautious deliberation till he was flush with the face of the ledge. In front of this sat a wide semicircle of men, the figures of those in the center standing out in the glow of a large fire. Stepping out softly, screening himself behind the branches of the shrubbery, Kamas saw that the landing party had cunningly utilized the cut-in base of the ledge for a fireplace, above which the arching rock overhung so far that the glow was completely hidden from city, beach, and watch-tower. A large kettle hung from three sticks over the fire.

A powerfully built sailor appeared suddenly from the darkness beyond the circle and made his way between the seated men, bearing a great armful of driftwood. He strode to the fire and cast his burden on the flames, which sank down, crackled briskly amid a smother of smoke, and then flared up, illumining the man's face. It was Valgard. Beside him, his figure thrown into sharp relief by the bright blaze, stood Ragnarr.

His mind made up, Kamas strode into the firelight. All sprang to their feet, weapons in hand. Halting a few paces from Ragnarr, Kamas raised his arm in salute.

"I come in peace!" he cried so that all could hear. "Prince Ragnarr, if ye be indeed a living man and not of the cheerless dead, tell me what ye seek here, and why ye did not enter the harbor, where I keep the sea-gate of Troy. But if ye be a spirit among spirits let me depart unharmed, for never was I enemy of yours."

Recognizing the captain of the Trojan shore, and recalling his kindly hospitality, the Northmen threw aside their weapons and stood about gravely waiting for their prince's reply. Ragnarr thrust out his hand and warmly clasped that of Kamas.

"We are no ghosts, but flesh and blood even as yourself," he answered. "I have looked on the Minotaur and lived to tell of it, and having kept the first part of my oath so far as it lay in my power, fled hither from Crete, purposing to fulfil the second."

"Have you slain the Minotaur?" asked Kamas, awestruck.

"No, for it was not mortal, but a furnace of bronze into which I saw the living cast."

Kamas cried out in horror, and Ragnarr continued:

"I and my men escaped from the prisons of Minos, and ran past his galleys in a storm which blew us far toward this land before it subsided. As we stand in peril of the wrath of Crete, I resolved to settle my affairs here as quickly as possible. But now tell me, good Kamas: how is it with the Princess Ilia? For more than all else I come here because of her."

The Trojan's face fell, and for a moment he strove in vain to speak.

"Seven days ago she sailed for Crete, in the ship of Prince Ambrogeos," he at last said sadly.

Ragnarr stared at him, his face livid with grief and fury.

"Man, think what you say!" he gasped. "Do you not know she was betrothed to me?"

"I know somewhat of it, O prince," answered Kamas sorrowfully.

"Did she go of her own will or under compulsion?" Ragnarr questioned him. "Was she stolen? Or did your king give his consent?"

"She was not stolen, my lord, but went in all honor, suitably attended, according to the compact between King Dardanus and the Cretan prince, that he should make her his consort upon their arrival in Crete."

Ragnarr turned abruptly and walked to the outermost rim of firelight, his form scarce visible among the trees. For some time he stood there, while Kamas tarried

in the ring of Northmen; then he strode back, his features set and grim.

"Ambrogeos returned to Crete in time to have me thrust into bondage," he said bitterly. "When I escaped his ship was still at anchor in the harbor. If I had known!" He bit his lip savagely then went on: "But that is over; my hopes are dead. One thing remains—revenge! We came ashore here purposing to pass the night and proceed to the city at daybreak, where I expected to find Ilia. But now——"

He broke off and turned to his men with a savage cry.

"Up, fellows! The night is dark, and we shall be before the city within two hours. Tonight your swords shall drink their fill! We will drag this traitorous, perjured king from his bed and toss him on our spears!"

A roar of wild enthusiasm went up from threescore swelling throats, and sixty hands shook spears and axes in triumphant frenzy.

But Kamas seized Ragnarr's arm.

"How do you think to pass our mighty walls, defended by a host outnumbering your tiny company fifty to one?"

"By the secret passage!" Ragnarr returned, and shaking off the Trojan's hand, snatched the sword Tyrfing from its sheath.

As it gleamed in the firelight, the reflections rippled down the blade in strange figures like eery monsters dancing beneath the moon. Undaunted, Kamas interposed once more:

"O prince, you would never see the pleasant sun again," he said quietly. "Since you struck down Ambrogeos before the king, and escaped with your men, the passage has been strongly guarded. Before you could pass half its length the alarm would be given, and such of you as remained alive would speedily be overpowered. Moreover, though I confess the king has dealt most foully with you I am none the less his captain of the shore, bound to protect his person and city with my life, so long as I remain in his service."

"You do not think we will let you go to rouse your fellows, do you?" one called from the background. "We have you, and you do not leave us alive."

A growl of approval went up. Ignoring the speaker, and addressing himself to Ragnarr, Kamas continued:

"I stand here alone and helpless before you, and ye are many. Yet, while I live, you shall not stir one step toward Troy with hostile purpose. Slay me if you will—I am resolved."

Ragnarr stood looking into the fire, his face inscrutable. Two or three turbulent fellows pressed forward, and one, a thick-set, bull-necked sailor, thrust himself between his master and the Trojan.

"Look you, fool!" he roared. "You stand in our way and ask for death. My lord here is too tender-hearted to remove you, but I have no fine scruples. Thus do I clear the road to Troy!"

And he drew his knife, glowering down upon the Trojan, who stood with folded arms, his eyes raised proudly to the bully's face. Calmly, deliberately, as one crushes a snake, Ragnarr raised his mighty fist and struck the fellow to the earth, where he lay still. Then seizing the hand of Kamas in his own he swung him bodily around, facing the crowd of sailors.

"Behold a man!" he cried. "If ye serve me as he serves Dardanus we will yet return and sweep the Cretans from their isle! And as for you, O Kamas, who have denied me my vengeance, what do you propose instead? I can not stay here and wait for Minos to send after me, nor can we sail back through the Mediterranean, where his fleets comb the waters for us far and wide. What course is left?"

"Why do you not sail northeastward through these straits, where the Cretan galleys do not venture?" asked Kamas.

"Lead not these straits into the Euxine Sea?"

"E'en so, my lord."

"Then thither lies our way!" exclaimed Ragnarr. "For my people have long taken their wares from the north along the great rivers that flow into the Euxine, and we can go where they have gone before us. Valgard here has made the journey in his youth, and can guide us back.

"When we have returned to our own land, I shall raise a mighty fleet, and we will sail through the waters of the Western Sea, back into the Mediterranean to seek our vengeance. Then let Minos pray to his gods and offer up many victims to the Minotaur, for he will need their aid. We will overthrow his cities, spoil his treasuries, destroy his palace with fire, and hurl him living into the devouring flames!"

Again the Northmen raised a mighty shout, as gray Tyrfing flashed above their prince's head. Then, as the tumult died,

Kamas spoke, his eyes fixed eagerly on Ragnarr's face.

"My lord," he said, "all the days of my life I have served Dardanus; and as you have said, I served him well. Even to this last moment I have been ready to shed my blood for him, but my heart is filled with loathing at his vileness, and I renounce him. I am an honest soldier, and will call no base perjurer master. I pray you, take me with you to your land; let me share your labors and your perils, for your service is one that a man may be proud to live and die in."

Ragnarr looked into the Trojan's eyes and saw in them faith and reverent affection. He turned to his Northmen.

"I bring you a new comrade!" he cried. "Be your shields his defense, and your points and edges his protection, as you hope for my favor!"

The applause was loud and long. At its height, old Valgard picked up the Trojan and lifted him bodily onto the flat surface of his shield. Hjalti leaped out, and seizing one rim steadied the buckler; then two burly sailors raised Kamas high above their heads, while the tumult rang loud about him.

"Hail, Kamas!" shouted Valgard; and the Northmen echoed the cry in wild delight: "Hail, Kamas! Hail! Hail!"

"To the ship!" cried Ragnarr; and, lowering the enthusiastic Trojan, Valgard set him on his feet.

Each man seized his weapons, and, stopping only to snatch up brands from the fire the entire company dashed down to the shore, the lights of their torches dancing and flickering through the deep blackness of the night. Ragnarr leaped into one of the boats, Valgard into the other. The crews shoved off, and the men left behind scorning to wait for the boats to return, plunged into the water and swam to the *Wolf's* side. Over the shield-rail they swarmed; the anchor was weighed, the sail hoisted, and the oars thrust out. Silently, as she had come, the *Gray Wolf* stole out over the waters of the Hellespont.

"Who goes?" came the sharp challenge of the shore-watch.

"Kamas goes, never to return," rang out an answering voice from the ship, which passed close by the shadowy tower.

Something whizzed through the air and struck tinkling on the stones at the watcher's feet. "Keep my silver bracelet in remembrance, Perimon, and say to Dardanus that henceforth I follow a prince whose hands are clean!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE CARES OF MINOS

MINOS paced angrily up and down the floor of the audience-chamber, his scowling brows forming a black bar above his stern eyes. From time to time he glanced up impatiently with a muttered interjection. At last a graceful figure appeared in the doorway, and Ariadne, radiant and smiling, bent over and kissed the king's hand.

"You sent for me, my father," she said in tones of dutiful submission.

"And you were long enough in coming," retorted Minos, wrinkling the skin between his eyes into two deep furrows, a sympton of rising anger with him.

Ariadne looked at him with gentle reproach.

"I could not appear before the great king unbecomingly attired," she said demurely, smoothing the elaborate ruffles of her new dress with a slender hand.

"It is both as king and as father that I would speak to you now, girl," Minos began severely. "You are no doubt interested in last night's happenings."

He paused and looked at her searchingly. She met his gaze with a look of serene innocence.

"You heard the tumult—I believe I saw you in the corridor among your women, clad only in a nightrobe; a proper sense of your position should have restrained your curiosity till you were fittingly dressed.

"You know what happened: how the barbarians mysteriously escaped from their prison, overcame the guard, and took their leader with them, killing ten of my guardsmen, and severely wounding seven others. Moreover, more than thirty of the palace guard were drowned in the wreck of my barge—for the most part, nobly born young men."

He paused, and the veins in his temples swelled, while his face flushed angrily.

"Now these barbarians could not have escaped without aid, for their leader was in the deepest dungeon in the palace, to which there is no entrance save from the top, and his men were safe behind lock and

key. The guard was changed at dawn, and the relief reported the night-watch drunken with wine, contrary to my edict that no soldier on duty should touch strong drink. But the prisoners were still in their cells when the guard was changed; their escape was none so quiet as to leave us in the dark on that score. Now the sentry who was posted at the entrance to the corridor has disappeared, and it may be that he had a hand in the matter. What think you?"

He bent a piercing look on the girl, who returned his gaze unfalteringly.

"It is very like, my father," she replied in tones of purest simplicity.

"Yes, very like," the king continued drily. "But if he did, the plan was not his own, for the prisoners were hardly in a position to bribe him, since he must have known that they had little chance to get clear of our galleys in the harbor. He could not know that this accursed tempest would arise in time to save them by sinking some six of my swiftest ships."

Ariadne, well prepared as she was for this interview, felt strangely apprehensive. Here was a more serious matter than the loss of a few popinjays of the palace-guard. She knew her father's pride in his fine ships and well-trained seamen.

"Some one within the palace must have tampered with the fellow," Minos went on. "Wherefore it occurred to me to ask you—" and his voice grew terrible—"why you were absent from your chamber from an hour before dawn till almost the very moment when the tumult broke out?"

His cold eyes rested on hers, and despite herself, she quivered a little. But she recovered her composure quickly, and answered readily enough.

"The night was sultry, my father, and I could not sleep, so I went out into the portico to take the air."

"It was strange then that your women report they could not find you there," Minos retorted, his voice uneven with restrained anger. "They missed you, and, having waited long, went into the portico to search for you."

"But you forget," the girl broke in, her voice trembling with perfect simulation of outraged innocence. "You forget that at daybreak I must make offering to the goddess in the shrine."

"True," admitted Minos, somewhat confused, for indeed he had forgotten. "Still, you were out of bed overlong it seems. Look you, there is none in all Crete who was on such friendly terms with the strangers as you were with that accursed Ragnarr. It also came into my mind that you prayed me to have a young and half-grown bull provided for his ordeal. Is it not so? Do not tell me that you had no interest in his welfare."

The girl's eyes filled with tears; but if Minos expected a confession he did not know his daughter.

"You yourself agreed to it," she sobbed, "and when he came you bade me receive him graciously. I was no more friendly with him than you. It is wicked and cruel of you to accuse me of this crime when I did but as you commanded me."

Minos resumed his pacing up and down the room, cursing softly to himself. At last he cried out in vexation:

"Does the girl mean that I myself bribed my men to help my son's enemy escape from myself, bringing about the slaying of my own men and the sinking of my ships?"

Ariadne's sobs grew unrestrained. She flung herself on the floor, weeping hysterically. Her father, sure of his position as he was, grew perplexed and alarmed. He bent over her, stroked her soft hair, called her endearing names and strove as best he could to calm her.

At last her sobs ceased and she sat up, drying her eyes. For some moments Minos continued to comfort her till she rose to her feet with a deep sigh. Then, taking her face between his hands he said gently:

"My daughter, let me recall to your memory a tale that you have often heard, for it has some bearing on this matter. When I was young it was said that I was a man of some presence. Some even called me handsome. It chanced that I had occasion to lay siege to the city of Megara. Nisos, its king, fought cunningly and well, and for many days withstood my greatest efforts. Though my ships blockaded him, and my armies harassed him, he seemed never to lack food or arms. It was said that he had a purple lock growing over his forehead, and that while that lock grew uncut he was invincible.

"This Nisos had a daughter, Scylla by name, who happened to look out from a tower on the wall, as I was directing the siege. She fell in love with me, and a few nights after made her way out of the city to my camp, bearing with her the purple lock

which she had cut from her father's head as he slept. I know not whether the lock had indeed such virtue as was claimed for it; but she also showed me the way by which provisions had been smuggled into Megara. I acted upon this information, and in due time the city fell.

"The accursed woman claimed my love as her reward. I spurned her, and as my ships left the waters of the conquered city Scylla leaped into the sea and grasped the steering oar of the galley on which I was, crying to me not to forsake her. As she clung there the gods wrought a miracle, for an eagle dashed down upon her from the clouds, striking her with beak and claws, so that she sank and was drowned.

"Now, my daughter, if ever like temptation comes to you, think of the shameful fate of Scylla, whom the gods punished, and whom men despised. I shall not speak of this matter again; but I have despatched a fleet in pursuit of these barbarians, and if they are captured you shall be sent to Phæstos for safe-keeping till they have paid the utmost penalty."

With these words he urged her gently to the door. She turned, looked at him from the depths of tragic eyes and went out.

THE morning sun beat down pitilessly on the unroofed western court, but its rays did not penetrate the shade cast by the great pile of the palace over the stone bench which ran the entire length of the wall. Along this bench or projecting base sat a long line of aged, white-haired men, the elders of the people, their eyes turned toward the portico on the further side of the court. Above their heads the painted figure of a great bull stood out, and beyond it the pictured pomp of a splendid procession of men and rich-robed women lent majesty to the scene.

At length a stately figure came out onto the portico, wrapped in a flowing scarlet robe, and crowned with the peacock-plumed golden crown of Crete. It was King Minos. The hoary elders rose to greet him, and bowed low, till he seated himself on a hollowed gypsum seat between the fluted columns.

"We have called you, O chosen rulers of the people," he began in solemn tones, "that ye may hear and act upon certain proposals for the welfare of the State. Ye know how the barbarian, Ragnarr, broke his bonds and impiously escaped from our land, leaving death behind him. While he was yet among us and honorably entertained at our court I learned from him that the race his father rules is numerous and mighty, and that their ships are numbered by the hundreds. We need not tell you that they are a warlike people, for alas, we have seen and felt their prowess. Now, pondering on their boldness and the stanchness of their ships, we have concluded that it is reasonable to look for an attack in force, if their prince escapes our galleys. Fully thirty hours have passed and we have heard no news of them.

"Let us remind you that for more than ten years it has been our constant effort to secure an army to meet a possible invader, if our fleet should be divided and overwhelmed, or scattered by storms. At last we have made an enemy who is able to invade, and now the time has come when it is impossible to feel secure without a numerous and well-trained army to defend our land. We have summoned you, therefore, to lay before you this proposal:

"Let all taxes be increased by one-fifth, and let the crown be empowered to levy, train, and equip ten thousand men for our defense. If the tax increase does not meet the demand we will defray the remainder from our personal treasury. We await your pleasure."

A meager, stooped old man arose, bowed low, and began:

"O king of kings, and ye, rulers of the people, it is with grief and sorrow that my ears hear these tidings. Since man's memory began the foot of the invader has not pressed our shores; and are we to hear his savage outcry now in the days of our prosperity? If it be so, if war must come upon us with its horrors we shall know how to meet it.

"Yet, let us remember that while our fleet rules the seas, invasion from without need have few terrors for us. At great expense we have increased this fleet from year to year, and the people groan under the taxes; yet no enemy rises to attack us. We are defended by innumerable ships, by the natural isolation of our island, and by the mighty goddess and her son. If the barbarians wished to attack us why have they not come before, when our fleet was smaller?

"We need no armies to defend our coasts. Our ships are our walls, and our seamen are our soldiers. The people do not want war,

war destroys trade, injures the business of the nation, brings poverty and destruction in its train. We are a nation of peaceful traders, and have been asked too often to empty our coffers to maintain the fleet. Who knows what wide dissatisfaction might ensue if more money and yet more money were squeezed from the people to equip a monstrous, idle, parasitic army?

"Yet we are proud of our fleet, and will cheerfully continue to support it; and if ever the time comes when the ruthless invader dares attack us, the whole nation will arise in its might and drive him into the sea!"

Minos shrugged his shoulders wearily.

"Ye are merchants," he said, "men whose lives are spent in counting profits and estimating expenditures. I am a king, concerned with the maintenance of a great empire. It seems fitting to you that money should be spent to rid the sea of the pirates that prey on your cargoes; and it seems right to me that our land should be guarded against pirate peoples, who prey upon peaceful nations. It costs more, for it is a greater task.

"I do not ask you to spend your gold for protection against an imaginary foe, but against a strong and angry enemy, a barbarian who would think nothing of crushing our civilization under his uncouth heel. Worthy Orontas has said truly that we have lived in safety for generations; but for generations we have lived surrounded by weaker peoples, with few ships, like eagles commanding the lesser birds. Now we have learned of a mighty race, possessed of scarce smaller navies than our own. Moreover, we have had their king's son in our hands, and he has escaped us, full of hatred against us and all this people. I ask you to spend a talent to save thousands; to sacrifice a little profit to preserve your all."

The row of white heads shook dubiously, and a dissatisfied murmur became audible. A second old man arose, bowed, and began:

"Most mighty one, we have laid out the best of our gains in the fleet, and there are some of us who hold it no better than money thrown into the sea. Whether this be so I know not; at all events we have a fleet of ample strength to protect us. How know you that this barbarian spoke truth, when he told you of his many ships? How know you that he is a prince at all, and not some swaggering adventurer? Shall we spend our wealth for fear of a peril that may not exist? Let us live in peace; let us treat all peoples with the same kindness we would expect from them, and then we will have no enemies."

The elders clapped their hands in applause, and the king knew that his cause was lost.

"So be it," he answered, rising from his seat, his cheeks flushed with angry disappointment, "but when the day of reckoning comes, remember these words, and do not look for me to raise an army overnight to protect your paltry gains."

Without further words he turned and left them.

Minos walked rapidly down the corridor, his wrath mounting with every step. Turning into the passageway which led to the central court, he came upon two of the palace-guard who sat on the stone floor throwing dice, their spears leaning against the wall beside them.

He was fairly upon them before the absorbed players heard his footsteps. They sprang to their feet, jaws dropped, and eyes wide with terror. Minos seized an arm of each in a terrible grip and glared at them savagely.

"Is it thus ye keep watch?" he cried, shaking them till their teeth rattled. "These are the heroes that guard Broad Knossos! Go ye both to the port, say to the Captain Kalyntas that ye are to sail, by my command, on the expedition that leaves for Libya tomorrow! Ye will have learned something of discipline by your return!"

The men gazed at one another in consternation; then one spoke a frightened protest:

"Most gracious Majesty, we are volunteers, and not liable for foreign service."

"It is so," the king answered, "but it will be better for you to go than to remain."

"We go, your Majesty," they said, and backed away.

Minos held up his hand. "Wait!" he ordered. "As ye pass the apartments of the Prince Ambrogeos, bid him come to my chamber at once."

The king walked slowly to his council chamber, thinking swiftly. He had vented his anger on the luckless guardsmen, and now his natural shrewdness reasserted itself. He knew well that it was impossible to convince the comfort-loving Cretans of their danger, and that their magistrates,

the Council of Elders, could not be moved to open their coffers for the public defense.

He was sure in his heart that Ragnarr had not deceived him about the strength of the northern fleets. Minos was a keen judge of men, and the Northman's eyes were those of a man who habitually speaks the truth. Whatever was to be done in preparation against the attack he felt sure would come, must be done on his own responsibility, with such means as he could command. He passed into his chamber and sank down upon the gypsum throne, his forehead resting upon his hand.

In a few moments Ambrogeos entered, but the king, lost in thought, did not see him. Ambrogeos stood waiting, his eyes fixed on his father's face, until at last Minos felt his presence in the room and looked up.

"Be seated, my son," he said gently. "I have great matters to confide to you."

The young man bowed and sat down on the bench beside the throne. Minos sighed and laid his hand on Ambrogeos's knee.

"It will not be long," he continued, "before you sit upon this throne of mine and rule the people, if the gods will. I have reigned long, and have seen this land grow strong and great; it is my hope and prayer that under you it may become yet greater."

"That can hardly be," the prince answered. "Who am I, to wield the scepter of Minos? I am like to be known to posterity as the son of a mighty father."

"It can be, and it must be," the king replied. "Many have feared, but few have loved me. You may do much with men, for you win their hearts. But it is time you began to take up a monarch's burdens. I need your help, my son, and you alone can help me."

In a few words he told the prince of his fear, and then described his rebuff at the hands of the elders. As he went on the young man's face grew dark, his eyes flamed with anger.

"Why do you not command them to be thrown into prison?" he cried. "Seize their wealth and with it raise a host of followers who look to you alone for support!"

Minos held up his hand.

"Ah, you are young!" he reproved him. "So I thought in the days of my youth, and so I was wont to act; but our Cretans are a stubborn folk, and I learned how far a king may go, and where it behooves him to stop. No, this is not a time for harsh measures. We can expect nothing from the people, my son. Where, then, do you think men can be found, and how can they be paid?"

Ambrogeos considered, and at last light dawned upon him.

"We must have an alliance," he announced.

"And with whom?" asked Minos, shooting a keen glance at him from under his shaggy brows.

"Mycenæ is too weak," Ambrogeos answered. "Troy is no better. The Libyans are barbarians. Egypt alone can help us."

"You have said it," the king returned. "Egypt is our only hope. The Pharaoh Amenothes has countless hordes of men, but few ships. We have many ships and well-trained seamen but no army. We have always favored the Egyptian traders, and they would not care to see their commerce with us cut off by the barbarians. Where would they go for tin, for olive-oil, for wool, if Crete should perish? Where would their artificers find so good a market for their cunning wares?"

He paused a moment, then continued in crisp tones:

"Therefore I have resolved to call you to my help, for there is none other in whom I have such confidence, none who will work so faithfully and well. For more than a year now, negotiations have been pending for your marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh, and we are little nearer to its realization than before. I have my sources of information, and I know that Amenothes favors the alliance; but his queen—born herself of humble stock—has her heart set on the marriage of their daughter to Pharaoh's brother, who is of royal blood on both sides. You know such marriages of kinsfolk are the custom in Egypt. Now, if we come to Pharaoh to press this matter, urging also a political alliance, he will be suspicious and incline to refuse us both, unless we make him certain substantial concessions."

"Crete is not wont to make concessions," Ambrogeos objected.

"True, but Crete has never before been in such need. We must make some offers—as low as we can, as high as we must. Pharaoh needs our fleet to safeguard his coast from pirates, but we need his armies yet more. His greatest lack is tin, for he has no access to the western mines, and the common weapons of Egypt are, therefore, of poor bronze, little better than copper.

If Amenothes requires persuasion we can offer him yearly presents of tin."

"But that is tribute!" the prince protested.

"I prefer to call it a temporary concession," Minos answered. "We need make it only until our necessity is past. With the hosts of Egypt, we can await our enemies in security; then, the danger over, let Amenothes find his metal himself. But now to the point: I can not leave Crete; the times are troublesome. Therefore you must go, for I trust none but you. You shall sail tomorrow, conclude this marriage swiftly on whatever terms you may, and arrange an alliance of offense and defense between Egypt and Crete—at any cost, even of tribute."

The young man was staggered. This was a crushing blow to his hopes for a speedy marriage with Ilia and would make impossible the fulfilment of his pledge to Dardanus. He knew his father too well to ask for more time. Only one course was open: perfect frankness. Besides, he loved his father, and was not anxious to continue deceiving him.

"So be it," he said at last. "But first another matter must be settled, which concerns my honor. At Troy I met and loved the Princess Ilia, daughter of Dardanus; and it was in her presence that the barbarians attacked me. When I sailed from Troy I brought her with me, having promised Dardanus to marry her before the Egyptian, and make her my queen. I must keep my word. Let me marry her tonight, I pray you. We can keep the matter secret till I return, bringing the daughter of Pharaoh with me as my wife. None will know of it until the alliance is confirmed."

Minos stared at his son in blank amazement; then, as the full meaning of the words sank in upon him, anger and resentment kindled in his eyes.

"By the bull!" he roared, rising to his feet. "It is an ill trick that you and your sister have played between you! It was you, then, who brought these barbarians about our ears with your mad, ill-considered folly! If you wanted the girl, why did you not take her and have done, without this foolish prattle of marriages and honor? Dardanus would not have dared refuse you, even if you had claimed her for the Minotaur!"

Ambrogeos bore his father's angry gaze without flinching. "I love her," he answered steadily, "and I would not have it said that the son of Minos dared not treat the woman he loved with honor. Let me marry her, and I sail for Egypt tomorrow; otherwise, you must find some other for the business."

"Never!" cried Minos, bringing his fist down on the bench. "Do you know that this land is full of Egyptian spies? They throng my palaces, fill my service, even sit at my table and conduct my sacrifices to the gods. If you marry this girl the news of it will reach Egypt as soon as you do, and Pharaoh will send you packing back to Crete! You speak of honor, but are willing to beguile the Egyptian woman, cheating her of the dignity which is her right. Why, let Amenothes hear of this, and he is like to fight against us when the hour of our peril comes!"

Minos strode up and down the throne-room wiping the perspiration from his brow. Gradually he became calmer and turned to Ambrogeos, his manner altered.

"My son, you have thought too much of your own devices and too little of your father and your people. Remember that my years are numbered, and soon you will take my place. Consider then, the welfare of your country. Will you not do for her what you refuse to do for me? It is little that she asks of you. Restrain your impatient love for this Trojan. Go to Egypt, bring back your bride, assure the safety of Crete. I myself will answer for the Princess Ilia, and regard her as I would a daughter. When you return, marry her if you will; I shall approve. But as you love me, and as you love the land that bore you, do not let a rash promise made to the cowardly king of a petty city stand between you and duty."

He put his arm about the young man's shoulders and embraced him tenderly.

Ambrogeos hesitated.

"Father," he said at last, "I have done ill, and I pray your forgiveness. I sail for Egypt tomorrow. But whatever may happen, keep the Princess Ilia tenderly; let no harm befall her. When I return, you shall say I have done well."

CHAPTER XX

THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

SIGMUND, King of the Island Goths, received the homage of his subjects for the last time. From the long pit in the center of the wooden hall the hearth-fire

leaped and roared, the firelight playing on the stern old face, calm now in the majesty of death.

Two long spears, resting on trestles and covered with shields, formed the bier on which the old warrior lay, his great white beard spreading over his lifeless breast. His folded hands lay on the hilt of a mighty scabbarded sword, and shield and spear were propped beside the trestle at his head. At his feet sat his old hound, deaf and nearly blind, its muzzle, white with age, resting upon the woolen shroud.

Beyond him on the dais, half-lit by the quivering glow, rose up the royal throne, a high seat of smoke-stained oak, rudely carved on all its surfaces with the deeds of ancient heroes, its arms terminating in wolfs' masks, the tall posts at its back towering nearly to the rafters and capped by the grotesque heads of gods, now invisible in the gloom, now suddenly revealed by the flickering firelight.

At the foot of the dais stood a tall, compactly built youth of perhaps twenty-two years, dressed in the Northman's woolen tunic and kilt, and a flowing mantle which was fastened at the shoulder with a golden clasp. His legs were protected from the chill of Winter by strips of woolen cloth winding from boot to thigh, and his sleeved arms were adorned with heavy golden spirals. From his bare head, waves of golden hair descended over his shoulders. In his outstretched hand he held the horn of an ox, bound with hoops of gold and rimmed with the same metal. Beside him was a heavy wooden butt, filled with a dark, foam-streaked liquor.

"Come hither, Hallvard!" the young man cried, his proud, somewhat selfish face growing grave and tender in the presence of the dead. "Be thou the first to drink to my father's safe going to the gods, thou who wert ever first of his warriors while he lived!"

Along each side of the hall ran built-in oaken benches, on which, helmeted but unarmed, sat the chieftains of the Island Goths. Rising from his seat, a stalwart, gray-bearded old man came forward with bent head. He looked at the face of his dead lord and a tear trickled down his deep-lined cheek; then, raising his eyes to the young man, he answered:

"Prince Sigvard, it ill becomes me to accept the name of first of Sigmund's warriors so long as Valgard the Strong is remembered among men. Yet as he is not here and mayhap lives no more, I will be first to drink!"

And taking the horn from the youth's hand, he emptied it at a draft, and cried in a loud voice:

"O Sigmund, sprung from the seed of Tyr, be thou welcome in the courts of the gods, a hero worthy to be their bench-mate! Be thou not lowest at the table where the brave dead banquet, for in all their host there is none braver, none lordlier, than thou!"

"It is so! It is so!" chorused the chieftains from the benches; and as if in accord with them, the fire shot up a wavering finger of flame high in the air, almost to the very smoke-hole in the roof above.

"It is a sign!" Prince Sigvard cried. "Tyr has heard, and welcomes the king among the gods!"

He filled the horn again, and holding it high called on the name of Björn. The chieftain advanced, bowed before the dead and drank the toast. After him, in the order of their service, the Gothic warriors came up and drank, and filed back to their places.

When the ceremony was over, a door opened in the eastern wall, and a dozen sturdy fellows brought in carved oaken tables, which they set in front of the benches, to right and left. After them entered five tall, fair-skinned girls, the daughters of dead Sigmund, each clad in the long gray robes of mourning, their bright hair unbound. Quickly they placed the steaming dishes of stewed meats upon the tables and filled the mead-horns from the vat before the dais.

When all was ready, the young prince took his seat in the middle of one bench, and the eldest girl passed him the horn. He touched it with his lips and passed it down the table till it had gone the rounds, each warrior taking only a sip. Now the feast was formally opened, and all, as the dishes were borne past them, thrust in their hands and drew out savory bits of meat or handfuls of greasy barley. The girls kept the mead-horns circulating, and under the influence of the strong liquor, the spirits of the feasters lightened until the talk grew loud and cheerful.

From time to time, Prince Sigvard glanced at the faces about him, observing their merriment with satisfaction. At last,

when the hunger of all was satisfied, and the drinking was keeping pace with the talk and laughter, he rose, and commanded silence. All turned toward him in expectation.

"Men of the Goths," he said in solemn tones, "before you on his bier lies your king, who was such a hero as this land may never see again. His arm subdued the people of the northern coast; his wise mercy made them our allies in peace and war. Now he is dead, and I have called you hither to the Feast of Inheritance, as the custom is when one of our people dies.

"Ye all know how, more than a year ago, my brother Ragnarr sailed away in his ship, carrying with him the sword Tyrfing, hoping to find a sea-road to Mycenæ. Surely the gods sent madness upon him; for who but a madman would have ventured to sail into unknown seas? Well, he has not returned; and it is most like that he is either drowned or slain. One part of the inheritance goes with him—the sword Tyrfing, best of all weapons, in which the magic of the gods abides. My father gave it to him against my advice, for I knew that if my brother fell in distant lands, the sword would never again come into the possession of our house.

"Ragnarr my brother is doubtless dead; and now my father, whom all loved, has departed from the earth. A people without a ruler is like a ship without a helmsman. Therefore, in the presence of the dead, I demand my inheritance, the kingship of this land. I will guard it well; I will destroy its foes and foster its trade. Munificent as my father was, I will be even freer-handed, enriching my faithful ones with lavish gifts. Chiefs of the Goths, it is for you to speak. Do ye grant me my inheritance?"

The younger men burst into noisy shouts of acclamation; but the old warriors, who sat in the seats of honor nearest him, for the most part kept silence. When the tumult died down, old Hallvard rose slowly to his feet.

"Prince Sigvard," he said, somewhat sternly, "you ask that which is not ours to grant. Who can say that the Prince Ragnarr is dead? He may yet live, strong and blessed by the gods. You have said that he has Tyrfing with him; and he who bears that blade does not die until he has achieved great deeds. While he lives, this land is Ragnarr's, by the first-born's right; and we can not take it from him to give to you. If you take it, you rob your brother. It is my counsel that you rule over us in his name, till he come again, and yield it back to him on his return. I have said."

"Aye! Aye!" cried the elder chieftains; but they were drowned out by the chorus of younger men, whom Sigvard had endeared to him, and who were inflamed by the fumes of the mead.

Sigvard himself flushed with anger, but, knowing the temper of old Hallvard, he restrained his passion.

"But Ragnarr is surely dead!" he insisted. "Think you I would rob him? If he lived, he would have returned by now. Moreover, I have not spoken without some knowledge of the matter. The witch Grunhild has told me that he lies slain and unburied in the Isle of Mines! I will have her called in and ye shall hear."

And calling to him one of the table-knaves, Sigvard whispered in his ear. The man bowed and went out.

The warriors gazed into each other's faces in awe and consternation. Ragnarr held for dead was one thing. Ragnarr slain and given to the ravens quite another. For some minutes they spoke only in whispers, stealing frightened glances toward the southern door.

At last there came the tap-tapping of a stick, and the door was opened by the table-knave, who shrank close to it to protect himself from the blighting touch of her who entered. All sat spellbound as she came in, a withered crone of untold Winters, bald, one-eyed, clad in rags. Her nose and hairy chin nearly met, and her lips, parted in a twisted grin, showed a single blackened tooth. She stood in silence, waiting Sigvard's command.

"Clear a table!" he ordered; and swiftly the dishes were removed from one of the smaller tables, which was thrust out from the others.

"Lift her up!" commanded the prince; but none stirred. "Lift her up!" he cried again.

No one dared move hand or foot. Sigvard turned to old Grunhild.

"It seems that I alone fear you not, mother," he said, and raising her in his arms, he swung her up onto the top of the table.

All stared, fascinated, as the witch raised her eyes to the roof and began to mutter. Faster and louder came the incoherent

words, till at last she broke into uncanny song. Now she stopped short, her eyes rolled, her jaw dropped, revealing the hideous unloveliness of her mouth. She spoke at last, in a strange, unearthly voice:

"The ravens circle about the plain. The wolves draw nigh, scenting dead flesh. There the king's son lies, the child of Sigmund, on the plains of the Isle. He is cold, he is gashed, he is meat for the eaters. His men lie about him, covered with corpse-dew. The song is sung."

She ceased, and the hall was still with a fearful, heart-oppressing silence, so still that the hissing song of the fire, and the swish of the snow-wind against the walls sounded clearly in the men's ears.

CRASH! Crash! the north door shook with the pounding blows of heavy metal. The Goths leaped to their feet, staring wildly about them. In from the adjoining room rushed the alarmed bodyguard of Prince Sigvard, their great spears flashing in the firelight.

Crash! The massive door-bar rattled in its wooden sockets. A roaring, muffled voice cried in at them, but the words were lost in the tossing gusts of wind. The spearmen lined the doorway, shields raised and weapons ready.

"Stand fast and unbar the door!" shouted Sigvard, and a house-carl drew out the bar.

The great door swung in and two men stumbled over the threshold, swathed to the eyes in snow-covered cloaks. The firelight cast its wavering gleam upon the white expanse outside, revealing many dark forms, huddled together, close-wrapped against the cold and the blinding tempest. The newcomers stopped, seeing themselves surrounded by threatening weapons.

"Who are ye who come here unbidden, in night and storm?" Sigvard demanded.

The taller of the two threw back his mantle and revealed a tremendous frame, wide shoulders, and a face wind-reddened and fierce. His thick, flowing beard was matted with snow which ran down in melting streams upon the floor.

"Who am I?" he replied, wringing the water from his beard. "Has the son of my father forgotten me? I am Ragnarr, your brother, Sigvard, and this is our kinsman, Valgard."

And plucking his comrade's mantle away, he uncovered the old warrior's stern features. Sigvard leaped back in afright, and the guardsmen drew away with cries of terror. The chiefs clustered together, their eyes seeking each other's white, scared faces.

"This is indeed a joyous welcome!" Ragnarr exclaimed. "What wrong have I done you that I should be greeted with fear and loathing?"

He looked about at them, searching one face, then another, disappointment and bewilderment in his eyes. A log fell, and a blazing tongue of fire shot up from the hearth, throwing its full radiance on the dead king's face. With a cry of bitter grief, Ragnarr hastened to the bier and threw himself at his father's feet.

"Oh, my father!" he groaned. "What hatred do the gods bear me, that in one moment all my sufferings should be thus outdone?"

He abandoned himself to his grief, throwing his arms about the lifeless body, his shoulders heaving. The old hound raised his muzzle and sniffed at Ragnarr's garments, then burst into glad little whimpers of joy. Valgard looked down on father and son, then, turning his fierce old face on Sigvard, he cried:

"The king slain, and thou afraid to face thy brother! There has been ill work here!"

He laid his hand menacingly on his knife. The chiefs looked meaningly at each other, and the color returned to their faces. Sigvard, still pale and speechless, gazed at Valgard in blank astonishment. Hallvard strode from among his companions and held out his hand to Valgard in greeting.

"Old comrade," he said, "we have been at cross purposes. We held you and the prince for dead, and all that were with you. The old hag Grunhild here—" he pointed to the witch, who cowered on the table-top, her evil face twitching with terror—"sang her spells and declared that you had been slain on the Isle of Mines. Wherefore the lord Sigvard desired to be crowned king in the place of his father, who died two days ago of fever. When you came in, we took you for ghosts and were sore frightened. Now we know you to be living men, else you would have known of the king's death when it happened. Prince Sigvard bids you welcome, and so do we all "

A shout, half genuine gladness and half

pure relief, burst from the men's throats. At last, Sigvard regained his composure, and seized Valgard's hand.

"Be welcome indeed, kinsman," he cried, "and you too, brother. Leave mourning for the present and sit down and eat, for ye are weary and exhausted."

Ragnarr arose, the tears still streaming down his cheeks, and embraced his brother.

"It is an ill time for eating and drinking," he said, "but my men have need of meat and ale. Let me call them in."

He strode to the door and flung it wide open, calling to those without. In came a thin-faced, wolfish company, their garments ragged and storm-torn. Some two-score men were left, the rest having perished in the warfare and starvation of the terrible overland journey from the shores of the Euxine. Among the first to enter was the Trojan Kamas, his face pinched and livid with the cold. The men hurried silently to the fire and held their chilled limbs close to the warmth.

Valgard walked to the table whereon Grunhild trembled and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"It was a false dream you had, old woman," he said. "I think that there will be few now so foolish as to believe your prophecies, or pay you good gold for charms. Moreover, something tells me that if you tarry here much longer, you will eat bronze."

He tapped his knife-hilt significantly. With a hoarse scream, the witch wrenched away from him, threw herself to the floor, and made off with amazing speed for one so old. As she fled, the company burst into savage jeering, and beef-bones from the stew hurtled about her head.

Now the great bowls and horns were brought in once more, and a second feast was spread before the famished sailors. They ate like starved animals and washed down their food with great drafts of mead. The men of the island stared incessantly at the dark features and small frame of Kamas, who, though ravenous, ate with restraint and delicacy, and drank but little.

When their hunger was appeased, Sigvard cleared his throat and began to speak, after making several false starts.

"My brother, when you came in upon us so fortunately, we were in the midst of our father's inheritance-feast, as you have seen. It seemed to be the will of the chiefs of this land that I should assume the kingship. But now that you are happily returned, matters are otherwise. I offer you then one-half of the kingdom, on these terms: you are to keep Tyrfing, and our father's tributaries on the northern mainland; while I rule over this island. When one of us dies, his holdings go to the other."

Ragnarr set down his drinking-horn half emptied, and the dark mead spilled over the table. Before he could reply, Valgard sprang to his feet.

"So there is a snake in the flour-sack after all!" he roared. "I might have known there was something behind the old hag's lies! Now look you, greedy son of a lordly father: This land is not yours, nor does it belong to the chiefs of the people. It is none but Prince Ragnarr's, and he who would steal it from him must reckon with me! You outnumber us two to one here, but we are all armed, and only your bodyguard carry weapons. If you desire the kingdom, stretch out your hand; but before you grasp it, you shall kiss the thin lips of my ax!"

The hall burst into uproar. The guardsmen formed around Sigvard, locking their shields in a wall about him and holding their spears before them. Ragnarr's following leaped from the table, drawing swords and tossing their spears and axes. The chieftains of the Goths shouted one to another and fell to wrangling, the young men crying for Sigvard, the elders ranging themselves with Ragnarr, or striving to hold back their hot-blooded companions. Tables were overturned and archers crouched behind them, fitting shafts to bows.

"Sigvard and Gotland!" cried one party; "Ragnarr and Tyr!" the other.

A moment more and they would have been at each other's throats; but just as the tumult was at its height, Ragnarr sprang up onto the dais and challenged them in tones that rose clear above the din.

"Men of Sigmund!" he shouted. "Hear the son of Sigmund and let none dare to strike another, or I will slay the smiter with my sword!"

The outcries ceased, and all stared at him, wondering; for as he stood there before the throne of Sigmund, it seemed to them that his face had become that of the old king, so stern was it, and stamped with the grim seal of hardship and suffering.

"I DID not return to bring war between my own people," he continued. "There is enough for your weapons to do without slaying each other. Listen now, and hear what I have come for; and I will settle this matter of the kingship without strife. Ye know how I departed hence to seek the sea-way to Mycenæ and Troy—and I found it. But I found also bitter enemies who mistreated me, flung me into prison, and cheated me of that which I held dearest. These enemies are the people of Crete, a mighty empire in the south, that lays its cruel commandments on all the lands that border the Inland Sea, and takes from them gold and treasure. Their strength is in their many ships and well-trained crews, for they have no army, and most of their men are untrained in war.

"Minos, their king, worships a bronze image, filled with fire, and would have cast us living into its jaws; but we escaped. We sailed to the east for many days, coming out into the Euxine Sea, till we reached the mouth of a mighty river that flows into that sea. There we found a trading-post of a people like our own in appearance, but savage and inhospitable. They would have slain us for our cargo, but we were too many. So they sold us food, which we sorely needed, having sailed with short provisions and eaten nothing for two days.

"Thence we rowed up the river for three days, till we came to rapids. Here there was a post, for boats can go no higher, and there we had to leave the *Gray Wolf*. No one wished to buy her, till, as luck would have it, there came down-river on a raft of merchandise, one of our own traders, stout Hamund Harelip. We told him of our adventures, and the wealth of the lands we had visited, and he bought the *Gray Wolf* from us gladly."

Ragnarr paused and held out his hand for the horn which Hallvard had filled for him. He looked at the eager faces around him and saw that they were listening with keen interest to his tale. Well content, he drank deep and wiped the drops of mead from his mustache.

"Above the first rapids," he resumed, "the river runs down from the northwest, with too strong a current for a boat to stem, though we met many rafts coming down. Valgard knows this old trade-route well, and indeed no one could easily go astray, for the up-river trail by the bank is trodden deep. For two months we marched by day and camped by night, suffering from hunger, and fighting off the wolves. Game was scarce, but sufficed us between posts. At last we came to the chain of hills where the river rises, and skirting these, crossed the plain between them and the sources of the river Duna.

"Above the market of Dunaburg lies a vast forest, which clothes both sides of the river. The road is narrow here, and the trees dense. One evening at dusk, we heard cries of distress ahead of us, and I bade my men loosen their swords and string their bows. At a bend in the road, I placed the archers in ambush, supported by spearmen, and rounded the bend with a scant score of swords and axes. There, disordered but fighting valiantly, was a merchant-train, hard-pressed by some four-score skin-clad robbers. The thieves had set on them unawares, and nearly a third of the merchants were down already. Their packs lay burst and spilled upon the ground, and rich jewels and well-wrought arm-bands were trampled into the mire.

"Seeing us, the merchants took us for a second band of thieves. Those nearest us strove to go forward, crowding their companions ahead so that they could not wield their weapons. I cried out that we were friends and bade them open their ranks to let us pass. Then the robbers saw us and cried out with joy, for we were few, and they desired our good weapons. We thrust forward to meet them, while I urged the merchants to give back to the other side of the turn.

"We rushed in with mighty strokes, and our good bronze axes and heavy swords cut down the first rank of robbers as the reaper cuts the grain. Then we gave back, and they pressed us furiously. Their wooden clubs clattered against our shields, and their stone-tipped spears broke on the bucklers.

"Now we were round the turn once more. I sounded my horn, and our hidden archers loosed a flight of shafts that smote the skin-clad ones like the wrath of Tyr. They wavered and gave back. More arrows sped, and they turned to flee. Out sprang our spearmen as we rushed forward, hewing the robbers down. Grim was the slaughter; not a score escaped to bear the tidings into the thickness of the forest. Nor were we unscathed. Fifteen good men were slain or wounded to death, among them

Storvald, our foster-brother, O Sigvard!

"The battle over, the merchants crowded about us, offering us gold and sapphires in their gratitude. We took little, for I thought they could serve us better in another way. We learned that they were heading for the settlements at the Duna's mouth, to sell their wares before the Winter set in, but had been delayed by the constant attacks of marauding bands. Thenceforth we served them as escort, and, as they were most amply provisioned, fared well.

"Now it began to grow cold, for the season was far advanced, and the wounds of my men grew stiff. In a few days more we came to the navigable part of the Duna, and built rafts, for there was wood enough growing all about us. Soon we had four great rafts made in the shallows, and on them shoved out into the current. That night the first frost came, and in the morning five of the wounded were dead.

"We burned our dead and hastened on, fearing greatly that we would be frozen in. But the current bore us down-river at fair speed, and we reached Dunamouth town before snow fell. The ships had been drawn up and covered over for Winter, and our friends the merchants pressed us to tarry with them until Spring. But we were hungry for home. We urged them, therefore, to sell us a ship; they reminded us of the service we had done them and gave us a fine galley, refusing to accept payment.

"Once we were clear of the gulf, Tyr sent an east wind that bore us straight for the island. It changed just as we made land, and came down upon us full from the north, bearing the first snow. We drew up the ship and covered her over from the storm, then hastened inland. How we arrived, you know.

"Now this is the end of the tale; and this is my proposal:

"The land of Crete is far away, but there is that within it which any man would go far to get. Never did my eyes behold so much gold and silver, such richness of jewels, or garments wrought so fairly. I myself saw vessels half as high as a man, all of pure gold, in the palace of King Minos. Benches and chairs are covered with plates of gold, and deep coffers are heaped with the precious metal. Moreover, Minos has enough weapons of good bronze to equip every man in the north, without exhausting the store."

He paused and emptied the mead-horn. His hearers looked at each other greedily, their eyes glistening with covetousness.

"I do not desire power, and I have wealth enough for my needs; but I have been injured, and I crave revenge. I have been robbed, and I live only to win back that which was taken from me."

He turned to Sigvard, who stood gazing at him in excited anticipation.

"Brother," Ragnarr continued, "I will make a bargain with you. Give me a hundred ships, and six thousand good men to man them. Let me take weapons and food enough for the return; and I, for my part, will give up my share in the kingdom to you and to your children forever!"

The Northmen went frantic with excitement, shouting and pounding upon the benches and tables. For some minutes, Sigvard strove in vain to quiet them, till at last the noise died down, and his voice became audible. His face shone with unconcealed joy.

"Brother Ragnarr," he answered hoarsely, "be it as you have asked. When the Spring comes, I myself will see to it that your ships are ready and provisioned. As to the men, that is another matter. If half my warriors leave the land, perhaps forever, we will be in an ill state against our enemies. But I will send to the northern shore and levy warriors for you among our tributaries. If you want more, here are the chiefs of our land. I forbid no one to go with you. But how will you pay them?"

"I have little enough to hire so great a host," Ragnarr replied. "They who come with me must look to their arms for their reward. I have said there is gold in Crete, enough to enrich all that live here. If there be any who dare to risk death in the sea, on the spears of foemen, or by all the perils of a long and arduous journey for the sake of wealth beyond their dreams, let them come with me. The danger is great, but riches uncounted are to be won. I have spoken. Who goes with me?"

"I for one!" rang a clear young voice, and Ulf of Wolfdale strode up to the dais, his blue eyes flashing with resolution.

"And I!" shouted Hakon the Strife-ready, brandishing his drinking-horn, which splashed its spumy contents over his shoulder.

"And I!" cried Gudmund the Greedy, a stocky, huge-armed champion, renowned

equally for his savage bravery and his love of gold.

One after another they came forward, the youthful and ambitious chiefs, even those very men who had been most ardent for the cause of Sigvard. Their young blood ran fierce in their veins in response to the call of gold and of strange, far-distant lands, and their hearts beat high to the lure of new adventures. The old men were silent, but the light of desire burned in their eyes, for theirs was a wild and valiant race.

Ragnarr found himself surrounded by a band of young warriors, quivering with eagerness, each one of them a proved fighter and the chief of from fifty to five-score skilled swordsmen and sailors. Sigvard's face fell as he saw his best and bravest volunteer; but he had promised his consent, and he would not break his word. More than two-score pledged themselves and their men to Ragnarr, and offered him all their ships.

The firelight danced and played on their ardent faces, and the smoke-stained walls rang with their cries. Ragnarr glowed with triumphant joy, received each with a warm hand-clasp, and swore them to loyalty on Tyrfing's blade, which gleamed red and baleful in the playing light of the flames.

THE Winter passed, and Spring unbound the land. Ships were stripped of their coverings, overhauled, pitched and painted. Masts were stepped, and the new sails, which golden-haired maidens had woven in the gray days of Winter, were brought out of the lofts.

Grain and smoked fish and meats were packed in oaken casks in the holds, and chests were filled with arrows and well-tested bow-strings. The shore was crowded with the toiling crews, coming and going with heavy burdens, or thrusting rollers under the keels. Already forty ships were anchored in the harbor, newly arrived from the northern shore, the land which is now called Sweden, with huge shock-headed sailors and bearded captains.

On the beach, women flung their white arms about the neck of lover or husband, weeping and praying Tyr to protect the departing heroes. One after another the carven stems of the galleys glided out onto the sea, their crews climbing over the side, the long oars thrust out, and the sails raised. At last they stretched in long lines along the water, the joyous shouts of the sailors rang out from ship to ship, and hundreds of hands waved farewell from the shore.

Against the *White Swan's* mast leaned Gorm, the son of Ingir, King of the Southern Swedes. His old eyes gleamed, and his heart beat high with adventurous joy. He would not send another in his place on this marvelous voyage, but girt on his ponderous sword and launched his ship to sail with Ragnarr.

He led the long line of his ships, two-score in number; and west of him stretched the fleet of the Islanders, sixty fair galleys, with the flower of the Gotland warriors. At their head, Ragnarr stood in the stern of a new *Gray Wolf*, larger and stancher than the old; and in the waist old Valgard exhorted the rowers. The prince's faithful company was filled out with young and ardent sailors, burning to see with their own eyes the wonders told of by their comrades.

The captains of the fleet were the chiefs who had volunteered for the expedition, each commanding his own ship, and some brought two ships to the voyage. Ulf, Hakon, Gudmund, Ragnvald Ready-Sword, Gautrek Yellow-Tooth, Koll the Lame, Bersi of the Rough Tongue, Rolf Red-Ax, Erik the Boar, and fifty others, famed for strength and courage throughout the north.

One by one the galleys dwindled and disappeared on the far horizon, leaving behind a people torn by new fears, new hopes, new wonders. On they swept before the favoring breeze, these sturdy ships, so soon to cleave the unknown seas that washed the shores of a far-off, mysterious world.

CHAPTER XXI

TIDINGS

WHEN the *Gray Wolf's* impact smashed the *Dolphin's* oars, Ilia's curiosity, already stirred by the noise and shouting, was excited to alarm. From the moment when the prince's galley had entered the harbor, the curtains of her cabin had been closely drawn, and she was not allowed to look out; for Ambrogeos had no desire that she should be seen until he had won the consent of Minos to their marriage. The prince himself had warned her, when he left the ship, to remain in seclusion until he sent for her.

Since Ragnarr's departure from Troy,

Ilia had received no word from him; and during the voyage and the twelve hours spent in harbor, her mind had been full of fear for his safety.

Now, startled from sleep by the shouting of Rhodonthos and the sailors, followed by the crashing, grinding impact of the *Gray Wolf*, she imagined at first that the *Dolphin* had been attacked by sea-rovers; then, as Ragnarr shouted an order to the oarsmen, her heart leaped in her breast, for she recognized his voice above the din, and knew that, whatever might come, at least at this moment, he was still alive.

In mingled joy and fear she started to her feet and snatched at the hangings that shut off her vision; but they were fastened tightly together, and she strove in vain to undo them. The noise without died down, nor did Ilia hear Ragnarr's voice again; but she felt that he must have escaped, or the Cretans would have announced their triumph with shouts of rejoicing.

Then the *Dolphin's* spare anchor was let go, and presently the storm struck, and the curtains flapped and bellied in the gale. For two days and nights thereafter, Ilia saw no one but her women, and the sailor who brought her food and drink.

On the morning of the third day, as she sat at meat, the curtains were drawn apart, and Ambrogeos stood before her. Her fear and dislike of the man showed in her face. He saw, and his grave features assumed an expression of grief.

"Princess," he said, "I have news as bitter to me as it must be pleasing to you. The king bids me depart at once for Egypt, on business of state, postponing all thought of marriage till my return. I may be gone some months. You are to go to Knossos, under escort, where the Princess Ariadne, my sister, will receive you as her guest."

He paused and looked at her appealingly. For a moment she almost pitied him, this pale young man with the unhappy face; but remembering his angry demand for Ragnarr's life, and the shame he had brought upon her father, her heart hardened, and she turned away.

"It is farewell," he urged; but she did not speak.

Sadly and unwillingly, Ambrogeos left her.

Soon afterward Rhodonthos appeared and bade Ilia and her attendants follow him. They were lifted down the side of the galley into the arms of a boatman, whose skiff was drawn alongside; and a few strokes brought them to the beach. Here three chariots were waiting, the graceful heads of the horses held by grooms of the royal stables. Young nobles of the palace guard stood in the drivers' places, and a seat at the side of each chariot showed that it was not meant for war, but for the carriage of guests.

"Ascend," said Rhodonthos briefly, and they obeyed.

Straightway the drivers cracked their whips, the grooms let go the horses' heads, and away they sped up the long stone road to Knossos.

Minos had lost no time in sending his galleys after the Northmen. As soon as the tempest was over, he had sent for Rhodonthos, inquired what ships were in the port, how many were in the yards at Palaikastro, and how much of a squadron could be spared for pursuit. If Ragnarr could be captured, there need be no fear of reckoning with his countrymen.

Rhodonthos, who knew the condition and disposition of every ship in the Cretan navy, answered immediately. There were, he said, eighty-four ships at Palaikastro, and some two-score and five in the port of Knossos. The remaining hundred and ninety-one galleys were cruising, or at their various stations, in the Mediterranean. Fifty more were building in the shipyards, and would be launched by the following Spring.

"Good!" answered Minos. "Have two-score of the swiftest provisioned at once, and send them to the Hellespont under sealed orders. The barbarians are far to the northeast by now, and from what their leader told me, will make for the Euxine, where they will doubtless Winter, thinking that we will not follow them there. Send a dispatch-boat to Palaikastro, with orders to the captain of the shipyard to replace the expeditionary fleet with a squadron from the reserve. Let the western fleet comb their end of the Mediterranean and the straits, in case the pirates double on their course, and attempt to slip past along the African or Iberian coast."

"It is done, O King of Kings," Rhodonthos replied, and departed from the presence.

Following the king's orders, Ambrogeos bade farewell to Ilia, and took the *Dolphin*

to Palaikastro, where she was scraped, overhauled and provisioned for the ten-days voyage to Egypt. After six days she was ready, and the crown prince of Crete, convoyed by a squadron of five and twenty ships of war, sailed to the southeastward on his all-important mission.

ILIA was overwhelmed with the magnificence and splendor of the Cretan Capitol. The citadel of Troy possessed no such grandiose distances, such towering, many-storied height, nor such lavish gorgeousness of decoration. She was led through the northern entrance into the great central court, itself larger than her father's palace; and her senses could hardly receive the impressions that were crowded upon them.

The guardsmen who served as her escort conducted her into the eastern wing of the palace, where majestic atria and columned halls reared their pictured beauty before her astounded eyes. Here, in the southeast quarter, lay the women's chambers, separated from the Hall of the Double Axes by a twisting, many-doored corridor.

In the center of these chambers was the Queen's Megaron, the heart of the domestic activities of Knossos. The Queen Pasiphæ had held her court in this stately hall, till death had taken her; and now Ariadne filled her mother's place, directing the servants with a firmer hand.

As Ilia entered, Ariadne rose from the queen's seat, laying aside her distaff, and advanced to meet her. She was clothed in a full-skirted gown of yellow taffeta, elaborately embroidered around the hem and girdle, and the low, square neck of the bodice was outlined by a high ruff whose edges were stiffened with alternate rows of sapphires and amethysts.

Ilia fairly gasped at the rich costume, the glowing jewels, and the audacity of the low-cut bodice; but she controlled her surprise and met the cordial smile and outstretched hand of Ariadne with self-possession. Her hostess conducted her to a cushioned bench, and bade the waiting-women bring water to wash her feet. From time to time the Trojan girl stole admiring glances at the life-like frescoes of dancing maidens, or looked delightedly at a great crystal vase, in which tiny fish swam among miniature rocks.

For her part, Ariadne scrutinized the stranger with appraising eyes. Minos had told her that Dardanus had sent his daughter to Knossos in pledge of his fidelity, which had been called in question by Ambrogeos after the regrettable incident in Troy. She had been anxious to know what these Eastern women were like, and was a little disappointed at the white simplicity of Ilia's robe. She liked the girl's face, though; there was something at once artless and firm about it; she might make a friend one could trust, but was certainly no child to be trifled with. Ariadne was a thorough mistress of the art of putting folk at their ease, and gently drew her guest out of her anxiety and constraint.

Ilia was grateful for the kindly welcome, and said as much.

"You are very good to me," she remarked, smiling for the first time in many days.

"It would be hard not to be good to you, child," the Cretan princess answered. "I hope to make you so happy here that you will not regret your own land."

Comfortless and wracked with anxiety as she had been, Ilia responded quickly to the gracious friendliness of Ariadne. Her own charm and sweetness of spirit also drew the Cretan woman to her, and it was not long before they were exchanging little confidences, though neither spoke of the matter that lay nearest both their hearts.

Little by little they became firm friends; for if Ilia had none but Ariadne to turn to in all Crete, neither did Ariadne have any other of her own station, nor indeed were many of her women serious enough to win her confidence. She was virtually alone in the land of her royalty, and her heart warmed toward her new companion.

In this manner the days lengthened into weeks, and the two felt almost as if they had known each other all their lives. They went everywhere together—to the dance, gathering fruits in the orchards of the neighboring hills, or hunting in the forest.

One day, as they sat alone together on the eastern terrace overlooking the river, Ariadne voiced a question which she had been on the point of uttering for some time. After turning the conversation to Troy—which Ilia talked of gladly—the Cretan asked quite casually:

"And did you perhaps see the tall barbarian—Ragnarr, I believe he is called—when you were at home? I am told that he was at Troy for the fair."

Ilia started and looked at her in some alarm; but seeing palpable innocence in her face, she answered:

"Yes, I saw him several times. He was my father's guest, you know. But why do you ask?"

"He was here," Ariadne replied, "and before he departed he made quite an impression on us."

Ilia felt hope surge into her heart again, but she checked the eager questions that rose to her lips. She looked dreamily out over the water, and asked, very calmly:

"Then he is here no longer?"

"No, he sailed away just before you came to the palace. His ship may even have passed yours."

Ariadne watched her furtively, to note the effect of her words, but Ilia was prepared.

"We thought him of great promise," she hazarded, "and my father was anxious that he should know King Minos."

Companionship with Ariadne was producing a certain subtlety in Ilia.

"Minos had a high regard for his powers," retorted Ariadne, "though I am not sure that two men of such strong natures could have agreed much longer. It was better that Ragnarr went when he did."

Ilia thought a moment, and at last decided to risk the question:

"Did he go in peace?"

"He went safe and unharmed," answered the other, "and it is just possible that he may remain so."

At the ominous undertone in her words, Ilia became alarmed and the color left her cheeks. Ariadne noticed and attacked on another front.

"You will be glad to know," she said, "that my brother Ambrogeos is prospering well in Egypt, having brought his business there nearly to a close. My father received his messenger this morning."

This was hardly the news to restore Ilia's composure, nor did her embarrassment escape Ariadne.

"He should be back within a month at most," she went on.

"Much may happen in a month!" exclaimed Ilia, too distraught to guard her tongue.

Ariadne looked at her keenly.

Realizing what she had done, Ilia tried to extricate herself.

"He should finish his affairs most successfully by then, and come back happily," she added.

This seemed to satisfy Ariadne.

"Have you seen the new cloth from Lycia?" she asked. "It would be just the thing for——"

Suddenly there was the pattering of feet and the rustle of skirts, and one of the waiting-women came flying out on to the portico.

"Have you heard?" she shrilled, incoherent with the news. "Have you heard——"

"Peace, little fool!" Ariadne rebuked her. "Is it thus you come before your princess? And why do you speak before I address you?"

The girl hung her head, silent with humiliation and fear.

"Speak, then," said Ariadne sternly. "Say what you came for, briefly, and then begone!"

The culprit raised her eyes, wet with tears.

Seeing her grief, the princess softened.

"Tell me, my child," she soothed her, "and fear nothing—this time."

The woful lips curved upward, and now the words came forth in a torrent.

"They have caught him—the barbarian!" she cried. "Our galleys overtook his wolf-ship at the entrance to the Euxine, boarded her, and slew all her men. The captain of the *Sea-Eagle* cut off the pirate's head with his own hand and has brought it back with him, pickled in wine, to the king!"

Ilia's eyes grew wide with horror. She strove to speak, but her dry lips choked her utterance. At last she managed to utter his name.

"Ragnarr—do you mean Ragnarr?" she gasped.

"Yes, my lady," the girl answered, eying her curiously. "He was no easy loser, however. Two of our ships were stripped of men by the pirates' arrows, and twenty of the boarders fell beneath their axes."

Ilia grew faint; her heart beat wildly, and her temples hummed. Ariadne saw her emotion and dismissed the messenger of evil. Then, going over to Ilia, she laid her arm about her shoulders.

"Child, you do well to grieve for him," she comforted her. "He was a brave man and your father's friend. I too knew him, and he fell as I should have wished him to,

a conqueror even in death. Go to your room now, for you are overwrought."

Ilia lifted her head, her tear-wet face proud and high.

"I go," she said, and walked into the palace like a queen.

Ariadne stood by a great square pillar, stern and dry-eyed. She was a true daughter of Minos, and would not weep at her own sorrow. She looked out over the river onto the fertile plain, and all that land, green with the young grain, seemed dry and arid, empty of all good. She turned away and left the portico.

Across the court, and straight for the chamber of Minos Ariadne went on her bitter errand. She entered, silent and unannounced, and saw a gruesome sight. There before his throne stood the sea-king, his right arm raised, fists clenched, demoniac fury written on his livid face. At his feet cowered a panic-stricken wretch, holding a severed head by the matted, tawny hair.

Against her will, Ariadne's eyes were drawn to the distorted, lifeless features. The glassy, staring eyes, the scarred and twisted nose, the leering hare-lip—this was not the face of Ragnarr! Unseen, she tiptoed softly out, the frozen numbness about her heart receding, giving way before unutterable gladness.

She ran on joyful feet to Ilia's chamber, and found her prone on her bed, sobbing wildly. Clasping her close, Ariadne whispered the happy tidings in her ear. Ilia looked up at her, staring uncomprehendingly. At last she took it in, and flung her arms about Ariadne.

"Say it again!" she implored. "Tell me he lives!"

"He lives indeed, dear child," the Cretan princess answered. "At least, he has escaped the pursuers, and the rest is with the gods."

So saying, she left the girl to her emotion.

"It is so, then," Ariadne murmured to herself as she turned into the corridor. "She loves him too."

ANOTHER month went by, and still Ambrogeos had not returned. At last, the king sent word to Rhodonthos that a swift ship must be dispatched to Egypt for news of him; but before she could put out, a galley entered the port with letters from the prince. These were borne at once to Minos, who tore off the clay seals impatiently, and read the scroll, frowning savagely.

Ambrogeos reported that unwittingly he had incurred the distrust of the powerful Rekhmara, chief minister to Pharaoh, and that in consequence his negotiations might be indefinitely postponed. Rekhmara had striven with all his power to block the marriage as well as the alliance, and Pharaoh, who had seemed well-disposed, now demanded tangible proof that the Cretan fleet would be as effective an aid as had been represented. Ambrogeos therefore, prayed his royal father to despatch ninety galleys as swiftly as might be, for Pharaoh contemplated an attack on Syria and required the aid of ships. If the Cretan sailors proved as skilful and valorous as they were reported, the marriage and the treaty would forthwith be ratified.

"What do you hear further from the fleet we sent after the barbarians?" Minos asked Rhodonthos, striking the letter impatiently with his finger.

"If it please your Majesty," the admiral answered uneasily. "The *Sea-Eagle*, when she returned a month ago, reported that the others would follow as soon as they could be careened and scraped, for their bottoms were foul with weeds. Since then I have had no word, and I fear the worst."

Minos beat his brow.

"How many ships can we spare?" he asked, his face dark with vexation.

"Four score have been built during the past year," the admiral answered, "and the eastern squadron has returned from Cyprus."

"Take this letter, and see that provision is made according as the prince requests. You yourself shall command the expedition."

"So be it, most gracious lord," replied Rhodonthos, and went out.

At the door he stopped and turned his worried eyes to the king. The two exchanged a glance of understanding sympathy, and the old admiral departed.

CHAPTER XXII

THE *GRAY WOLF'S* HUNTING

AMENOTHES III., greatest of Egypt's royal builders, had erected a towering pylon for the western wall of Karnak, the peerless Temple of Amon-Ra at Thebes.

Its massive gateway, giving entrance to the Hall of Osiris of the Many Statues, looked out beyond the beauty of Luxor with its avenue of rams, over the green strip of cultivated land even to the Nile.

From between the flanking towers one could see yet farther to the westward, where on the edge of the sands loomed the new temple of the Pharaoh, its great colossi keeping watch over the endless desert, and to the northwest, the dark Necropolis, the City of the Dead.

Midway between the central columns of the hall, the Pharaoh sat enthroned, the proud Queen Tii, his hawk-featured consort, on a carved and gilded chair beside him.

Amenothes was of great height and commanding presence, with full, leonine eyes in a strong and bony face. The queen, though of middle age, still retained much of the fierce beauty which had won her lordly husband, compelling him to stoop from his godlike isolation to lift her from her humble rank to the throne of the double kingdom. She wore the uræus circlet, the symbol of purest royalty, Pharaoh's wedding-gift against the wishes of his nobles. No king of Egypt had ever imposed his will more firmly on this race, nor had any before dared invest a woman of the people with the divine title of Child of the Sun.

Before the royal pair, between the temple guard and a double line of priests, stood Ambrogeos of Crete and his betrothed the Princess Nefrit. She was a girl of no more than fifteen years, but her rounded figure had already reached its mature loveliness, as the clinging robe of white revealed. Her untamed eyes and well-shaped, aquiline nose were the pattern of her mother's, but the broad, low forehead and arching brows were Pharaoh's own.

Things had indeed gone well with Ambrogeos, as his patient perseverance had deserved. Naturally quick-spoken, and conscious of the lofty place of Crete in the Mediterranean world, he had at first taken no pains to conciliate the unobtrusive Rekhmara, the chief minister of Pharaoh, who derived less power from this position than from his high favor with the queen. The result had been that for long Ambrogeos could make little progress; but the months of fruitless negotiations schooled him to patient diplomacy, and the very test which Rekhmara had suggested—the cooperation of the Cretan fleet, decided Amenothes in favor of the alliance.

Under the joint command of Ambrogeos and Rhodonthos, the island galleys had annihilated the Syrian navy, ravaged the coast towns, and landed a force which took the enemy in the rear in time to save the Egyptian land army from the disastrous results of a rash attack. The Syrians were completely crushed, and the booty exceeded all expectations.

Returning to Egypt, the Pharaoh gave a great feast in celebration of the victory, consecrated the spoils to the supreme god Amon-Ra, and had his exploits sculptured on the granite wall of his favorite temple.

Amenothes then graciously consented to bestow his daughter's hand on the Prince of Crete; but there were long discussions before satisfactory terms could be agreed upon for the treaty of alliance, on which Minos was so desperately determined. It was conceded that, in return for the services of the Cretan fleet, Egyptian troops should be sent to Crete when invasion threatened. This provision for mutual aid should hold good during the life of both monarchs and their successors. But Rhodonthos, who had brought the galleys required for the Syrian expedition, had been instructed by Minos to request that five hundred Egyptian archers and one thousand pikemen be sent back with Ambrogeos and his bride, for the Cretan king was much disturbed by the loss of his Euxine fleet, and desired to fill his depleted ranks. This disaster he thought best to conceal from Amenothes until the treaty should be signed.

Ambrogeos regarded the beautiful girl beside him, appraising her charms as coolly as he would examine the lines of a ship. She would make a queen to be proud of, he reflected, but his pulses did not quicken at the sight of her. He thought only of Ilia, whom he was to see again so soon, and the sixteen wearisome months that had passed in the east seemed not longer than the days of the voyage before him.

Yet, however dully he submitted to the betrothal, and whatever were the thoughts of Queen Tii, who did not approve this marriage of a Child of the Sun with a foreigner, there was none in the company so ill-pleased as old Rekhmara.

As he stood with Rhodonthos at the right hand of Pharaoh, the chief minister's

impassive Oriental face had grim thoughts. He had not forgotten how, at a feast given in honor of the prince's arrival, Ambrogeos had mockingly compared his wizened face to that of the mummy which the attendants bore among the guests in symbolism of man's common end.

Graceful girls bent over tall, gilded harps, and the strings throbbed out their soft, full tones. The high priest of Amon stepped before the youth and maiden, and joined their hands together. The lesser priests chanted a solemn hymn of praise, and the betrothal was accomplished.

Then the queen rose, bowed to Pharaoh, and went over to the princess. Taking the girl's hand, she led her slowly out between the long rows of columns, followed by the priests and temple attendants.

Pharaoh turned to Rekhmara.

"Is the treaty ready to be signed?" he asked.

"It is ready, O Holy One of Amon," answered the minister, and clapped his hands.

Four sturdy slaves entered, staggering under the weight of a great square slab of granite, on whose surface, in three columns separated by incised lines, the treaty of the empires was carved in Egyptian, Cretan, and the Babylonian of diplomatic intercourse. Behind the slaves came a squat, thick-shouldered artisan, with mallet and chisel in hand. He prostrated himself before Pharaoh, who extended his scepter and touched the naked back of the man, who rose to his feet again.

Rekhmara, who stood not far from the pylon, had been slowly edging toward its sunlit entrance. A shadow fell across one of the granite posts, and he set his back against it, facing the king, and completely concealing the breathless messenger, who slipped in unseen with tidings to the wily old minister. Rekhmara had held his arduous post through the reigns of three successive Pharaohs, by maintaining the most effective secret service known to Egyptian times.

"Speak fast," he urged softly, through half-shut lips.

"A Cretan ship comes up the Nile, master," the messenger whispered, "and will be here soon. She has fared ill and bears bad news, for her prow is gashed with spear-marks, her sides are torn, and her rowers are few."

"It is well," the old man answered. "Go!"

The bare feet moved off silently; and Rekhmara, leaving the gateway, walked slowly forward to the throne. Bending close to Amenothes, he spoke in low, rapid tones. The Pharaoh frowned and nodded curtly, then addressed Ambrogeos with courteous friendliness.

"It seems good to us," he said, "that, in token of our esteem for the mighty empire of Crete, the signature of Minos, to whose wisdom we are indebted for this glorious alliance between our lands, should be appended before our own."

Ambrogeos, flattered by this high honor from great Pharaoh, bowed his acquiescence, but Rhodonthos darted a look of suspicion at the stolid face of Rekhmara. The prince took a charred reed from the hand of the attendant artisan and drew on the stone the prow of a galley, surmounted by a double axe. The artisan laid his chisel to the black mark and began to chip along the lines of the drawing. As he worked, there rose a distant, confused shouting, borne to them faintly through the hot, still air.

The minutes passed, for the work was slow. Pharaoh sat back in his ceremonial chair, his strong, lean features inscrutable, almost like a syenite statue of himself. Rhodonthos fidgetted with impatience and suspicion; but Ambrogeos, serene in the confidence that his task was accomplished, waited with smiling calmness.

The shouting rose again, nearer and nearer, swelling with marked rapidity. Now it came from the city itself, so loud that it oppressed their ears.

The workman blew the dust from the stone, drew a brush of pigeon-feathers from his pocket and brushed away the chippings. Taking a fresh reed, he drew the royal cartouche of Pharaoh beneath the signature of Crete and raised his chisel once more. But Rekhmara thrust him aside, and, raising his meager arm, pointed toward the gateway.

In the entrance stood a Cretan officer, his face pale, a half-healed wound above his eye. Beyond him, made fast to the temple quay, a great galley floated in the Nile. She was battered frightfully, and the tentacles of her octopus figurehead were gashed and splintered. Ambrogeos started. Rhodonthos strove to intercept him with a warning glance, but it was too late.

"You, Liras!" cried the prince with agitation. "What do you here? What has happened?"

"This, my lord," the man answered. "The western fleet, which the king of kings entrusted to my command, was overwhelmed off Melita by the barbarian Ragnarr. We were more than they; but they fought like demons, and their bows far outranged ours. Forty of our ships are sunk; more than fifty others were boarded, and every man slain by the pirates. The rest, scarce ten in number, were crippled and taken. The barbarian holds his course for Crete, with more than a hundred galleys. My flagship alone beat off her assailants and escaped; but with half my crew slain. I steered toward Crete. But he outsailed me and cut me off, so I came hither to bring you warning."

Ambrogeos and Rhodonthos stared at him horror-stricken. Rekhmara turned a frosty smile on the Pharaoh, who rose from his seat, towering high above them. His lips were set ominously, and, when he spoke, his voice was coldly courteous.

"Prince Ambrogeos," he announced, "it seems that you have strong enemies indeed, who know how to strike suddenly. You will hardly expect Egypt to sign a treaty with a weakened nation. You will do well to leave the articles here till the fleets of Minos fall upon and destroy this barbarian. When you have won a victory, we will consider the matter further. In the meantime, seek your own land in peace. The marriage and the treaty must await a more propitious occasion. The royal galley will bear you to the sea."

The prince flushed with anger, but he knew better than to protest. He bowed and kissed the royal signet.

"We go," he replied. "I will meet these wolves of the sea myself, and the bull of Crete shall gore and trample them to death. I will return in the Spring. The gods be with thee, Son of Amon."

The Cretans turned away and went out through the mighty pylon, Ambrogeos and Rhodonthos before, followed by the luckless admiral Liras.

Rekhmara chuckled softly to himself.

"Was I not wise, O Pharaoh?" he asked.

Ambrogeos was furious and would not set foot on Pharaoh's galley. Straight to the *Octopus* he strode and climbed her torn side to the deck. They waited but to bring her nose around, and in less than a quarter of an hour the rowers pulled her down the Nile toward Sais, where the prince's fleet awaited his coming. When the sun sank beneath the horizon, the vermilion prows of five-score and ten galleys swept over the sea-way toward the far northwest.

TO BE CONCLUDED

SONG OF THE SEA-KING RAGNARR

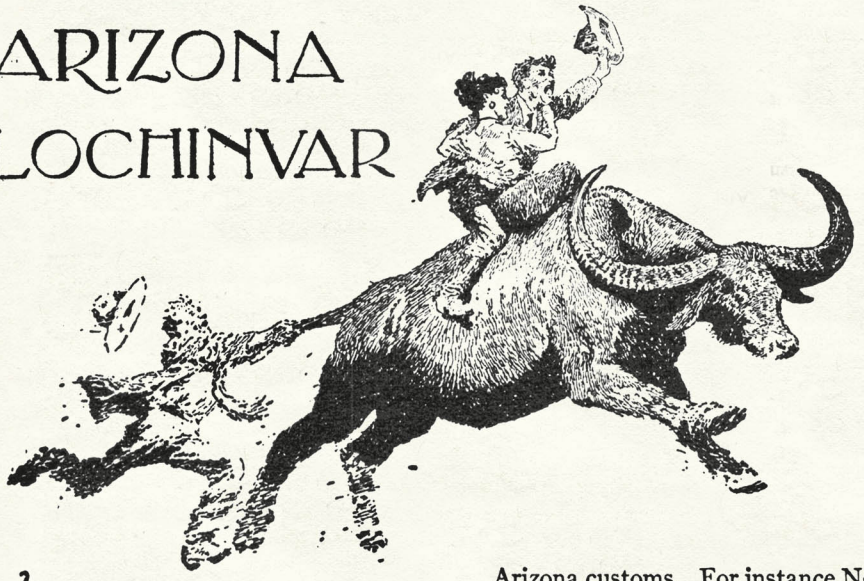
BY RICHARD BUTLER GLAENZER

WASTED the gold that gilds
Weakness, muxy as bran!
Skoal to the steel that builds
Man!

My shield is my friend and board;
My dragon-ship is my mate;
The sea is my song; and my sword,
Fate!

With the ring of a battle-cry
Shall rise my last-drawn breath:
He shall not seek me; but I,
Death!

THE ARIZONA LOCHINVAR



by Frederick Simpich

PIMA and Papago Indians, riding mute frayed burros, came from as far away as Coyote Wells and the fringe of the Yuma desert. For tomorrow was to be circus day in the sun-baked border town of Nogales; and already the cactus-country folk had begun to swarm.

Nogales itself, sprawling sleepily across the International line, had its own ideas of entertainment. After five years of revolution, the sudden rattle of Mausers and the *ping* of hot bullets biting holes in adobe walls, no longer even lured its people to the open street, to see who was killing who. Being casually shot up by roving patriots had become merely a mild Summer complaint.

But a circus—wherein a fat blonde in a sport shirt and red tights stuck her head into a tiger's mouth and bet the manager $50 a week that the tiger wouldn't clamp down on her—well, here was a sporting proposition that promised new thrills to all good gamblers.

Other feats on the bills differed, too, from Arizona customs. For instance Nogales had seen people dangle at the end of ropes; but they didn't hold the rope in their teeth, as the man on the show-bills did. And when the act was over, instead of dropping off the rope and bowing pleasantly, the Nogales danglers had to be cut down and buried.

Then the posters showed an irritated party throwing knives at a lady, to see how close he could come without cutting her throat. And another scene pictured a gent flat on his back, an elephant planting his big foot on the gent's stomach—forms of indoor sport and massage also new to Arizona.

Then last of all was a four-sheet spread featuring:

"B I G C A R R I E"
The Largest Filipino Carabao in Captivity!
The Only One in the World Trained to Dance on Its Hind Legs!

Idling cowboys sniffed at this.

"If I ever seed a cow o' mine doing a Salome dance, I'd shoot her for a loco," commented one doubting *buckaroo*. But he wouldn't have missed the circus; for everybody was "sure going." That is, everybody except Bud Bowles, who was no longer quite sure about it. He had planned to go—with his light o' love Chita Borel—daughter of old Pierre, who ran the "Hotel La France." But all at once Chita herself had upset all Bud's fond plans. For it was Don Juan

Copa de Cerveza—the newly arrived Spanish *matador*—who now basked in the border beauty's smiles, with Bud a vanishing second. Every evening of late found Don Juan on the balcony of the Hotel La France, thrumming a guitar and singing French love songs to the romantic Chita, and buying cognacs for the dozing old Pierre.

But Big Bud, ex-soldier in the Philippines, ex-Manila cop and now one of Uncle Sam's line-riders on the Arizona-Mexican frontier, had no thought of yielding weakly to any rival—more especially to a Spanish bull-fighter, be he ever so dashing and soulful of eye. And as he moodily wolfed his lunch in the "Greasy Pan Café," fronting on the International line, he pondered deeply on a plot for the banishment of Don Juan and, peradventure, his own restoration to favor at the court of Mademoiselle Chita.

It was no simple plan, this scheme of Bud's for the humiliation of his handsome rival. It called for infinite caution, for boldness, and for quick whirlwind action. But as Bud had gazed on that circus-poster memories of old days came back—memories of his days as a traffic cop in the hot, jammed streets of Manila, where giant carabaos grunted and tugged at heavy hemp carts.

In his ears sounded again, after long years, the odd, clicking Tagalog words of command, used by naked Filipino drivers.

"I used to savvy them big brutes, like I savvy my own hoss," he mused reflectively.

Across the little table from him lounged Mike Moran, his close friend, manager of the bull-ring on the Mexican side of the line.

"You're right, Mike," he grumbled, in response to a flippant interruption from Moran, "this Cerveza person has sure crabbed my romance—but I'll put the skids under him yet. He's just got to fade. I won't let no star-spangled bull-fighter muddy up my cup o' joy, without at least giving him one stiff kick in the throat.

"Fighter—Umph!" he snorted. "All dolled up in a Easter hat, a red shawl and silk pants—and beaded slippers like a soubrette. And slayin' runty calves with a bread-knife! Fighter! Booh! He wouldn't fight a knee-sprung guinea pig!"

"Don't fool yourself," said Moran. "This Cerveza gink is some go-getter. He kills a bull slicker and quicker than any *matador* I ever see."

"He's a fat-head bluffer, and stuck on his shape," began Bowles.

"I admit he speaks well of himself—always fussin' with the bull-ring helpers—and making me trouble; and I'd sack him, if it wasn't for his contract. I'm losin' money on the durn bull-ring anyway. But you got to hand it to Cerveza, Bud, he's a big drawin'-card, and he sure kills bulls."

"Them puny, one-lunged Mexican bulls—sure," retorted Bowles. "But listen here. I got a scheme to queer him—it'll make that bull-ring audience eat him alive—red pants and all!"

He leaned over and whispered earnestly to Moran. And the bull-ring manager began to grin, and then to laugh and laugh till he threw back his head and howled aloud.

"Bud," he gasped, when he caught his breath, "if you can put that stunt across, we'll clean up a roll big enough to choke a Dinah Sorus, and we'll speed up your love-affair till it'll make Romeo and Juliet's look like an old maid's dream!"

"Will you kick in?" asked Bowles.

"Watch me!" giggled Moran. I'd buy a drink on it right now if Arizona wasn't so prohibition dry that frogs has even forgot how to swim."

"All right," agreed Bowles. "There's Cerveza now, leanin' against the line monument, braggin' to the bunch about the bulls he'll kill tomorrow. I'll just mosey out there, horn in and pick a row with him. When we mix, you rush up, act sore at me and cuss me out. Then I'll turn on you and roast your bull-ring as a crooked game. I'll say Cerveza is a fake and bet fifty bucks I can produce a bull that'll chase him clear off the map. You hold stakes—and leave the rough stuff to me."

"Shoot!" grinned Moran; and he watched Bowles stroll slowly across the street to where the small crowd of hero-worshipers hung on the words of the elegant Cerveza. Then he followed, casually, waiting in front of the "Greasy Pan," where he could easily hear the argument Bowles was to start.

IN A few well-chosen words Bud roused the ire of the *matador*, and the quarrel was on.

"What's that?" snarled the indignant Spaniard. "You say I am a butcher—a calf-killer! I, Don Juan Copa de Cerveza, who have slain the fierce bulls of Andalusia before crowned heads—I, who am famous from Rio to Madrid! Who by right should be——"

"Should be back in Chicago, in a white apron, scrapin' prize pigs or hackin' out rib-roasts with a cleaver!" taunted Bowles.

"Santa Maria! You insult me!" flared the Spaniard.

"I done my best—you ornery wart-hog!"

"Poltroon! Then we fight!" declared Cerveza. "My honor demands that blood shall atone!"

He struck a defiant attitude, Latin-like, prepared for a long, lively argument.

"You're talkin' turkey now," grinned Bowles. "Blood's the word—right from the beak!" And swiftly he let Don Juan have it, a stinging wallop on his aristocratic Cesarian nose.

With a howl of pain the Spaniard rushed to Bowles, grappling wildly, and down they went, rolling over and over.

Moran, taking his cue, ran up expostulating. And behind him, drawn by the row, raced a Yankee cop, an eagerly tightening grip on his war club.

In the scuffle Cerveza had squirmed around till he lay directly across the International line, his long legs in Mexico, his head and shoulders on American soil, fast in the giant clutch of Big Bowles. Cerveza's excited friends danced wildly about, and as they beheld the rushing policeman, club raised to start work on their hero, inspiration seized them.

Grabbing Cerveza by the feet, they jerked him loose from Bowles' grip and dragged him bodily across the line, on to Mexican territory, where the disappointed Yankee cop couldn't follow.

"You're a fool, Bowles!" growled Moran in a fine show of indignation. "It's a wonder you wasn't killed, tyin' into Don Juan with your bare dukes like that."

"My fists is tools enough for me, when the other guy is a Dago with perfumery on his whiskers," said Bowles.

"Dago, nothin'," asserted Moran hotly. "Don Juan's a Spaniard, pure Castile blood, and the greatest *matador* in Mexico!"

"I am that," admitted the disheveled bull-fighter, brushing the dust of two Republics off his clothes. "And I defy——"

"Aw, you give me a pain in the tripe, you macaroni-fed fakir!" scoffed Bowles. "All you ever kill is these runty Mexican cattle—all hoofs, horns and tails. A real, husky gringo bull, full of pep and bawl, would chase you clear down into the Gulf o' Cortez!"

"The Señor is a liar," announced Cerveza, feeling safe on the Mexican side among his pals.

"Listen here," interrupted Moran, diplomatically guiding the argument along the desired lines. "Mr. Bowles has got his neck bowed and seems hunting trouble. If he thinks Don Juan is a quitter, let him produce a bull—one of them real husky ones he keeps talkin' about—for the fight that's billed for tomorrow forenoon. I'm bettin' Don Juan will kill any bull Bowles can find. And if he does, that'll settle the argument."

"*Seguro* — sure!" declared Cerveza eagerly.

"That's a go!" agreed Bowles, stepping suddenly across the line and thrusting a fifty-dollar bill before Cerveza's face. "And here's fifty to fifty that I can dig up a bull you can't even scratch. Your friend Moran here, who thinks you're such a hell-cat, can hold stakes."

Don Juan's sporting instincts responded promptly. In an instant he was peeling bills off a plethoric roll and putting up his fifty with Moran.

"Poor Señor Bowles," he mocked. "He has yet to learn that the great Cerveza's sword never fails! It will be so easy, that fifty; tomorrow I shall spend it at the circus—in charming company." And he leered knowingly at his quandom rival.

"You wait and see," muttered Bowles.

NEWS of the unique wager spread quickly. Bull-ring habitués, and gamblers from the American side, flocked about Moran to learn all details and to place bets, each on his own "gambler's hunch." Cerveza was plainly the favorite. Even the shrewdest *buckaroos*, who knew Bud well, could not imagine where he expected to find a bull that would have even a fighting chance before the skilful Spaniard, who had fought from Barcelona to Buenos Aires.

By nightfall the odds were three to one on Don Juan, and going up. Moran's pockets bulged with stakes.

Bowles, keeping his own counsel, calmly bet his last cent, then all he could raise on his horse, his saddle, his watch and his guns and finally, all he could borrow.

"You're goin' powerful strong, Bud," Moran had cautioned.

"There's just two answers to this deal," said Big Bud. "For me, it's either victory

and live happy ever after—or else I'll do an Enoch Arden disappearin' act, wearin' borrowed pants and a worried look."

Betting kept up half the night. Here was a new sporting proposition, better than keno, or coon-can, or even stud-poker, because it meant action in the open bull-ring, with all cards face up on the table. And all Nogales wanted in on it.

Long after midnight Bud and Moran met secretly to agree on the last details of the frame-up. Moran was sure he could fix the roustabouts at the bull-ring.

"They all hate Don Juan," he explained, "hate his overbearin' ways—they'd slit his throat for a five-cent cigar. If we can double-cross him and make a clean-up, I'll chuck the bull-ring. It never was a Yankee's game anyway."

"Cerveza's goose is scorchin' already," commented Bowles. "Tomorrow I shift this gob of gloom from my soul to his. And I tell you, too, Mike, them bull-ring gamblers is poor losers, and unless Cerveza gets a runnin' start on 'em when his grief commences, there'll be fees for the coroner *mañana*.

Moran grinned his approval as Bowles rose to leave.

"Don't get shot tonight—or pinched for cow rustlin'," he warned good-naturedly.

"There ain't no law in Arizony against stealin' what I'm scoutin' for tonight," said Bowles, slipping out into the dark.

LONG before ten o'clock next morning Moran's bull-ring gate receipts had broken all records. Hundreds who had come early for the circus hurried over to the bull-fight, when they heard news of the odd wager and heavy betting.

Excited people jammed the frail grand stand, climbed up on the high board fence about the ring and swarmed on top of nearby houses. Speculation wild and divergent, copious guesses as to the identity of the unknown bull, its size, temper and battling ability, were heard on every side. All agreed, however, that a sensational fight was probable, maybe the goriest in the annals of the "Plaza do los Toros." And most of the spectators, especially the Mexicans, were equally positive also, that in the end the mysterious bull, be it ever so *broncho*, must inevitably succumb to the skill of Cerveza.

The great *matador* himself, elegant, gorgeous in the fancy bull-ring costume of old Madrid, basked now in his happiest element. To him the homage of the masses, the gracious plaudits of the élite, were as food and drink. And as he walked leisurely across the ring between Moran and the *Jefe de Policia*, the throng cheered itself hoarse.

Undeniably, Cerveza approached bodily perfection. With a head like a Cæsar, the physique of an Apollo, clean leg sinews playing smooth and supple beneath his tight knee-pants and pink silk stockings, straight-backed and graceful of carriage, he was indeed the ideal gladiator of old. And as he lifted his natty *chapeau* to the cheering crowd, there was in his bow the merest essence of that blasé disdain, of discreetly measured affectation and pose, so inseparable from the Latin when he knows the eyes of men and women are upon him.

Considering which, it was inevitable that romantic little Chita Borel, with her own Latin blood, should feel flattered by the smiles of this popular hero. And as she sat, breathlessly happy in the gaily decorated box of the Presidente, among a score of brightly garbed, typically perfumed señoritas of the Mexican town, her heart beat furiously as Don Juan appeared, making ready for battle. He would first meet two mere Mexican bulls—a sort of preliminary warm-up before his star combat with the unknown.

The first bull to appear drew howls of disgust from the crowd. Plainly a bovine pacifist, spurning carnage, it trotted idly about the ring, or stopped to gaze foolishly at the tantalizing *banderilleros*. The pin-rosettes and *banderillas* they stuck into its sides merely made it bawl ludicrously, or stand and kick up with its hind feet.

"*Huido!*" "*Otro Toro!* Coward! Bring another bull!" yelled the crowd and threw empty soda bottles at the cringing animal as jeering men chased it from the ring.

Bravos of mirth and enthusiasm greeted the entrance of the next bull. Barely had the big gate swung open than it dashed furiously into the ring, charging at any man daring to show himself from behind the tiny safety-stations that lined the arena. It was a real *toro valiente*, and was soon goaded to frothing madness by the taunts and pricks of the dodging *banderilleros*.

When it was crazed with rage, Don Juan advanced to the center of the ring, smiling disdainfully. Sword in hand, waving his

red scarf, he coolly faced the vicious beast. Snorting defiantly, it promptly charged, head down.

The trained *matador*, with steady, practised eye, stepped barely from the path of the rushing animal, leaned slightly forward to meet the shock, and drove his long sword home with unerring skill. The grand stand roared its approval; Don Juan bowed, haughtily indifferent, and ring-men hastened in with blindfolded mules to drag out the dead bull.

The band played a few bars of a mad *diana*, and then the Presidente arose to announce the great event of the morning. He compared Don Juan with every hero in history that he could think of, from Ghengiz Khan down to Jess Williard. But in the midst of his eloquent peroration, the eager throng drowned his classic appeal in their noisier cries for action. They wanted gore not oratory. They wanted to get a look at the unknown — the mystery bull — the heavy-weight *"Toro Americano,"* whose death at Don Juan's hand meant fat winnings to scores in the grand stand. They wanted the winnings—quick.

Taking advantage of this tumult, Moran sneaked back for a final word with Bowles. The latter, hiding in the tightly closed paddock where reserve bulls were housed, had kept a personal vigil over his big quadruped, kidnaped in the dark hours of night.

"Has anybody got wise?" he asked anxiously, as he discerned his brother conspirator in the shadowy entrance to the shed.

"Naw—they don't suspect nothing," said Moran. "But Bud—I got thousands o' dollars in stake-money stowed away in my rompers. And if this beast of yours falls down on us and takes the count, we're ruined!"

"Buck up, Mike! I didn't pick no hysterical toy bull for this job," assured Bowles. "I got a rip-roarin' man-eater. And when that gate flies open and I bust this bottle o' 'high-life' on that brute's rump, and it scoots into that ring, the death-rate among them Dago *matadors* is goin' sky-high, savvy?"

"Amen," grunted Moran. "I hope you're right. But I got to skip—them gamblers is impatient. They're hollerin' their heads off. Are you all ready here?"

"Ready when the horn blows. And say Mike," he called guardedly, as Moran started away, "the minute Don Juan blows up, you beat it for *tierra Americana*. All them gamblers that ain't busy beatin' him to death'll be hollerin' 'fake' and fightin' for their money back!"

"The more money I'm carryin', the faster I can run," called back Moran, hurrying out as the impatient tumult grew louder.

"Sigue! Let in the Gringo bull!" yelled a hoarse voice from the grand stand. *"Bravo! Cerveza! Viva Cerveza! Viva el Grand Matador!"* chorused another excited group.

The *banderilleros* had taken station and Don Juan smiling indifferently, stood at one side of the ring, several yards from the big gate through which the bull should enter.

THE grand stand was on its feet, *en masse*, people climbing on top their chairs to get their first glimpse of the mystery bull. Then, all at once, as a bugler rose near the Presidente's box, the din hushed. The silence of expectancy fell on the dense, eager jam of humans.

Lifting his trumpet, leisurely, the bugler blew the warning note. Then the big gate crashed open—and in rushed the long-looked-for, the snorting, bawling unknown.

For one tense, silent second, fraught with stupefaction and fear the great crowd shrank back, speechless. Then burst yells of dismay, hoarse curses and the shrill screams of women.

"El Diablo! A hell-bull! Flee for your lives!" shouted the *banderilleros*, rushing for the ring-side and vaulting the high fence to safety.

In all his long career of slaughter Don Juan had never faced a bull like that. A prodigious creature it was, big as five Mexican bulls, with a sweep of horns seven feet across! Nor did it rush, head down, as other bulls did, but it rose to its hind legs and came two-stepping toward him, like some unspeakable prancing monster of nightmare in a hideous *danse du ventre*. And it bawled as it came, not a bull's bawl, but a threatening raucous snort—a muddy, jungle-roar, as of the tropic morass—such a roar mayhap as rose from the primordial diplodocus when floundering in mortal combat.

A dumb instant only Don Juan stood, fear-stricken, helpless. Then he shrieked in sheer terror and flung his once honored sword at the appalling, upright thing that

bore down on him—and then he fled. Across the ring he ingloriously bolted, to scramble up the board fence and into the grand stand, a shaking beaten man, leaving the giant beast monster of the arena.

"Shoot it! Kill it!" gasped the frightened Presidente, and the valiant General Pocos Centavos drew his automatic and rained lead toward the lumbering monster, only to kill a burro in an empty lot beyond and to wing an earnestly fleeing Chinaman.

Stampeded, the grand stand crowd fought to escape. Too small by far was the narrow stairway that led down past the ticket window, so the people began jumping. And in the rush an end of the frail pine grand stand gave way, letting a score slip and slide to the ground, as the structure fell.

Into waiting automobiles many sprang, to dash away. Far in the lead raced Don Juan Copa de Cerveza, mounted on a purloined mule. Gone was his Easter hat, his red scarf and his beaded slippers. Safety first had become his life's great ambition.

Around and around the ring floundered the menacing beast, triumphant. And as the end of the grand stand collapsed, the heavy animal hit the weakened ring fence, not built to stop bulls of such weight, and crashed through it, scattering the swarming crowd outside.

Then up from the crush came Big Bud Bowles, an unconscious girl in his arms. Straight for the "Hell Bull" he ran, scrambled up on its broad back, slapped it on the neck—as he had guided a hundred of its kind in the old Philippine days—and yelled the magic Manila command, "*Sigue Dagupan!*" which any old soldier can interpret.

With unerring animal instinct the brute headed straight for the line, seeking the haunts from which it came. Through the swarming Mexican town it fled, in long clumsy lopes, indifferent to the man and woman clinging to its back. And close behind, holding fast to its tail for safety and speed, ran Mike Moran, the big winnings safe in his bulging pockets. Slipping and stumbling, but gripping that tough, hairy tail, the bull-fight promoter ran for life, for the haven of American soil.

Into the main street of the Yankee town they thundered, plowing through the crowd that had gathered to see the circus parade.

"I transfer here!" shouted Moran, dropping his tail-hold before the "Greasy Pan," and ducking swiftly for its friendly door.

"Hey there! That thing's been stole!" warned a policeman, jumping in front of Big Carrie, waving his club.

"I know it—I been huntin' it all night and am taking it back!" yelled Bowles, clasping Chita tighter and digging his heels into the panting sides of the carabao.

On down the street they plunged, overtaking the gaudy parade. Right in front of the Hotel La France, as Big Carrie with a glad snort slackened speed and slid to her accustomed place in line just back of the hippo's cage, Big Bud rolled from her back; and, with Chita still in his arms, he bolted for the hotel entrance. Amazed and incredulous, the street crowd swarmed after him. Outstripping them all, he bounded up the main stairway, straight for old Pierre's apartments.

Swift on Bud's heels came the circus manager, volubly inquisitive, yet immensely pleased at the magic return of his trained carabao.

"Never knowed Carrie to go off on a bat like that before," he declared to the gaping bystanders. "She disappeared some time last night—slick and clean. We couldn't find hair nor hide of her this morning."

He was still talking in the hall before old Pierre's door when the rescuer of wayward Carrie came out. Seizing Bud's hand, the showman wrung it dramatically, then pompously drew his fat wallet.

"Nix!" objected Bud. "You don't owe me a cent. In catchin' your stage-struck cow I only done my duty as a officer. "And I don't want no steady job with the show, riding Carrie in the parade, either," he added, as the manager insisted.

Old Pierre slipped out, tugging at Bud's sleeve, whispering.

"Mademoiselle Chita wished to see Mr. Bowles—she had something to tell him."

Moran, hiding in a back room of the "Greasy Pan" had to send a Chinaman three times for Bowles; and then it was an hour before the radiant line-rider finally appeared.

"Three cautious cheers, *companero!*" chuckled the reformed bull-fight promoter. "Your street-o'-Cairo cow sure turned the big trick! She scared Don Juan plumb down into the Panama Canal—and won us a cold six thousand!"

"And me a home," confided Bud blushingly. "I just saw Chita, and it's all fixed for the big splash in the orange blossoms."

TENTS

by Maude Radford Warren

THE YOUNG woman in gray put down her pencil as a sign that, for her, the interview was over. The manufacturer talked on, rather uneasily. Miss Craven was a remarkable saleswoman, of course, but, after all, she was only a woman, only a human being, if it came to that, and on her depended a contract of some eighty million dollars. The prospect of getting it ought to scare her as much as the prospect of losing it scared him.

"It's a great chance for the firm, Miss Craven," he said in a worried voice. "I'm tempted to wish so much didn't depend on it. If Jordan were not sick and if Ainslee wasn't married and didn't tell his wife all he knew, I'd send one of them. Then, of course, your going as a nurse gives you an advantage over a man——"

"I understand, Mr. Murray," said Georgia Craven with a good-humored laugh that did not clash much with the slightly cynical understanding in her eyes. "You wouldn't send me if you could get any one you consider better, and you have to trust me against your will."

"Oh, come, Miss Craven," he stammered rather dashed.

"Any one can fail," Georgia went on, "and I may fail. But if there is a chance of success, I mean to take it. Please remember that if your whole stake is in this, mine is, too. Eighty millions doesn't mean a bit more to the firm than my commission does to me. Even if the firm loses the contract, it has the same good future before it that it had before the Russian army wanted tents; while if I lose this contract—I leave you to tell me where I stand."

Murray nodded and sighed.

"You've got it doped out right," he said. "Of course, I think you'll pull it off. It was wise of you to register as Mary G. Smith; your own name isn't usual, and somebody might find out what you're after and beat you to it. But I must say no one could have acted quicker than you did when you got the smell of this thing. Be sure not to talk more than you must to people going over. You couldn't pretend to be seasick, I suppose?"

"With this color?" she laughed, her blue eyes sparkling over her pink cheeks. "I am afraid I couldn't look sick however much I tried."

"I think my first plan was the best," he grumbled. "You ought to have taken your little nephew over; that would have given a domestic touch to you, and what with

your general appearance, it wouldn't have looked likely to any spy or detective that you are a young lady trying to sell to the Russians."

Georgia Craven's voice was steely as she answered:

"My nephew is my real stake in life, Mr. Murray. I'm willing to risk being blown up by a mine or submarine myself, but I am not willing to risk Roddy. I can't say anything more than that I'll do my best."

"Of course you will," said Murray, remembering that it is necessary to hearten the salesman. "I guess I know we're lucky to have you undertake this." He rose. "Well, good-by; take good care of yourself."

Georgia gave him her hand and saw him to the door of her little sitting-room. Then she went out, bought herself a ticket for the French steamer *Melisande*, bound for Havre, purchased a nurse's outfit, and very composedly dined and went to the theater alone.

SEVERAL hours later she was on the *Melisande*, enjoying a storm all by herself. She had been urged below by deck-stewards and ship's officers, who behaved toward her in the stupid, obstinate way Pullman porters did when she asked to have both windows open and the pillows of her berth laid so that she could sleep with her face to the air and the cinders. She had overborne the ship's people in the firm way she overbore porters; the stewards yielded, because they had their minds on tips; the officers yielded because they looked forward to conversations with a handsome and healthy young woman who did not seem as if she would be nervous about submarines.

Georgia, then, pursued her tramp along the heaving deck without further interference, and, at first, without further company. She found her steamer-chair, which was placed between those of two other Smiths by a deck-steward who evidently overlooked no bets. She overheard involuntary groans from stateroom windows with that amused superiority which is one of the vices of a good sailor, and which ought to have some sort of penalty. And she began to wonder about dinner. Then chance played its first card in the great adventure of Georgia's life.

A tall man, rounding a corner, head down against the wind, ran into her and grasped her arm to steady her and himself. A raincoat and rubber hat have an even chance of adding to a man's looks, or putting a curse on them. In this case they took nothing away from an open brown face, observant brown eyes and a cheerful mouth.

"Did I hurt you?" he asked anxiously.

"Not a bit," Georgia returned brightly. "You can only hurt me if you ask me if I oughtn't to be below in a storm like this."

He laughed.

"We're the only passengers on our feet," he said, "and I've the right to be, because I'm a doctor. I wouldn't have the stomach to lie down."

Georgia became, on the surface, equally frank in labeling herself.

"I'm a nurse," she said; "at least, I expect to be, if they'll take me in France."

"H'm," he said, "shall we walk?"

They strode against the wind, and while he told her his name was Barnes, and that he had already been working in Belgium, he decided the type of nurse she was. She wasn't the sentimental type, ardently wistful to smooth the pillows of the sick, until she got inside a hospital. She wasn't the restless, adventurous type, eager for experience in a great world crisis, and ready to pay for it with hard work; she must be the third type of steady humane worker, kind, competent, and supremely able to put herself out of the reckoning.

"Have you had experience, Miss Smith?" he asked her, as they swerved around and got the wind at their backs.

"Not much," she said. "I meant to be a trained nurse once, and served as probation for three months, and had a couple of months' experience after that. But then the fortunes of my family changed and so did my plans."

She was silent, suddenly homesick for Roddy, remembering how, when his frail sad mother died, she had bequeathed her baby to seventeen-year-old Georgia, who gave promise, even then, of unusual mental and physical strength. Georgia, at nineteen, had begun to learn to be a nurse, solely to know how to take care of Roddy, who was delicate. Then Georgia's mother had died; very little money was left, and Georgia had to find work that would pay better than nursing. It had been hard going for eight years, but she had succeeded;

love and work and the rewards of both were hers, and if she could but win this contract. . .

Barnes received only an absent smile when he made some remark about the sea. Then, remembering that he had said his work was in Belgium, she began to question him about the conditions he had met.

Very few people appeared at dinner. Barnes was able to change his seat to a chair next Georgia. After dinner he disappeared, saying that there were some really serious cases of sick people on board which he must help the ship's doctor to look after.

Then fate dealt her second card to Georgia in the great adventure of her life. For presently Barnes returned to the library, where he had left her, and asked her if she would not come with him to help care for a patient among the second-class passengers. This was, he said, the wife of a young French-American who was going back to offer himself for work in France. His wife expected to become a mother in a month, and the storm was playing havoc with her nerves. All she needed, really, was the companionship of some steady, gentle-voiced woman who was not seasick. Georgia was glad to go.

She followed Barnes to the second-class decks and came at last to a stateroom, the door of which was opened by a young fair man, whose face, Georgia noted, looked tragic, rather than merely anxious. Barnes presented him, and then Georgia entered and found herself looking into the sick, frightened eyes of a very young girl, whose pale, golden hair swept the pillow all about her head, and whose fingers were clenching and unclenching wildly.

Georgia took the tense hands in hers and began to talk soothingly. After a time the girl's wild stare grew peaceful and her hands relaxed. Her eyelids closed, and her young husband, Carpentier, drew a long, sobbing sigh.

"Poor things," Georgia mused. "It isn't themselves they're thinking about."

When Mrs. Carpentier was sound asleep, Georgia went away, asking Carpentier to send for her in case his wife should need her again in the night. She was called before dawn, and she did not succeed in quieting Mrs. Carpentier till mid-morning. Then Barnes took her out to her steamer-chair, tucked her in, and ordered her to rest.

"Shut your eyes and go to sleep," he commanded. "I asked you to help that little woman, but not to take the full burden of her on your shoulders."

She smiled up at him sleepily. They had gone far in companionship in the past few hours. As she sank back in her chair, Georgia noted that the storm had abated, and that people were struggling up on deck. Then she closed her eyes and slept.

When she woke, it was midday. The sea had subsided into long rolling swells, and the sun was shining brilliantly. Georgia glanced at Barnes's chair at her right; it was empty. She glanced at the chair to her left.

Fate then dealt Georgia the third card. Of all the ninety millions of people in America, this man was the one she had meant never to meet. It was eleven years since she had seen him, but she could not have mistaken him. Hate makes for memory, as well as love. There could not be, in the world, two such dark, handsome, luring faces. She knew that when his eyes opened, they would be light gray, strange and starry against his black hair. It was a face that women loved to their own hurt.

Georgia turned her head, her body shaking with a disintegrating bitterness. For years, this man had meant grief and humiliation to her. In all that had been best and worst in her life he had been concerned. And now, what was he doing here beside her? He could make trouble. Did he mean to?

Her pulses grew weak. Then her hard common sense reasserted itself. The name on her chair was Mary G. Smith. When Gordon had last seen her, she had been an undersized girl of sixteen, pale and shy, and plain. Now she was tall, with brilliant coloring, a ready smile, and not quite plain. No; he could scarcely know her.

Well, then, let what would come. He was most hatefully in her debt, but she would be passive. Her business training had taught her always to be open-minded, always alert. She lay still, schooling herself to endure this man; if necessary, to exchange words with him, even to smile at him.

She knew by a sudden movement at her left that Gordon had awakened. She was sure that he was sitting up, straightening

his cap, putting a hand to his cravat. She remembered his vain little ways. She opened her eyes and looked at him, to see that he was apparently reading. He met her eyes with a start and offered his book to her.

"I beg your pardon," he said, and Georgia remembered his musical voice, "this book fell out of your chair while you were asleep. I picked it up, but I was afraid of awakening you if I had restored it."

Georgia was sure, now, that he had wished sufficiently to scrape acquaintance with her to plan for it.

"I'm afraid it's not mine," she said pleasantly.

"So?" asked Gordon. "Then I was not trespassing when I read. I only opened the book to keep from hearing passengers say that they haven't been seasick; they've only been resting in their berths."

Georgia laughed, naturally enough.

"But I've really been on deck most of the time," she said.

"I envy you, Miss Smith. You see, I've read your name," he said in a winning, apologetic tone.

"There isn't much to do on shipboard, except read and find out things about people," she said lightly.

He began to tell her of a voyage he had once taken on a P. and O. boat, when he had set out with the impression that nothing ever happened on shipboard; then the voyage had turned out to be a veritable Arabian Nights tale. By the time his account was over luncheon was ready, and they went down together. Gordon had a seat just opposite her; Georgia had no doubt that he had arranged it as carefully as he had shifted his deck-chair beside hers.

She was ready now to respond to his lead. Slowly that side of her nature which acted had come to the front; the Georgia Craven who could feel keenly, who had suffered as only a very young girl can suffer, was in the background. Georgia Craven, for business purposes Mary G. Smith, was following that gift of intuition which is the main asset of the best business women and business men. Gordon wanted something of her; she would see what it was.

She introduced Gordon to Barnes, noting, with a sort of amused aloofness, the doctor's instinctive distaste for him. She walked with him in the afternoon, and they had not made their first turn about the ship when she knew that whatever Gordon wanted, he meant to get by the only route he knew with women. Evidently, she reflected, his vanity had led him not to take into account the woman whom hard experience in the business world has armored against the philandering type of man.

As they walked and talked, Georgia had to occasionally steel herself, not against the quick, soft magnetic glances of those pale grey eyes, romantic in their dark setting, but against bitter memories.

When they sat down, Gordon flung off his dark green ulster. Georgia's quick eyes noted that it bore the name of a Kansas City tailor. She knitted her brows quickly. She said nothing until a large man passed their chairs. Then she began to speak of people of great size.

"The very largest person I ever met," she said, "was a William P. Brody of Kansas City. Did you ever meet him?"

A quick gleam came into Gordon's eyes, and went, leaving them blank.

"No, I never heard of him," he said in a measured tone.

Georgia was glad of her keen memory for traits of character. She knew how it was with Gordon's eyes when he lied.

They walked again and paused to look down at the steerage, speaking of the reservists who were going back to France to fight.

"But what they need," said Georgia, purposely making her tone impulsive, "is not men so much as munitions, tents," she broke off quickly.

Again she saw that quick gleam in Gordon's eyes.

"Is it tents?" he asked indifferently. "I thought it was medicines. As a nurse you must know what they lack in hospital supplies."

"Yes, yes, I do," said Georgia hastily.

Her heart was beating hard and her mind was racing. So that was it? Well, Gordon should see! She went on talking, but it was a relief when Barnes came to her, saying that Mrs. Carpentier was asking for her. Gordon smiled sardonically; he thought Barnes was manufacturing a stupid device for winning an hour with Georgia. Any woman to whom he paid attention, so life had taught him, was sure

to be attractive to other men. Georgia sneered inwardly at his stupidity.

She found little Mrs. Carpentier very ill, and her young husband even more tragic than he had been the day before. As she looked at him, Georgia felt infinitely old and experienced. This was the commonest thing in the world, waiting for a child; but young Carpentier looked as if the woes of the ages were his alone. Georgia found herself soothing him, much as she had soothed his wife.

Dinner was almost over when she left the stateroom. Barnes was waiting for her.

"Why," he asked, as they made their way across the second-class decks, "are you seeing so much of this man Gordon. You don't like him."

Georgia stared at him. Then she dropped her eyes.

"Of course I don't like him," she said. "I don't know him."

"It isn't that, you know," Barnes said. "Not that I'm curious—or, yes, I am curious, but I understand perfectly that I have no right to be."

Georgia considered.

"I am intensely interested in the man," she said slowly; "intensely. I shall take all the time he'll give me."

"Am I rebuked?" said Barnes with a smile. "I'm not going to be, you know."

THAT evening Gordon's real love-making began. Georgia was astonished to find out how convincing it was. She reflected, with a hard smile which the darkness concealed, that the hearts of many, many women must have gone to school to him before his method could have become so perfect.

She drank champagne with him, noting scornfully that the liquor improved his love-making. It affected his head, too, for he showed a little too plainly his certainty in his skill, taking her answers for granted, without really listening. And again she thought of those other women.

For nearly three days each played the game, Georgia, her head cool and her heart hot with rage and disgust, but not with shame. Then fate dealt another card. Little Mrs. Carpentier went down prematurely to the gates of death, and came back with the delicate freight of another life. Georgia stayed with her, helping Barnes, and the ship's doctor. The latter, Georgia thought, neglected some of his other cases to be with Mrs. Carpentier, who, in the earlier stages of her confinement, had been delirious, babbling wildly in French and German, her English forgotten.

Georgia, through all those fighting hours, did not think of Gordon. She was glad to throw herself into a struggle in which the competition was only with death. Yet when the baby was cared for and started on its career, and a competent woman from the steerage engaged to watch during the night, Georgia remembered her real work. She was about to make her way to the first-class decks when young Carpentier put his hand appealingly on her arm.

"There is no need for me to stay," Georgia said gently, "your wife is asleep, and the nurse will come as soon as she has her supper."

"It is not that," he whispered; "but you have helped us so much that I dare ask more."

He was still tragic, though his wife and son were safe. Georgia wondered rather impatiently. She allowed only a certain amount of deference to nerves.

"I thought I could do it," he whispered, his hold on her arm tightening. "I was commanded. I told her, and she would not let me go alone. We were going to die together, she and I, and the baby not born. But the baby is born—my life, yes; but his and hers—no! I can not; I can not!"

"What are you talking about?" Georgia cried.

"Besides, I think the ship's doctor suspects," he whispered on. "For when she was raving in her terror and pain, she talked of it in her own language. I think they will search the room. I think they will not let me visit the engine-room again."

Georgia stared at him, half comprehending.

"You mean," she asked, "that your wife is German—that is her language?"

"We are both German," he said; "I thought I could do it! Wait!"

He dragged out a steamer-trunk, unlocked it and drew from it two objects which looked like cameras.

"See," he said, "you can put them in the pockets of that great ulster you wear. Then you can throw them into the sea—if you are not afraid? You could not be afraid."

"They are?" whispered Georgia.

"Time-bombs; a new sort. Do not be afraid; it is not till noon tomorrow that they could explode."

"Where—where were they to go?" she asked.

"There is powder in the hold of this ship—yes. I have made friends with the engineers, with many of the men below. I should have placed them before this, but she was so ill! And now, I can not. It was commanded, well, they may have my life in any way they want it, but not hers and his!"

Georgia's breath was coming fast. To have been so near death! Never to see Roddy again! A boat-load of people to be lost to thousands who loved them!

"Give them to me," she said. "No; I'm not afraid."

She slipped on her heavy ulster, and put one of the innocent-looking little "cameras" in each pocket. She was trembling with an unreasoning fear that they would explode prematurely; how could even German scientists have an accurate knowledge of the actions of infernal machines? What harm would it do their plans if they had miscalculated by a few hours? Only Roddy——

She hurried on deck, and then she suddenly paused. Again she trembled, but now not with fear. She had been struck with a daring idea. She breathed heavily for a few moments. Then she set out to look for Gordon. First she went to her steamer-chair. He was not there, but Barnes was. She sank down beside him.

"Where is Mr. Gordon?" she asked, her voice falling insensibly into the whisper she had used with Carpentier.

"In the bar. He comes out every ten minutes to look for you."

"Is he drinking much?"

"Too much to talk to you tonight—if I have anything to say about it. You are white; it's been too hard a day. Hadn't you better go to bed?"

"Wait!" Georgia said. "This morning, in that wonderful walk we had when the dawn came up, you said—you said you'd do a good deal for me."

"Yes?"

"I want you—I want you to drink with that man; make him take more than he would; then bring him to me."

"I won't do that."

His tone was grim; she even thought she caught a flavor of disgust in it.

"As you please," she said. "Then I shall send a steward to bring him to me. I mean to see him tonight."

Barnes rose abruptly and walked away from her. Georgia waited fifteen minutes. Then she got up to find a deck-steward. Before she had gone a dozen paces, she heard Gordon's voice, pitched rather higher than usual. In the dim light of the deck, she saw him and Barnes walking toward her. Gordon did not walk quite steadily.

"I'm ready to take that tramp with you now, Mr. Gordon," Georgia said in a level voice. "But do put on your green ulster. It's too chilly without it. Besides—I like it."

With a rather silly laugh, Gordon went in the direction of his stateroom.

"Thank you," Georgia said to Barnes.

"I did it only so you should not ask the steward," he said stiffly.

"Still, thank you. And I am going to ask another favor. I shall take Mr. Gordon below—as far as I can into the deeps of the ship. The second engineer asked me only yesterday if he couldn't show me about. It's his watch now. In half an hour, I want you to contrive to come down with one of the ship's officers."

"It's ten o'clock. What will they think?"

"No one will judge me hardly who knows how I worked over Mrs. Carpentier today," Georgia said in a hard tone. "I want to use your help—but I can get on without it."

"It's not fair," said Barnes doggedly. "You've no right to ask it of me."

"No, I haven't, but you only refuse because I haven't explained——"

"I'm not so petty as that," he interrupted.

"Then you don't trust me?" Georgia said in a low tone.

"Does what you've been doing look trustworthy?" he returned.

"I'm enough of a woman," she murmured, "to ask you to do it for me whether you trust me or not. Do it because you care. But I can manage alone."

Gordon came in sight, swaggering in his green ulster.

"Very well," said Barnes abruptly, and turned away.

Gordon drew Georgia's arm within his.

"Shall we walk?" he whispered.

Georgia did not want the brisk air to medicine to him.

"No; I've a fancy to see the heart of this great ship—just alone with you."

"I'd rather walk," he said sulkily.

"But if we do," Georgia purred, "some one will join us."

"Plenty of people below, too," he said.

"Very well," she pretended to yield. "It's just a fancy of mine. I wanted to see it with you. I wanted to have another thing which you and I have done together, to remember. Because—I've something to tell you. Perhaps you won't forgive me, when you know I've been deceiving you. For I'm not going over as a nurse at all."

For a moment she was afraid that she had sobered him; his eyes grew almost keen, and he straightened.

"When we come back on deck," she said, leading the way, "I want to tell you all about it—what I'm really doing—what my great stake is."

He followed her, his hands reaching out eagerly toward her.

The next few minutes were a nightmare to Georgia; their progress down-stairs and along passages, directed by wondering or quizzical stewards and sub-officials, to each of whom she said that the second engineer expected her; their critical regard of the man she had chosen as her escort; the arrival at last at the engineer's office; the barely achieved politeness of his reception; the reluctant and brief guidance he gave them. As in a daze, Georgia saw shining or black machinery, greasy oilers, grimy, panting stokers, red mouths of furnaces; she heard the grating noise of sliding coal, the heavy, overpowering throb of the engines. And always she was conscious of Gordon behind her, half drunk, amorous, giggling; then bored and sleepy.

Time was passing; how could she do what she had planned? There was a moment when the engineer had turned back to speak to one of his men. It was not the spot she would have chosen, but it had to serve.

Her hands in her pocket, she stopped hastily and placed one of the bombs behind what looked to her excited eyes like a grimacing pocket of steel. Then, rather abruptly, she made her adieus to the engineer and, slipping her arm within Gordon's, walked him, rather than walked with him, to the iron ladder which marked the first stage of their progress to the upper deck. Gordon preceded her up the ladder. At the top she leaned toward him, langorously.

"Ah, it is good to be alone with you," she murmured.

He held out his arms. Georgia went into his embrace. Tremblingly, but deftly, she took the other time-bomb from the pocket of her ulster and dropped it into his pocket. He felt the weight of it.

"Something dragged at my coat," he said thickly.

"It must have been my arms," she murmured. "Come with me. I want to tell you everything—who I am going to see, and why——"

Again she put her arm in his, and they walked along a passage to another narrow stairway. Would Barnes never come, Georgia wondered. Just when she was afraid she would have to give him up she saw him with the second officer. Dropping Gordon's arm, she ran toward him.

"Oh, I am so glad to find you," she cried. "I am frightened. That man—I believe he is a German spy. I saw him put what I think was a bomb down-stairs. He is drunk; he has told me that the ship will be blown to pieces tomorrow. He should be searched!"

Nothing, in these days, was too strange for one warring man to believe of an enemy.

In one moment the French officer was beside Gordon; in another he had wrenched the bomb from his pocket, examining it, wide-eyed. In still another he had called for help, and the bewildered Gordon was under the guard of three men.

Barnes stood aside, his arms folded, gazing fixedly at Georgia. The passage began to fill with men. The officer urged Georgia to take him at once to the place where Gordon had put the bomb.

"We have heard of these new time-bombs," he said excitedly; "we have an expert on board who shall examine this. But meantime there's not a second to be lost——"

Georgia, trembling now, not for her plan, but for the look in Barnes's eyes, preceded the officer along the passage and down the ladder to the place where the bomb had been hidden. The officer explained hastily to the engineer.

"You see how it is now," Georgia said to the engineer. "I have suspected him

for two days, but I had to be sure. He was drunk——"

"But you are wonderful!" said the engineer admiringly.

"I'm tired," Georgia said, with a choke in her voice. "What will you do to Mr. Gordon?"

"Take him to the captain—keep him in irons—put him in prison as a German spy the minute we reach Havre."

GEORGIA, under the escort of the second officer, went gropingly to the upper deck and sought her stateroom. The reaction had come and she was worn out. She slept until noon. Then she got up and sought her steamer-chair.

The first officer joined her and thanked her emotionally for what she had done. Gordon was in irons, he said, of course protesting his innocence. It has been suspected that a German spy was on board, but Gordon was not the man under suspicion. The matter had been kept very quiet; most of the people who had viewed the disturbance believed that Gordon was drunk or ill, or both, and was now in hospital. By dawn they would have reached Havre and then Gordon would be quietly taken to prison to await trial.

Georgia listened impassively. She was waiting for him to go away, and for Barnes to come. At last she saw him, but he only bowed gravely. So that was it; he had made his own judgment.

Georgia sighed and thought fiercely of Roddy. After luncheon, at which Barnes did not appear, she went to her room, packed, and lay down, listening to all the bustle on decks that heralded the hazardous approach to the shores of France. She dined on deck, an empty chair on each side of her. She was not in the least conscience-stricken. Everything she had done, she would have done again. But she was hurt that Barnes was avoiding her. Just when she was preparing to leave the deck, he came and sat beside her.

"Gordon isn't a spy," he said in a miserable voice. "I am sure of it. I am sure you know it, too. Will you explain it to me? I can't bear to doubt that you're right."

"I am going on to Paris," said Georgia, "as you are. I shall be at the Hotel Louvre. If you will come to me there, I think in a week, I'll tell you, truthfully, what all this means. I've no regrets for anything. You can make your own decision then; you may think worse of me then than you already do. I can't help that. I've got to stand or fall by my own character. I care too much about you to deceive you, and I am too loyal to my birthright, such as it is, to pretend to you that I'm the woman I am not."

Barnes said nothing. They sat together in long, poignant silence. Slowly Georgia felt barriers giving away in him, and in her. She knew him to be of a less rigorous fiber than she was herself, and she cared for him all the more. She knew him incapable of a scheme, incapable of anything but white truth. She suspected that he would rather withdraw than compete. He was not a fighter, but a healer. Other men made the hideous wounds, and he gave himself to cure them.

She loved all this in him, and yet she had no regrets for what she had done. They sat together, still without speaking, and she felt as if the darkness and peace and silence were fusing them into a curious, reluctant union. She sighed quietly, wondering if it would be only temporary.

TEN days later, Georgia and Barnes sat in the Luxembourg gardens. There was a radiance of sunshine and bloom. The roses glowed delicately against white marble; water shimmered in the Medici fountain, and green showed cool above the grotto. But there was not the accustomed gay talk and laughter from young men and women, walking the garden paths, which were also their road to love. The only laughter came from some little children, watching Guignol go through his wooden adventures in his booth, and the women with these little children wore black.

Georgia was putting to Barnes what she chose to call her "case," though he winced at the word.

"When I suspected that this man Gordon was selling tents, and was trying to influence me in some way so that I should not apply for the Russian contract," Georgia said, "of course I tested him. I satisfied myself that he was a salesman for the Brody Tent Company, of Kansas City."

Barnes averted his eyes.

"Ah, no," she murmured. "I would not

have worked such harm to a mere competitor. But this Gordon is the one person in the world who stands to me as an embodiment of wickedness. Long, long ago, when I was a little girl—oh, I can hardly bear to speak of it, even now. I had my invalid mother and my beautiful sister Irene. This Gordon was spending his vacation in the town. He—he loved and rode away. I was too young to understand, but I saw that Irene was drooping. There was a dreadful night when Irene sobbed till dawn in mother's arms——"

Her voice faltered.

"We went to a little German village and fabricated a pitiful lie for people at home. A young Englishman who loved Irene; a sudden marriage; his death; Roddy's premature birth—that story went home when Roddy was really three months old. I've hated that lie about his age as much as anything. The one true thing was Irene's death, and then Mother's. Roddy's been worth the shame and pain that produced him—but I'm only human! Why should I have forgiven Gordon?

"You are thinking," she said, when he persisted in silence, "that what I did is not what you have been taught to call 'womanly?'"

Barnes looked at her painfully.

"But your conception of womanhood is medieval," Georgia went on. "I'm in this world to fight, like a man. Why should I give up any power that comes my way because I'm a woman? No one feeds and clothes me, just because I'm a woman."

"It isn't that," he murmured. "But why need you have set yourself up to be this man's Nemesis?"

"Because the harm he does to women is a crime there is no law to punish," Georgia said. "Nothing would have overtaken him—except maybe ill health. I didn't care to leave it to chance, when I could make chance."

"But you didn't punish him for what he had done," argued Barnes.

"Now you are talking like a lawyer," Georgia replied. "I hurt him in the only way a man can be hurt—through his work."

"You've only told me," Barnes said, "that Gordon is tight in prison, waiting to be tried as a German spy. You didn't tell me whether or not you—you sold your tents.

Georgia opened her hand-bag and showed him a bulky, heavily sealed document. Her eyes, as she fingered it caressingly, were the triumphant eyes of a hunter, viewing his well-earned quarry.

"Have I not!" she cried exultingly. "I'll spare you my schemes, my bribes to underlings, my unremitting vigilance, the red tape—the way I waited for my Russians to cable to manufacturers—and the way I shaved their lowest prices, and how I talked, and smiled, and talked again! Yes, I've got my contract."

Barnes's eyes were miserable.

"There's just one thing," he began.

"Ah, I know what you're going to say, my dear," Georgia said. "It's hard for you to see me taking unwomanly, un-Christian revenge; but it's harder for me to have my revenge and make money, too. That part is the one thing I don't like myself. But three-quarters of my big commission goes to Roddy—his father's involuntary payment to him. One-quarter goes to Red-Cross relief work. I go back to America richer only in one thing, and perhaps poorer than I want to be."

The laughter and chatter of the children rose higher. Guignol's career was over till the next day, and they were dispersing to their homes, where their mothers wore black and little vases of flowers stood in front of the photographs of their fathers and elder brothers. Barnes rose abruptly and stood looking down on Georgia.

"This explanation," he said moodily, "we oughtn't to have to have it, you and I."

Georgia looked up at him with a wistful smile.

"I haven't kept anything back," she said. "I am as I am, and I don't want to be different. I'm glad I got sufficiently hard in my competitive business life to have the strength to put through what I did. I'd do it all over again, every bit, just as I did. I regret nothing, would change nothing. I'm glad I can be a tender mother to Roddy; and I'm glad I can go out and fight like the most ruthless man for what I want. You must take me or leave me just as I am."

Barnes murmured something incoherent and started rapidly away from her, up the long path. Georgia's eyes were misty, but she gazed after him steadily. At the top of the path he turned, and came back. She had been right; tents or no tents, fair fight or foul, he could not leave her.

THIRTY OUNCES

by George L. Catton

Author of "Old Dad," "The Years Between," etc.

THE BIG man passed his mittened hand over the ragged pack that rested in the small of his back and cursed savagely.

Before him, behind him, on all sides as far as eye could reach in the gathering darkness the first snow stretched away in silence unbroken, save for the whistling swish of the sharp breeze in the spruce and the soft muttering of the river on the left as it ran along over the stones.

Once again the big man slapped at the bundle, and once again he cursed sarcastically.

" 'Bout thirty ounces!" he sneered. "Thirty ounces! Three pounds of sowbelly, a handful of coffee and thirty ounces; and a whole year gone to blazes!"

The Runt trailed along behind, head down, unconsciously yet mechanically placing each foot into the tracks the big man crunched in the snow. Slung from his shoulder a pack—scarcely larger than his partner's and wrapped like his in a piece of ragged blanket—bounced against his hip with every weary stride, or swung free at his side when he lurched weakly in the trail. He was finding all that he could to keep the pace.

"Thirty ounces!" the big man mouthed the phrase again derisively. "Ice, snow, frozen feet and gnawing guts, a hundred miles to a doctor and arnicky and a million to a drink stronger than snow-water! For what? Thirty ounces! Thirty ounces? That wouldn't grub-stake a ground-hog in harvest!"

He stopped and swung around to face the little man.

"What have you got to say about it?" he rasped.

The Runt raised his head.

"I'm cold." He tried to smile. "Can't get warm walking, any more. How's your foot?"

"Don't know!" The big man raised his right foot and drove it viciously into his left. "I ain't felt it since morning."

He flung his pack down into the snow and the rifle beside it.

"Let's eat," he snarled, "or I'll be eating my mitts!"

They broke down a frost-dwarfed spruce and built a fire in the lee of a drift; then

The Runt unstrapped the pack he had carried and spread it out on the snow. The big man eyed the layout for a moment.

"Three inches of sow-belly and three grains of coffee!" he sneered sarcastically. "Don't it beat the devil? Here we've got one rifle and one cartridge and thirty ounces of gold dust; I'm thirty years old and I've got three frozen toes! Say—I'll bet three dollars and thirty-one cents that it's the thirty-first of the month and a hundred and thirty-one miles to Dawson!"

The Runt tried again to smile, but his weakness turned it into a wistful grin.

"What'll it be today," he husked, "a porterhouse steak and French drip, or just the drip?"

"Both!" the big man snarled it. "And hurry, or I'll be eating the other bundle!"

By the time they had gulped the mouthful each they allowed themselves, the long silent night had dropped down and the great green stars glittered sharply as the snow clouds raced below them.

The big man jammed his pipe between his teeth and felt for his pouch.

"We'll take a couple of hours rest now, Runt," he growled. "Maybe the wind will ease up by then; and if the snow keeps off for a few days——"

He stopped and glanced down on the other man.

"Hey! Wake up!" he barked.

Then he caught his breath and turned his eyes down to the two packs at his feet.

"Three pounds of sow-belly and a handful of coffee!" he breathed. "And it's all of a hundred miles to Dawson!"

A flurry of snow lifted from the edge of the drift and drove into his face. The big man returned his pipe and pouch to his pocket.

"I'll have to travel light and fast," he muttered. "If I take the rifle, I'll have to leave the dust. I might need the rifle and —puh! Thirty ounces! Anyway, I've got to take all the grub to make it at all."

The Runt sighed in his sleep and his head lolled over on the other side. The big man sneered.

"Don't weigh over a hundred and can't stand nothing!" he sneered half audibly, and bending down he slung the pack over his shoulder.

"A —— of a pal to hook up with!" he snarled, and strode out into the snow.

Twenty yards away he stopped and turned around. For a moment he eyed the sleeping man; then he knelt down in the snow and raised the rifle to his shoulder.

The Runt's head straightened up and lolled over on the other side.

The big man got to his feet again.

"No!" he growled. "The frost'll get him when the fire goes out, and besides—I might need that cartridge myself."

And over on the left the shell ice along the bank of the river thickened, reached out into the current.

TWO hours later The Runt raised his head. He missed his partner. His blinking, roving eyes came to rest on the single pack on the other side of the dying fire. The other pack was gone. So was the rifle—and his partner. He didn't need to be told.

"Big Bill's gone?"

The Runt's wind-raw face tried to look surprised. He didn't think that of Bill. Bill was a good fellow. Bill always broke trail. Bill——

He got up and, picking up the pack, sat down again.

"Thirty ounces," he sighed wearily. "Thirty ounces at eighteen twenty-five, that's—that's five hundred dollars' worth of ham and eggs in Chicago." He turned it over on his knee, "And it ain't worth a soda biscuit here," he yawned listlessly.

Five miles away the big man——

The big man crossed the flat, cut through the trail pass in the hills and dropped down into the lower valley. A hundred miles away lay Dawson. If the snow kept off for three or four days and his feet didn't get any worse——

He shoved his pipe between his teeth and opened his pouch. Then he closed the pouch again and returned it to his pocket. He had just one pipeful left.

Ordinarily, given his choice between a smoke and food, he would take the tobacco. Tomorrow or the next day when he really needed a smoke, he'd have it. Now—he felt in the pocket where he always kept his pouch—now he'd scrape.

Very carefully he turned the pocket out into the palm of his hand. Dirt, lint, twigs and tobacco dust—he crammed it all into his pipe and tamped it down. Springing open his match-box he drew out a match, struck it, and held it couched in his hand till it burned white and clear.

Stopping short, he raised the flame to his pipe.

A sharp crack rang out beneath his feet. The big man sank straight down into five feet of shockingly cold water.

He didn't notice that that flat open space in that sheltered hollow was a soft blanket of snow laid gently down on the first half inch of ice, with a little pond beneath.

The big man scrambled out. Without a dry rag on him but his hat, with his teeth grinding into the pipe-stem to control his chattering jaws, he reached solid footing and squeezed out all the water he could. Then with his threadbare clothes freezing stiffly together, he tore down a bunch of alders and felt for his match-box. It had been in his hand when he went through the ice. It was with his rifle at the bottom of the pond.

The big man stood rigidly still for one long minute. Dawson was days away. Already the needle-points of the frost were finding his wet body through the clinging, freezing cotton of his clothes. His legs were numb where the water drained down into his boots. And the one blanket he had was soaked.

He cursed. Through those short yellow teeth that bit into the pipe-stem, he fouled the air with all the curses a vicious life had taught him, till the stinging frost brought him back to the urgencies of the present.

To stand there was to——

The hate of death surged up into his brain and edged his wits. To keep moving, there was a bare possibility. He tore the straps off his blanket, beat the frost starch out against a tree and wrapped it around his stiffening clothes. He turned his face toward Dawson and the days between. With his teeth clamped down on the stem of his pipe he started his feet pumping across those days to Dawson.

Up — down; up — down; up — down. When darkness lifted the big man had made fifteen miles. For seven hours his pumping feet had drove up and down steadily in the snow till now they worked mechanically; he couldn't feel them. When he raised his foot for a step he knew by the dull throb in the calf of his leg that that leg was drawn up, and when he put his foot down he knew that, too, by the jar of its contact with the ground. But the feet themselves had quit stinging. By noon the throb had gone and the jar had increased.

The outside of his blanket was beginning to dry in the wind, though his clothes beneath still sucked clammily at his flesh and sent throbbing shivers through his lungs. The muscles of his neck pulled at his throat with short jerks, and his breath rasped huskily on its inward journey. Then at nightfall it came.

Instantly, without warning, it started just under his left shoulder-blade and shrieked through to his chest—a long, twisting, contracting thrust that made him hesitate in his stride, made him gasp. He held his breath a moment.

One, two, three, four strides he counted, then it came again. One, two, three, four. He shut his teeth down on the pipe-stem, grinding them. Again and again that piercing scream drove through his lung, mounting higher and higher with every thrust and ending in a wail of silent agony. He drew his blanket tighter around him and began breathing through his mouth; there was less pain in a short breath.

Then his right lung caught it.

When darkness lifted, his lungs screamed in unison. His breath sucked into his throat with a low dry whistle. His hunched shoulders jerked up and down with every stride. His half-drawn eyelids nearly hid his set stare. Only his jaw muscles moved, grinding cruelly on the pipe-stem. He didn't notice the next sunrise.

He hadn't eaten for thirty hours; he didn't remember then, food never occurred to him. For two nights and a day, ever since he climbed out of the pond, his dead feet had pumped mechanically up and down, up and down, with the toes pointing always toward the west. Now with his rigidly distorted face pulled down into his blanket, and fighting hour in and out, sun up and night down that hell in his chest, he stared ahead. He was waiting, half-consciously waiting for—for the high roof of the store at Dawson to stick up out of the snow.

THAT day he gave up trying to keep his eyes open. Down hill and up, over rocks and ice and brush his strides had never varied an inch. A hundred times he had fallen, and a hundred and one times he had got upon his feet again; but now his staring, waiting

eyes refused to stare and wait longer. The wind-raw lids sagged heavily, too heavily to control. The hell in his chest had ground itself into a dull, dead ache. The deadness in his feet had come up to his knees. He was going to sleep on those feet.

He knew away back in his mind that if he went to sleep he'd never wake up again. That was too long a sleep. He wanted just a few winks, a cat-nap.

He dropped down in the snow and wrapped the blanket around his knees. He'd sleep just one hour; maybe when he awoke the high roof of the store at Dawson would be sticking up out of the snow.

No, he'd wake up all right. Hadn't he always woke up when he figured on waking? He yawned and the pipe fell out of his mouth, the contents spilling out on the blanket.

The big man sat up. With a spasmodic jerk he straightened up on his haunches and stared at the blanket across his knees. For a full minute he sat tensed, his wide staring eyes focused on the contents of the pipe that had spilled out on the blanket, his right hand rising slowly and creeping forward, the fingers rigid, clenching and unclenching nervously. Then with a snarl that was almost human that hand darted down and clutched one little red head of a match. It had been in the scrapings of his pocket that he had crammed into his pipe before he went through the ice.

The big man stood up. Over on the left a little pile of brush stuck up beside a rock. In a minute he had scooped a hole in the snow and piled the brush into it. Scraping a double handful of bark off a dead stub he pushed it beneath the brush and knelt down beside it. He was ready for the match.

Drawing a dry corner of the blanket across his knee, he carefully, feelingly drew the match head across it. A little fiery point sprang to its tip. A tiny curl of smoke drifted up. A white ring ran around the red head between his fingers. The match flared.

Slowly, carefully, he lowered the flame into the scrapings of bark. The caustic flame ate into his thumb; he didn't know it. The scrapings caught and flared up into the brush. The brush caught and hissed vigorously. The big man laughed.

For a long time the big man sat and piled the brush on to the fire, watching the playing flames; then he felt for his tobacco-pouch and filled his pipe with that last damp pipeful. Lifting a blazing twig he lighted it.

Dawson was—puff, puff. Dawson was about——

He got up on his feet again and turned his face to the west. Dawson was——

His feet started pumping again.

That night the high roof of the store stuck up out of the snow.

The Runt beat the big man in by fifteen hours.

Two hunters found The Runt asleep beside a big roaring fire and brought him down the river on a raft load of meat.

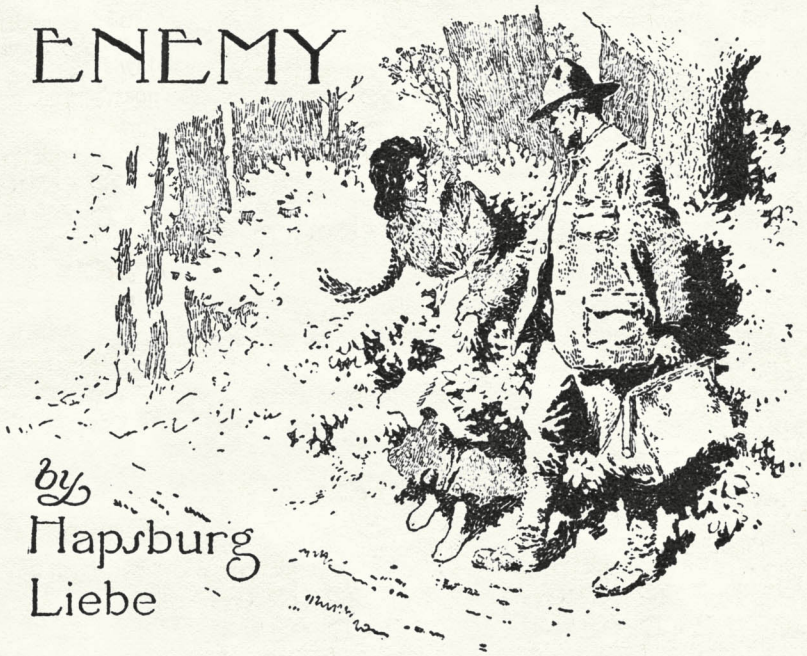
The next day when the doctor leaned over The Runt's bed, The Runt questioned him.

"Yes," the doctor answered, "he'll get around all right, but I had to take his left leg off at the knee. Gangrene. I'm taking up a subscription now to send out for a leg."

The Runt pulled a little ragged bundle from under the blankets and held it out to the doctor.

"Get it with that," he smiled. "I guess there'll be enough. There's about thirty ounces there."

HER BELOVED ENEMY



by Hapsburg Liebe

Author of "The Law in Little Egypt," "The Man-Breaker," etc.

SHE stood in the front doorway of her foster-mother's honeysuckle-covered old log cabin, this little laurel blossom. Her chestnut-brown eyes, shaded from the hot June sun by a sunburned hand, were staring absently toward the logging-camp on the creek in the valley, a hundred yards below.

Her name was Lettie; she was nineteen, slender and roundish, as straight and as supple as a young cove birch, and as much a thing of the mountains as a young cove birch. The great hills had given to her in full measure of their strength, of their dumb pride, of their half-sad and half-riotous beauty, and of their wildness.

Her dress was of blue calico and simply made; she was bareheaded and barefooted; her hair, as brown as her eyes, hung below her waistline in a single three-ply plait. Granny Parkis, who had always lived there in that little house, low on the breast of Sunrise Mountain, had found her, seventeen years before, sitting alone on the doorstep of a cabin that a desperate feud had either directly or indirectly robbed of all its other occupants. The old woman had taken Lettie and brought her up as well as she could.

There was a certain great spirit of unrest in the girl's eyes. Lettie was full-grown, and she had no sweetheart! Not that she couldn't have had a sweetheart. She could have shared the name and the fortunes of any of those strapping young timberjacks who now rollicked and wrestled and boxed around the two great rough-board buildings in the valley—wise old Bill Cole, the big, bearded, booted and corduroyed superintendent, always gave his men a half-holiday on Saturday afternoons.

Absently she watched the camp's bully, Burley Mott, the brown giant, knock his man down and himself count ten over him; then she heard Mott bellow a challenge in the voice of a Goliath for another bout without rules and without gloves—which was not accepted.

Mott looked toward Lettie and waved a

victorious hand; he had known that she was standing up there in plain view of it all. He claimed her as his sweetheart, that big brute of a man; he had told the other timberjacks that he was going to marry her some day.

Lettie tolerated his advances because she admired his savage strength. In most women there is a primitive something that admires savage strength.

Then Lettie, with a faint sigh, turned her eyes down the narrow-gage railroad over which the loaded logging-cars passed on their way to the great sawmill in the lowland, which wound through the valley like the trail of a monster snake, crossing the sparkling creek on log bridges at frequent intervals. Her troubled gaze turned at length up a crooked ribbon of a path that led across Sunset Mountain—the crest of which formed the western horizon of her life, even as the crest of Sunrise Mountain formed the eastern horizon of her life—and on that path her eyes, always accustomed to distances, spied a stranger. He was coming swiftly, with the unmistakable long strides of the native-born hillman, and he was singing as he came.

Lettie had more curiosity than the average woman. She gave one quick glance toward Granny Parkis, who sat dozing in her chair just inside the cabin, and then she ran down through the riotously blooming laurels. She wanted to see the stranger; she hid herself in the underbrush close beside the Sunset Mountain trail and waited. The song he was singing was an old song that the hills had borrowed from the old wild West:

We fit for nine long ow-ers, and 'en the fight give o'er.
The like o'dead and wounded, I never seen afore!
The' was ten as brave a Rangers as ever trod the West,
Laid dead aside their comrades wi' bullets in their breasts!

Lettie peered cautiously out from behind the blooming laurel bush that sheltered her. She could see him plainly now. He was young, not more than twenty-four; he was tall and strong-looking, smooth-faced, black-eyed and black-haired, and more than ordinarily handsome. There was an alertness about him that reminded her of the alertness of a panther. He wore the laced boots, the brown croduroys, and the broad-rimmed hat of a timberjack, and in one hand he carried a cheap canvas traveling-bag.

When he had come up even with her, he stopped his singing suddenly, shot out his right arm, caught her by a wrist and brought her gently but firmly to the path beside him!

"Look!" he laughed boyishly. "Look who's a-waylayin' me!"

She liked him for his masterfulness; but she struggled, and he freed her.

"What camp is that up thar in the valley, little gyurl?" he asked.

"It's the Old King Cole camp o' the Bell-Henry Loggin' Comp'ny," answered Lettie. "Bill Cole, the super, he's knowed all over the world, I reckon, as 'Old King Cole,' and the camp it was named atter him. He's all right. But ef you're anyways afeard to fight, I'd edvise ye not to go on to that camp."

"Afeared to fight! Me?" The young hillman laughed again. "Why, little gyurl, fight is my very fust name! I've been in loggin'-camps afore, ye see. Who's the bully?"

"Burley Mott. Anybody 'at comes here has to fight Burley Mott. It's the 'nitiation, he says."

"Burley Mott; eh?" with a slow narrowing of his black eyes. "I know him. He's from my home country. Old inemy o' mine. Big as a skinned hippo-potaymus and about thutty-five year old, with sunburnt brown hair and beard, eh?"

"That's shore him," smiled Lettie. Then the stranger asked her:

"Won't you show me the way up to the camp?"

"Jest go ahead," she told him, "foller yore nose and the railroad, and you cain't miss it!"

"All right," agreeably. "Afore I go, I want to ax what might be yore name, little gyurl?"

"It *might* be 'most anything," said the girl mischievously; she had not quite forgiven him for finding her hidden beside the trail. "It might be Sadie, Sallie, Sue, Mary, Mollie, or Minnie—or it might be Pete, Henry, Bill, Charley, or Sam—or Towser, Fido, or Toodles. But it ain't!"

Then she turned her nose up at him and disappeared in the laurels.

"Humph!" said the young mountaineer. "Humph! Purty as a speckled pup with a ring around its neck—and a heap sassier'n

the devil! Be durned," he went on, as he started for the camp, "ef I couldn't love her to death!"

And Lettie heard him say it.

THE timberjacks stopped their rough play when the newcomer entered the grounds about the commissary and the boarding-house. Burley Mott recognized his enemy of other days, and he scowled with murder in his pale blue eyes. No man ever hated another man more than the bully hated young Tom Dunellen, from the Pigeon River country. Dunellen walked as straight to Bill Cole's office in the rear end of the commissary building as if he had already been there a hundred times; he stopped and laughed aloud at the chalk-writing on the half-closed door—it had been put there during muddy weather:

CLEAN YOUR DAM FEET PLEASE

Bill Cole had known that Lettie and her foster-mother, the only women in the camp's vicinity, couldn't read when he put it there. Tom Dunellen rapped on the door-facing, and Bill Cole's voice bellowed—

"Come right on in!" heartily.

Tom opened the door a little wider and stepped into the office. The timberjacks, all but Mott, crowded around the door, and behind them was Lettie.

"I'm atter a job," Lettie heard the stranger say.

"You've done got it, son," Bill Cole replied gruffly. "If you ain't afraid to handle dynamite, and if you know about batteries to bust it with. I've got to blast out a roadbed to get at the Gentry's Hell Timber."

"Dynamite is my fust name," smiled Dunellen, "and I know all about bustin' it with batteries. Not a braggin', though. Well, I'm ongodly hongry, and I'll hunt grub, ef ye don't mind." He was one of the few hillmen who hang on to their drawling dialect in spite of long association with lowlanders.

The crowd opened for him as he stepped out of the office, and his quick black eyes caught a glimpse of Lettie trying to hide from him.

"Hello thar, Toodles!" he cried teasingly. It angered Burley Mott.

"Smarty!" clipped the girl.

Then Burley Mott stepped before Tom Dunellen. Mott's bearded lips worked; he wanted to say something and he feared to say it. He knew that Dunellen was the finest and the fairest barehanded logging-camp fighter in the Unakas. But no other person there knew it.

Dunellen put his cheap canvas traveling-bag down and pushed the front of his black hat's broad rim up.

"I onderstand," he said in low and even tones, "'at you're the bad man here. With that in mind, I want to say that I have never started none o' my quar'ls and have never failed to stop 'em all."

Burley Mott the brown giant laughed a great laugh. His place as bully of the Old King Cole camp was secure only as long as he avoided a fight with Tom Dunellen. Therefore he must avoid a fight with Tom Dunellen.

"Oh, go on to grub, boy!" he said easily. "You're hungry and tired, and I ain't goin' to force a fight on you."

Dunellen laughed, took up his luggage and went toward the boarding-house. Lettie tugged at Mott's corduroy coat-sleeve.

"Who is he?" she asked.

Mott told her. He continued:

"And Tom is the last livin' man o' the Pigeon River Dunellens; all the others was killed fightin' feuds with their boots on," which was true. "When you fight a Pigeon River Dunellen, you've got to kill him in the end; and that's why I didn't care to fight this one," which was false. Mott went on glibly: "I didn't want to kill him. I could do it, but I didn't want to."

Lettie smiled somehow queerly.

"You're afeard of him!" she declared.

Mott saw red and closed his teeth with a snap.

WHEN the noontime meal was over on the next day, which was Sunday, a tall, strong young fellow in new blue serge walked proudly out of the boarding-house in the valley and went straight toward the little old honeysuckle-covered cabin on the breast of Sunrise Mountain. A good-natured smile was on his face, and in his movements there was the lithe grace of a buck deer and the alertness of a panther.

He stopped at the weather-beaten paling fence that ran around the old log house, plucked a blooming zinnia and drew its stem

through the buttonhole of his left coat lapel, and shouted, after the fashion of hill folk—

"Hello in thar!"

Lettie gave a quick glance toward Granny Parkis, who sat dozing in her chair before the stone hearth, and went to the front door. She had seen Tom Dunellen coming, and she had hurriedly put on a freshly laundered dress of blue-figured percale; also she had tied the end of her long plait of chestnut-brown hair with a faded blue ribbon.

She stood there blushing and smiling, and one of her bare little big-toes burrowed bashfully into a knothole in the worn door-step. Shoes and stockings she had none; the only money she and Granny Parkis had was that which they earned by mending the clothing of the timberjacks, which wasn't much, although the timberjacks sometimes tore their clothing intentionally. Anyway, what was the need of shoes and stockings in the Summer-time?

"I jest thought I'd come up and see ye," Tom said amiably. His masterfulness admitted of no diffidence.

"All right," replied Lettie, her eyes twinkling. "Look at me all ye want to!"

"I don't mean that," smiled Dunellen. "S'posen we walk down to the creek and look for flowers and sech things, eh?"

"You'd call me 'Toodles,'" mischievously.

"Be durned ef I do!"

Lettie went with him down through the sea of white and waxen laurel bloom, and they sat down not very close together on a flat stone beside the creek, under a spreading beech, that aristocrat of trees. About them grew in profusion tiny pure blue day-flowers and tinier Job's-tears, red-spurred wild columbine and monk's-hood; the air was as sweet and as fragrant as the air of an Eden.

For a long time they said nothing, but they looked at each other frequently. It was as natural for them to fall in love with each other as it was for the water in Nobody's Creek to flow.

"I wonder," said Tom finally, "ef you could ever come to like me well enough to marry me?"

"Maybe," said Lettie, trying hard to conceal the fact that she was pleased. "Gi' me time. I heerd you was awful bad to fight, Tom. I heerd that all o' yore people was dead on account o' their bein' so bad to fight. Tell me about it."

"The wasn't but a few famblies of us," muttered Dunellen. "They was mostly all men-folks; and all o' the men-folks but me has been killed in feuds. All the old women is done dead, and the young women is all married off and gone—I don't know whar. I've l'arned a lesson, Lettie, by the others. I never fit a fight with anything but my bare hands, and I never expect to. And I've never started a quar'l, though maybe I've brought a good many to a end.

"I'm not a bad man. But people thinks I am, jest acause my name is Dunellen and acause I'm from the Pigeon River country. Lettie, I've suffered a good deal about that. It made it hard for me to be a clean, straight man. But I *am* a clean, straight man. I'm a-givin' it to ye right, Lettie."

The telling of his unfortunate people and of his ill-starred life had stirred the old, old and bitter sadness in him; great was the burden that Tom Dunellen had carried for years. He saw sympathy in the girl's pretty face and it touched him deeply; for few had ever sympathized with him. He was merely one of those "Pigeon River Dunellens."

"I'm shore sorry for ye, Tom," Lettie murmured barely above the rippling of little Nobody's Creek.

He bent toward her and took one of her sunburned hands.

"I believe it," he said almost brokenly. "And God knows I'm much obliged. I never had a reel friend in my life, afore. I've been mighty lonesome without people, and without friends, and without anybody to like me."

"I'm lonesome too," Lettie told him. "My folks was all killed in feuds too. Jest like you're the last, I'm the last. I'm glad I met you, acause I didn't know the' was anybody else but me that didn't have no folks."

She looked at him with swimming eyes. Then it happened. Neither ever knew how it came about; they knew only that it did come about. They suddenly found their arms around each other, with everything else on earth forgotten.

"We'll marry, won't we?" whispered Tom. "And I'll allus love you, and you'll allus love me."

Less than three rods behind them, well hidden among the laurels, crouched Burley Mott, listening. His pale blue eyes shone with fury, and his teeth were clenched; in

one of his great brown hands he held a bright, short-barreled revolver.

"Yes," said Lettie, with her face against Dunellen's shoulder. She continued: "I'm a-thinkin', Tom, about somethin' Granny Parkis told me no more'n a month ago. It was this here:

" 'Now that you're old enough to marry, be mighty keerful who it is ye fall in love with, Letitia,' she says to me—she allus did say that word 'Letitia' so primpy-like! 'Acause,' she says to me, 'it'll be a long-time thing with you. The' was one good p'int about yore people, anyhow,' she says: 'they loved, as well as they hated, to the grave and beyan'; and I never knowed none of 'em to love but one time.'

"And so," the girl went on, "I reckon the one time has come for me. I feel like it. I'll love you to the grave and beyan'."

Tom kissed her reverently on the forehead. She went to her feet.

"I'll go and tell Granny Parkis about it," she said.

"All right," smiled Tom; and he, too, rose.

Lettie hastened toward the honeysuckle-covered old cabin on the breast of Sunrise Mountain. Tom turned toward the boarding-house, and as he went he sang gaily, joyously, out of the fulness of his heart, the song the hills had borrowed from the old wild West:

Come all you jolly cowboys, wharever you may be,
And listen to some troubles that happened unto me——

Burley Mott followed him stealthily, and twice he had an aim at his back. Mott did not fire because he knew that his revolver was not a dependable weapon; he feared that he might miss, and he knew what it would mean if he fired at Tom Dunellen and missed.

LETTIE found Granny Parkis still dozing in her chair before the hearth. She shook her foster-mother gently, and the old creature rubbed her eyes and sat up almost straight.

"La, la!" she cackled, her parchment-like face breaking into a very good smile. "I'm mighty glad ye woke me up, Letitia! I was a-settin' here a-dreamin' about black cats, and 'at shore is a bad dream!"

Blushingly, somewhat falteringly, Lettie told the old woman of the wonderful thing that had come to pass. Granny Parkis grew pale as she listened, but she did not interrupt. When the girl had finished, Granny Parkis went to her feet without the aid of her staff; her wrinkled face was working almost spasmodically.

"The good Lord ha' marcy!" she cried shrilly and tremulously. "He's one o' them same Dunellens that killed out all o' the Batesfords but you! It was on Pigeon River, seventeen year ago, that I found you and brung you here. Had ye forgot, child, had ye forgot? But no," with a sorrowful shake of her white head. "But no. You hain't heerd the name o' Dunellen and Pigeon River mentioned sence ye was a little bitsy baby. A course you cain't marry no Dunellen, Letitia. It's not to be thought on, child. And yit—ef you're like all o' the rest o' the Batesfords, you'll allus love him and never nobody else! Hain't it a black shame, Letitia? Hain't it a onholy, black shame?"

Lettie had gone as white as chalk. Even her lips were pale.

She walked slowly to the worn front doorstep and crumpled there like a woodland plant in a furnace-blast, weak of limb and broken-hearted. Without in the least realizing what she was doing, she plucked marigold after marigold and tore them slowly to pieces. This simple child of the hills, unaccustomed always before to any great emotion, had known the heights and the depths of heaven and hell in less than an hour.

Many minutes went by, and still she sat there with her brown head bent low, dry-eyed, plucking marigolds to pieces. Then the soft voice of Tom Dunellen, which she loved with a great love, and which she hated with a great hate, fell upon her ears.

"They tell me down at the camp 'at the grannywoman is so ongodly proud 'at she won't let nobody give her nothin', and 'at she makes her livin' by doin' the camp's mendin'," Tom was saying; "so I thought I'd bring her up a little work."

He threw a bundle of clothing lightly to the cabin floor. Lettie did not look up; therefore he did not see the signs of grief that were on her face. Granny Parkis limped to the clothing and picked it up gratefully. In the holy name of charity, it had been torn almost to shreds.

"La, son," she creaked as she examined it, "and la, la! And tell me how on earth

ye come by gittin' yore clo'es all tore up like this here?"

She did not know, of course, that she was addressing the last of the Pigeon River Dunellens.

"Onforchunately," and the young hillman's eyes twinkled merrily, "I was called upon suddently to fight a bunch o' wildcats in a buckthorn tree, and I plumb forgot to take off my clo'es."

Granny Parkis chuckled. It was then that Lettie rose and faced her foster-mother.

"That's him," she said in a bleak voice.

The old woman dropped the bundle of clothing.

"Who? The Dunellen?"

"Yes. The Dunellen," said Lettie.

Granny Parkis pointed one palsied forfinger at the torn garments.

"You take them rags away from here!" she ordered grimly. "You low-down Dunellen! Atter the way yore people went and killed out this here pore little gyurl's people, you've got the pore narve to come here and wheedle her into lovin' ye—ye sarpent o' the devil!"

Tom's black eyes flashed quickly to Lettie. She was standing very straight, and her head was very high.

"Ef I was a man," she told him in a strange-sounding voice, "I might kill you. I don't never want to see you no more."

And yet she loved him, and she would love him to the grave and beyond. She went on, solely for the purpose of hurting him:

"I think I'd better marry Burley Mott. He's wanted me to for so long. I'm shore he'd be good to me. When ye go back to the boardin'-house, Mr. Dunellen, ef ye please, I wisht ye'd tell Mr. Mott I want to see him at oncet."

"Marry Burley Mott!" cried Tom, horrified. He thought she was in earnest. "I'm no hand to talk about a man to his back, but —ef you was only a friend o' mine, I'd say, 'Don't.' Ef you was somebody I didn't know, I'd say, 'Don't.' Even ef yo was the wust kind of a' inemy o' mine, I'd say, 'Don't.' As it is, I'd ruther kill Burley Mott 'an to see you marry him. Acause I know Burley Mott. I know his past. I know his life. It's all been black. Pot black would look like snow on Burley Mott's life."

"Lies!" and Lettie smiled queerly.

Tom Dunellen took up the bundle he had brought and started for the camp below. Lettie watched him with burning eyes. She saw him throw the torn clothing into a thicket of laurel. She saw him go to the front door of the boarding-house, and she heard him call out—

"Burley!" And again, "Burley!"

Bill Cole came to the door and shook his head. Tom Dunellen sat down in the doorway, and for a long time he sat very still.

Then Lettie saw Burley Mott walk out of the woods to the left of the boarding-house, and she saw Tom Dunellen rise and go toward him.

Lettie ran from the cabin down through the sea of laurel bloom, without being seen by either of them; she was close enough to hear every word they said when they met. Dunellen's face was pale. Mott's face was red and ashen by turns.

"Burley," began Tom, "you've got to leave here for good and all, and you've got to do it right now."

All the real courage the brown giant possessed flared up quickly.

"How so?" he growled.

"Ef for no other reason, jest acause I said so," and Tom Dunellen threw off his coat and his hat, and tightened his belt.

Lettie caught her breath. Unless Mott gave in, it meant a great fight.

Mott had no intention of giving in. He too threw aside his coat and his hat, and he too tightened his belt. It was desperation that spoke when he said:

"We'll see about it. I'll put my shoe-calks in your face, Tom, and turn my heel on it. I'll put my trademark on you."

Again Lettie caught her breath.

IN THESE logging-camps they'll tell you that a strong first blow well followed up is not merely a good beginning but almost the whole battle; and Tom Dunellen, who had always had to fight for his own self-preservation, who had been kicked and cuffed even as a boy, had long known that fact. He sprang toward Mott and led for the jaw; but Mott ducked tardily, and he struck the giant on the forehead, shattering a bone in his best hand.

Dazed for the moment, Mott reeled backward. Dunellen followed and struck the bully low on the breast, expelling the air from his lungs with a hoarse "Hogh!" Mott rallied, and they clenched and fell a hard dogfall.

From the boarding-house came a joyous

cry, "Fight!" Bill Cole and a score of his timberjacks, hatless and coatless, rushed toward the two belligerents, and Lettie joined them without being noticed.

The combatants rose and began to hammer away at each other with savage force. The younger man struck quite as often with his injured hand as he struck with the other. Now Mott knocked Dunellen down; now Dunellen knocked the bully down. There were no sounds save those of their rapid breathing and their crashing blows, so great was the interest in the fight. Mott was the stronger; but the man with the grace of a buck deer and the alertness of a panther was by far the quicker, and soon the tide began to turn in his favor.

Lettie clutched at her dress below her throat when the bully made a last great attempt to rally. Her love for the Pigeon River Dunellen was fast outgrowing her hatred for him. Then they clenched again, bloody-faced, panting hoarsely, and fell with Mott's great back to the ground. Suddenly Lettie sprang toward them, crying out shrilly—

"He's got a knife!"

The other watchers saw it; it gleamed for half a second in the golden light of the lowering Sabbath sun, and it was in Burley Mott's right hand. Then Dunellen, going all at once as white as death, caught Mott's right hand in both his own and drove the blade into Mott's left breast. It happened so quickly that the watching timberjacks could not prevent it. Both men straightened on the ground and lay still.

Bill Cole made a hasty examination of the two silent figures. The bigger man was beyond human aid. Dunellen was still alive, but he had a deep gash in his left side where Mott's knife had gone in; the bare end of a shattered bone showed through the skin of the back of his right hand. They carried him to the bed in Bill Cole's room, in the lower story of the boarding-house, and a small, geared logging locomotive was sent thundering to the lowland for a doctor.

Night came, and a slender figure in an old black shawl crept up to one of the windows of the superintendent's room. By this time she had realized clearly why Tom Dunellen was lying at the door of death —a beggar, perhaps, at the door of death. He had done it for her, to save her.

She blamed herself heavily, as she stood there and looked at the white and motionless face and the battered hand that lay still on the coverlets. All he had told her of his persecuted life now came back to her.

In the yellow light of the little oil lamp, the faces of Bill Cole and the timbermen looked very haggard and drawn. Bill Cole stood close beside the bed, with his watch in his hand. He was counting the jerky beats of Dunellen's heart. When he faced his men, he shook his head sadly.

Hours went by, and still Lettie Batesford stood there in the darkness beside the window. Then she saw Tom's black eyes open and she saw them turn toward the superintendent. Bill Cole bent over, his beard brushing Tom's shoulder.

"Did I kill Mott?" Dunellen said weakly.

"In defense of yourself, son," quickly.

"It was the only time I ever fit—with anything but my bare hands," Lettie heard Tom mutter. "I hate that I had to do it. But the little gyurl was a-goin' to marry him. I done it to save her—I know Burley Mott. He's all—all black."

And after a long pause:

"I didn't do it for myself. She hates me. I'm a Dunellen, y'know. Ef I go out, tell her the only thing—I ever keered much about was her. Tell her the last thing—I thought about was her. And ef God 'lmighty keers anything about a pore —— timberjack, I hope—ef I *do* wake up in another place—the fust thing I see will be her——"

He closed his eyes in the manner of one who is very weary. Bill Cole stood up straight and turned to his loggers.

"What a —— of a man!" he said huskily. "Oh, what a —— of a man! Some of you go out and listen for that cussed snail of an engine."

Lettie had gone to her knees under the window-ledge, and now she was sobbing. She hated Tom Dunellen no more. If he lived, he could have her for his dog—if he wanted her for his dog. Bill Cole heard the choking sounds she made, and he went to the window and leaned out. One of his big hands went down and caught her gently by the shoulder.

"Is this you, Lettie?"

Lettie rose and felt her way, like one blind, around to the door. When she entered, the men divided and let her through. She knelt beside the bed and leaned forward.

"Tom!" she murmured chokingly.

It was a magic voice, at least to Tom

Dunellen. He looked toward her. She turned her eyes away, ashamed, and saw only that poor hand with the end of a shattered bone showing through the skin.

"Toodles!" he said queerly.

"Tom, ef you will not die——"

"What?" he whispered.

"I'll be yore dawg!"

The Pigeon River Dunellen smiled.

"Not die," he gasped, and then went on, "that's my fust name!"

The sputtering of a little locomotive fell upon their ears, and a few minutes later the doctor entered.

NINE days went by. Tom Dunellen was sitting up, with pillows to his back, in Old King Cole's bed. His recovery was certain now. Granny Parkis, reconciled, sat dozing in her chair beside an open window. Lettie sat beside Tom. Suddenly Bill Cole entered the room, and in his hands he carried a battery and some two hundred feet of insulated wire.

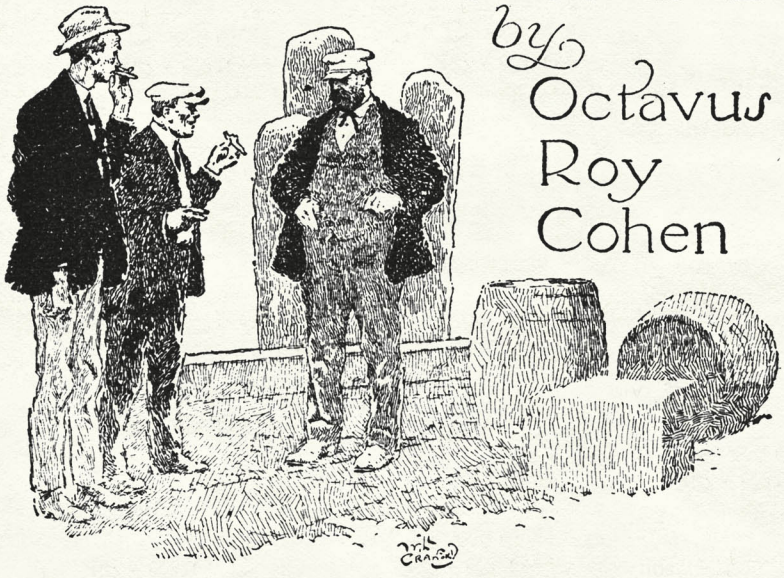
"Look at this, Tom!" he smiled. "Here's the battery we missed the Monday after you were hurt; I found it hidden in the laurels behind the dynamite house, and the wires ran into the dynamite—Burley Mott meant to blow you up! And he could have pulled it off very easily, too; it would ha' looked like an accident. When you made him kill himself, you saved yourself twice! You're entirely in the clear so far as both the law and your conscience are concerned. Anything I can do for you now, Thomas?"

"Ef it comes in handy, you might send for a preacher and a marriage license," said the Pigeon River Dunellen, "and much obliged."

"You might send by the next log-train," added Lettie.

TO ESCAPE

by Octavus Roy Cohen



Author of "The Fight," "The In-Curve" etc.

LANKY BILL could well have passed muster as an undertaker; Boston Tommy as a kid showvender of red lemonade. The former was sad to the point of extinction, deep-eyed, lantern-jawed, skinny-framed and big-footed. The latter was short, squat, square-jawed, genial and quick-witted—the very antithesis of his partner.

Together they made as clever a team of crooks as operated south of the Mason and Dixon line. And at the present moment

they felt a yearning to be very much farther south of that historic line.

At that, they were not close to it. They were transient residents of the city which first called the Mason and Dixon line into play. They had sought sanctuary in the sleepy confines of Charleston, South Carolina, after getting away with the sizeable bunch of lucre formerly stored in the vaults of the St. Croix bank.

St. Croix was a little town and it was less than sixty miles from Charleston as the crow flies. Lanky Bill and Boston Tommy had reached it on the warm trail of the money which now reposed in their pockets. As to the robbery itself, that had been mere child's play to men who had heretofore reaped a nourishing harvest by means of iniquity in cities the size of Baltimore and Savannah. Their mistake had been in coming to Charleston, for in the sedate columns of the reverent *News and Courier* they had read many times and oft of their little haul and of the fact that "the local police entertain suspicions that the robbers have come to Charleston, and all outbound trains and steamers are being watched."

It was sad news indeed; news to inspire melancholia in even so jovial an individual as Boston Tommy. For Lanky Bill and Boston Tommy desired nothing in this world quite so much as a sight of New York where they might seek real safety in their East-Side haunts.

They took warning from the *News and Courier* and did not attempt departure by any of the traveled routes. There were only two courses open, at that: the Union Depot on Columbus Street, where all roads enter, and the Clyde Line at the foot of Queen Street. Of course they entertained the idea of walking to Bennett's or Summerville or even to Otranto, and there boarding a freight-train by means of the rods, but at that time the railroads had developed a sudden intense antipathy to stealers of rides and there was danger that they would be caught in this petty thievery, returned to Charleston and there held just long enough for the money which was the property of the Bank of St. Croix to be discovered on their persons. After which they realized that their costumes would be the fashionable black-and-white-stripe effect so popular with the innocent and hateful to the guilty. They had no great fondness for the South Carolina penitentiary.

But get away they must. Charleston is a small town, despite the fifty-eight thousand persons accorded it by the 1910 census, and a town where strangers must give their histories—even though those strangers be paying guests at one of the East Bay sailorman lodging-houses. And to make matters somewhat worse Boston Tommy had met temptation and succumbed to it. In brief, he had played the local pool champion a series of games at five dollars a game before a large and enthusiastic audience, and defeated him signally. Therefore, attention had been attracted to him.

When taken to task by Lanky Bill for the lapse, Tommy mournfully pleaded guilty and promised to do better in the future; and their fear was not decreased a whit by the knowledge that one of the spectators at the game had been a plain-clothes man.

THE month was May and the day was clear and hot and calm. Leaving the odoriferous restaurant in which they had breakfasted, they turned their steps southward along East Bay, past the Terry Fish Company's wharves where the last of the mosquito fleet was putting out for the day's fishing, and thence to the news-stand adjoining the Consolidated's ferry wharf. There Lanky Bill purchased, with pleasing *sang-froid* a copy of the *News and Courier*.

With this acquisition, the comrades in evil retraced their steps to East Bay, walked northward a hundred yards and then strolled idly out on the pier which forms the north side of the Custom House wharf.

They seated themselves on the end of this wharf, swung their legs over the placid water of the river and lifted their eyes to midstream. Without a meeting of eyes, both sighed, and the right hand of each caressed the bulge which was formed by a package of money sewed on the shirt so it rested between that and a more personal garment. Lanky Bill broke the silence wheezily.

"There's th' *Nesporeol*"

He gesticulated only with his eyebrows but Boston Tommy knew that he referred to the trim four-masted schooner which lay in midstream, half-way between their vantage-point and Castle Pinckney.

"The blue peter is flying," commented Tommy dully.

"Yep." Lanky Bill referred to the mari-

time page of the venerable paper which he held. "She clears today for Rio with naval stores."

And again they sighed in chorus. Boston Tommy broke the oppressive silence.

"They tell me Rio's a powerful swell place to spend a vacation. Red Roberts was there for a year after he croaked that swell duck on Riverside."

"Yeh!" sarcastically. "And then he was fool enough to come back with a beard an' his hair dyed black. Now he's in Sing Sing."

"He was foolish. If I ever hit Rio, it's me for bein' a Don for the rest of my life. This grubstake we got at St. Croix is——"

"*S-s-sh!* F'r the love of Mike, man, shut up! This burg is so gossipy that the wharf rats are li'ble to tell on us. There ain't nothin' ever happens here an' everybody in town is on the lookout for us after what this —— paper printed about our bein' here. What right they got to think we're in Charleston, anyway? What right——"

"We're here, ain't we?"

"Sure, but we hadn't ought to be."

"Right you are. I wish we weren't. Oh, lud—if we could only get berths on the *Nesporeo!*"

"If! *If!* Man, if we was in New York we wouldn't give a hoot about anything. But we ain't! This here paper says she'll sail tomorrow with the early morning outgoing tide. If we could——"

"If!" grinned Tommy and Bill subsided abruptly.

They sat in silent reverie. The asthmatic *Lawrence* snorted out of her slip and panted laboriously across the harbor to the Mt. Pleasant shore, where her passengers disembarked for Sullivan's Island and the Isle of Palms. Then she puffed back again with much groaning of her overtaxed machinery.

The *Lenape*, pride of the Clyde Line fleet, steamed majestically in through the jetties for a stop-over before continuing to Jacksonville; the *Apache*, another ship of the same fleet, departed with much blowing of whistles for New York. The *Carib*, a Clyde freighter, left for Boston. Behind them, the East Bay spur of the railroad showed them a glimpse of freight-cars consigned from Pearlstine's inland. Carriers, carriers everywhere and never a one to ride.

If only they might ship on the *Nesporeo!* But, as Bill had stated, under what excuse might they ship? Neither knew the quarter-deck from the forecastle, and certainly they couldn't volunteer as cabin-boys.

A man, garbed in a suit of dark serge, with shirt and collar of white and cap which had once been the same color, descended the ladder of the midstream *Nesporeo* and entered a dinghy wherein were two dilapidated oarsmen. He sped shoreward. Boston Tommy clutched the arm of his companion in art and a hint of his old optimistic grin appeared for the briefest fraction of a second.

"Ten to one it's Cap'n Dangree, comin' ashore for his clearance papers."

"No bet. Where do we get off?"

"It's our last chance. With our roll—if we could just scrape an acquaintance with him, an' y'd quit lookin' like a wake——"

"You let me make that guy's acquaintance an' I'll look happy as a starvin' burlesque queen in a swell hash-house with a millionaire in tow. It'd be too good to be true."

The dinghy purled shoreward, stopped at the stairway leading from water level to the top of the Custom House wharf, and the white-capped man crossed the street and ascended the interminable flight of stairs leading to the Custom House. The dinghy shot back toward the *Nesporeo*. The two malefactors rose.

"This is our chance," suggested Tommy firmly. "He evidently ain't goin' right back to the ship, an' if we could latch on to him an' show him a few sights in this hell-bendin' burg an' get him about seven sheets in the wind——"

Which is said with all due apologies to ultra-respectable Charleston. But facts are facts. Up to a year or so ago there was much fun of a certain sort obtainable in the City by the Sea. Market Street, leading from the Custom House to Archdale, was studded with gambling-houses, blind tigers and other types of resort not quite as savory. I am informed that conditions have changed in the past year. Be that as it may, it existed as described up to a couple of years ago and was so at the time this story occurred.

At any rate, that they might not lose track of their prey they stationed themselves on the Market Street side of the Custom House where they commanded a view of both front and rear entrances.

At length their man appeared, on the East Bay side. He strolled idly down the

steps as if he had not a thing to do and was eager to do it. Boston Tommy grabbed the arm of his accomplice, shoved a cigar into his mouth, clinched its twin sister between his own teeth and hustled toward the idle captain. He paused immediately before him and grinned his most bewitching grin.

"Say, cap'n, you got a match?"

"Sure!" The white-capped man's voice boomed genially and he fished into his pocket. Then a blank expression came over his face and he drew forth a cigar, but no match. "No, dog-gone it, I haven't. Think I'll go over and get some."

Quite as a matter of course the lanky one and the squat one accompanied him. Matches were had and cigars lighted. Boston Tommy yawned wearily.

"Gee, ain't it rotten to be a stranger in a town like this?"

"It is," agreed the other feelingly.

"Me 'n' my pal here drifted in three days ago, an' have been waiting on an important letter. It come this morning an' we're leaving tomorrow for New York."

"Is that so!" politely, "I hope you have a good trip."

"You're Captain Dangree of the *Nesporeo* ain't you?" led the lanky one ingenuously.

"How'd you know?"

Lanky Bill smiled knowingly.

"Me 'n' my partner here is lovers of sailin'-ships. We're always cussing because steamships has took all the romance outa the sea. We just love sailin'-ships. We're crazy to take a trip in one some time—passengers, y'know."

He paused with a grimace as Boston Tommy's foot collided forcibly with his meatless shin.

"Throttle down!" hissed Tommy. "Y've done exceeded the speed limit."

To the captain he said.

"Yeh! It must be grand to ride the waves in a sailin'-ship—where there ain't no throbbin' of engines. You ain't goin' to New York from here, are you?"

"No. Rio de Janeiro."

Tommy's face fell.

"Pshaw! If you'd have been headed for New York, me 'n' my partner'd paid passage an' traveled with you."

The captain smiled.

"That ain't done, boys. The comp'ny don't let us carry passengers. It puts us under different government regulations, an' makes it harder on the company."

"But they do do it," insisted Tommy. "A friend of mine named Roberts—" He paused very suddenly indeed and gave vent to a fit of coughing. "He—er—shipped as a passenger."

"Probably. But the usual way is for a passenger to sign up as a member of the ship's crew. Just a formality, you know."

"I see." Tommy raised an expressive hand to his throat. "Gee whiz! this weather makes a guy thirsty, don't it, now?"

"Believe me, Xantippe—she do," assented Lanky Bill earnestly.

"Now that you mention it," joined the captain.

"Say," Bill grew confidential and looped his arm through that of the captain. "There's a joint up the street here where they mix drinks to the queen's taste. How about joinin' us? We're all strangers in a strange land—yo, ho! That's real nautical, ain't it?"

"Very," dryly. "Sure, I'll join you chaps. Haven't a thing to do until tomorrow, an' then I'll be at sea for three weeks."

The eyes of the conspirators met. Three weeks at sea! In three weeks the robbery would have been forgotten by all save a few inquisitive and tenacious detectives. And even the police didn't know who had committed the crime. Thus far in their careers Lanky Bill and Boston Tommy had managed to keep their faces out of any rogues' gallery.

THEY strolled up Market Street past Meeting, and turned into a place which combined the delights of bar, roulette, faro and craps. Bill treated first and then Tommy and then the captain.

After an hour or so Bill and Tommy treated twice each to the captain's once. Then they secured a card-table and sat down to a friendly game of twenty-five-cent-limit draw. It hurt both Bill and Tommy to break pairs in order to avoid filling to good hands, but they did so nobly and succeeded in transferring some forty dollars from their pockets to those of the captain during a bibulous afternoon. By nine o'clock that night the captain was in an extremely mellow frame of mind. Tommy and Bill swore the captain was a great fellow, and the captain agreed.

Then he came back with a compliment in kind and wished that he might have them

aboard with him during his three weeks at sea—so that he could play poker with them. His expressed wish was so close to their desires that they gasped and blanched. Was the golden egg to be dropped into their very hands at this eleventh hour? They had imbibed freely but not so freely that they had lost sight of the mission in hand.

The captain insisted on bucking the roulette-wheel and parted with fifteen of his forty-dollar winnings before his new-found friends steered him back to a poker-table. There they succeeded in losing sixty dollars very quickly. So quickly in fact that Boston Tommy excused himself for a minute and returned with five crisp new twenty-dollar bills, two of which he loaned to Lanky Bill. The captain drained his steenth cocktail, ordered straight whisky and shuffled.

They learned that the captain was going aboard at two A. M. The dinghy was to meet him at the Custom House wharf. And they must walk there with him; nothing else would do. They were princes—emperors—czars! The captain ran out of adjectives and stooped to endearing profanity.

At one A. M. they left the resort, and en route to the wharf had three drinks each from a bottle of the best bought by Bill. That and the warm night air finished the work for the captain. He became demonstrative. Then it was that Bill reverted to a topic of his love for sailing-ships.

The captain fell for the bait like a trout after a bluebottle fly. Nothing would do but that they go with him to Rio. They were the besht fell'rs he ever—*hic*—met. He cou'n't—*hic*—loshe shush goo' fr'en's—*hic*.

He walked between them and they tearfully accepted his invitation. They stopped in a cigar store and purchased a box of the finest perfectos which they pressed upon him. They couldn't think of never seeing him again. They promised him a fabulous sum for their passage-money. They were even considering remaining in Rio a while. They were men of wealth, they averred, and eager for travel; how eager they did not say.

The captain suggested that they lift their voices in song. Billy eyed a patrolman askance and quieted the vocal outburst. And finally they reached the Custom House wharf.

The night was very still, the moon very bright. In the moon path of silver they could plainly discern the silhouette of the *Nesporeo* as she rocked gently in midstream. They were both so happy that they hugged the captain.

"Boysh!" The captain was speaking with thick affection. "I—*hic*—lovsh you. Honesht. I coul'n't part—*hic*—wish you. You go wish me to ship—*hic*—t'ni'. Huh?"

"Yesh cap'n, we'll go wish you t'ni'." Billy found it very hard indeed to keep the elation from his tones. "Heresh m'hand on it."

"An' heresh mine," seconded Tommy.

The captain clasped them both, and then . . .

THERE was a flash of steel in the moonlight and two ominous clicks. Lanky Bill and Boston Tommy leaped apart in sudden sobering terror. That is, they leaped apart for six inches, then a connecting chain held them.

They turned profanely to the captain and found him in possession of a wicked-looking little automatic which played alternately on the vitals of the one and then of the other.

"Now boys," came the captain's voice, surprisingly quiet for one who had imbibed as freely as they imagined he had done, "take my advice and don't force me to use this little persuader. I was suspicious of you from the first—but when you were so crazy to get to Rio—I was sure. But I guess you'll travel by rail to Columbia and the pen. I hate to do it, but——"

"An' you ain't Captain Dangree?"

"No. But I'd seen you two fellows hanging around watching that ship and I figured that you'd try to make your getaway on it, so I concocted this little scheme, and—well, it worked. Here's what I am," and he turned back his coat to disclose a shining badge.

Lanky Bill and Boston Tommy joined sighs. Tommy spoke.

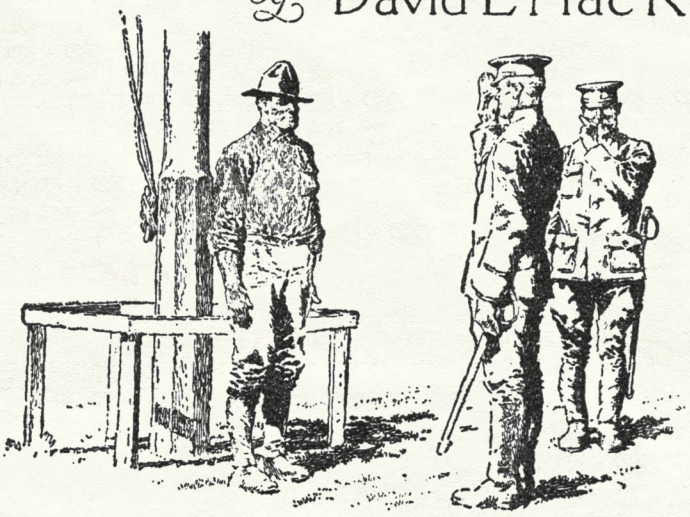
"You win, cap. Lead us to it."

And they started toward the station house. Only once did either of them speak, and that was when Lanky Bill turned.

"Say, cap—how about slippin' us one of them cigars we gave you, huh?" he requested funereally.

BROTHERS-IN-ARMS

by David L Mac Kaye



Author of "The 500th Shot."

THE bow of the United States army transport *City of Peking* was plunging into choppy seas three days out from Japan. The decks were brown with men of the —th California Volunteers and a large number of casuals for units already in the field in the Philippines.

One of the latter was a hospital corps private, first class, named Jones. He occupied the little niche at the bow, and with his feet braced against the ship's motion was gazing steadily forward.

The officer of the day was standing at the rail of the hurricane deck watching Jones closely. The officer's face, as well as his name, which was Flanagan, spoke cheerily of his ancestry but his good-humor was indefinitely suspended and Jones seemed to be the cause of it.

The one man attracted the other to such an extent that Flanagan, who was a first lieutenant in a volunteer field artillery battery, eventually left the upper deck and came down to the forecastle. He stood here for some time with the characteristic caution of the militia officer who is afraid of getting the ethics of things wrong with a regular soldier. After some moment of hesitation, however, he walked up behind him.

"Flanagan!" he said sharply.

The corps man wheeled around with a nasty exclamation and when he saw who it was, stopped short, stood to attention and saluted, with an expressionless face.

"Thot don't do no good!" exclaimed Flanagan. "Oi couldn't mistake thot mush inny place. Oi refused thinkin' ye was me brother to the last minit, I was thot ashamed to see him in the ranks. What name have ye got?"

"Jones," replied the other man sourly.

The officer looked him up and down.

"Say 'sorr,' " he demanded contemptuously.

Jones permitted his finger-nails to dig into his palms. Military discipline seemed, by that token, to be favoring Lieutenant Flanagan for the moment.

"Jones, sorr," said Jones.

"Ye renegade Oirishman, hidin' in the ranks loike a Wilshman!" snorted Flanagan. "Jones! And ye the son of Mary Flanagan of Kilcook, thot slaved hersilf to death providin' ye with understandin' and breakin' her heart over ye and ye wild ways. Sure, 'tis proud of ye she'd be, could she see ye in thot dhirty uniform when ye might of had a commission and been a gentleman loike she intended ye to, ye Belfast dog-robber."

"Ye kin be after laving her out of it, if ye plaze," answered Jones with a wicked twist to his voice that did not escape Flanagan. "As for the dhisgrace of me uniform, Oi'm thinkin' 'tis thot of a sojer and not thot of an officer of a milishy regiment who most loikely got his commission over a saloon bar in exchange for a few votes!"

"Kape a closed mouth by ye," snapped Flanagan, "or Oi'll have ye jugged for dhisrespectfulness!"

"Will ye now?" queried Jones curiously. "And a summary court hearin' about yez opinion of this dhisgraceful uniform and your callin' a private a Belfast dog-robber, and the rist of ut."

"Thot'll do," Flanagan interrupted stiffly. "Ye're right, bad cess to ye. But mind ye now, if Oi kin work it Oi'll have ye dishonorably discharged—bob-tailed, ye understand—before ye are through with yez hitch. No Flanagan is going to hide in the ranks under a name loike Jones if Oi kin prevint ut!"

"Yis?"

"Say 'sorr.' "

"Sorr," rolled Jones. "And ye kin take heed to ut thot Oi'm fairly burstin' with desire to get shet of me uniform so's Oi kin wring yez neck loike a came near doin' the day after mither died. Me wild ways may have driven her to the grave, God rest her, but she knows betther now than before what was behind yez slick, gentlemanly ways."

"Wait'll Oi git ye in a trench," stormed Flanagan.

"Wait'll Oi git ye in the hospital," grimaced Jones. "Oi'll make a gu-gu turn green with envy over the slicin' of ye!"

Eyes were beginning to turn curiously toward the pair. Flanagan turned abruptly and marched off before the argument passed words. Jones turned his back, and later went to his quarters where he stayed as closely as possible for the rest of the voyage, playing cards with his cronies.

IF JONES did not wish to meet Flanagan, neither did the militia officer have any desire for further encounter with his brother in the ranks. A ship's company has the uncanny faculty of sensing real situations. They glimpsed each other as they disembarked at Manila and they exchanged vindictive glances but this was the limit of their intercourse.

Jones reported at the base hospital and was assigned to duty, and Flanagan was sent into camp with his battery at Fort McKinley close by so that the prospect for further contact was good. This was an advantage for Flanagan. He came over to the hospital more than he had to and nearly always managed to be nasty to Jones in that particularly nasty way that lies open to an officer if he elects to make it uncomfortable for an enlisted man.

As a result Jones hated the sight of him. He hated him as an officer, further as an officer in the militia, and for rubbing it in. Each mean action of Flanagan toward him since they had been tots together revived in his breast and rankled. No soldier can nurse this kind of grouch and remain efficient.

In less than no time Jones deteriorated into an orderly for the commanding officer which is tantamount in the hospital corps to an advertisement of inefficiency in anything else.

This helped Flanagan in his attempts to bait Jones into a break of discipline that would give him grounds for charges. The militiaman was at the hospital compound more frequently than at Fort McKinley and Jones could hardly take his seat before the major-doctor's office without Flanagan's presence demanding a salute. But Jones had the regular soldier's ability to skim close to the articles of war without breaking any of them. He sat tight and refused to get up and salute.

One afternoon Flanagan came up ostentatiously. Jones as ostentatiously turned himself face to wall. This was too much for the other. He tapped Jones on the shoulder.

"Come with me," he ordered.

Flanagan led the way toward the flagpole.

"What's the dhirty Munster bla'guard up to, now?" wondered Jones.

Flanagan halted in the middle of the parade.

" 'Tention, Jones," he commanded bruskly. "Oi'm givin' ye a bit of a lesson in military etiket, ye understand. Oi've been noticin' thot ye're delinquent in salutin' yez officers and there's nothin' loike takin' ye recruits in hand early. Ye kin salute me now, forty toimes."

Jones' face crimsoned up and his eyes glittered dangerously. Curious men were

looking at them from every window in the hospital and the major-commanding was pacing thoughtfully toward them from headquarters.

"Ye kin start now," hinted Flanagan.

Jones started and saluted forty times with military precision. He was only half through when Major Witz, the medical officer commanding the hospital, reached them and stood looking on with quiet appraisement. After the lesson was over the major asked Flanagan mildly—

"Lieutenant, what are you doing with my orderly?"

"A bit of a lesson, sorr. The spalpeen niver has saluted me as Oi passed yez office and Oi'm showin' him how."

"Quite right, lieutenant, quite right," agreed the major-doctor. "Military etiquette is a splendid thing. It should always be borne in mind. You yourself are well up on it, are you not?"

"Oi am, sorr."

"Yes. Perhaps you noticed the regulations call for an officer to return a salute, did you not?"

"Oi did, sorr."

"Did you salute Private Jones in return?"

"Eh—no, sorr."

"An unfortunate omission, lieutenant. The military standards must be preserved intact. You may return the salute now—I believe it is forty times."

The base hospital broke into a pleased grin. Jones, at attention, suffered agony over his suppressed appreciation. Flanagan, with murder in his heart and not a little of it on his face, went through the prescribed motions, excused himself and fled. Jones was about to follow when Major Witz halted him.

"You have disappointed me as a soldier, recently," remarked the major-doctor.

"Oi'm sorry, sorr," replied Jones. "If the major will permit, Oi would loike to go back to the warrds. Oi'm feelin' betther now, sorr."

"Yes, I think you may. And, Jones, I think you and Lieutenant Flanagan look a great deal alike."

"Oi hope not, sorr."

"You even speak exactly alike."

Jones mumbled his reply.

"Very well, Jones. Return to your quarters. I will assign you to a ward later."

"Yis, sorr," Jones saluted and left.

"I'm a militiaman," speculated the major-doctor, "if there's not bad family blood between those two. I never saw two men so anxious to cut each other's throat in all my experience."

It was a fact that Jones felt better. The volunteer field artillery was moved out the following week, Flanagan and all. This helped Jones back to standard still more. He pitched into his work and while the younger Flanagan went out into the unfinished paradise of the Philippines and fought Tagalogs, mosquitoes and the dysentery, the elder, and disguised Flanagan made a name for himself in the hospital.

A year later when the Insurrection had molded the American forces into big men and fine soldiers, Jones had a sergeant's stripes on his arms. He grew in many ways. He hated militia officers and female nurses with a regular's intensity, gloried in the army, and pulled the febrile from their hot deaths by the mere force of his attention. He was wardmaster of the fever ward and suffered only in that he had a contract-surgeon of poor attainments under whom to work.

THE Philippines were in a pretty hectic condition. It was a gamble whether the dysentery or a little brown brother would get one first, and Jones took care of those in whom the tropical fevers anticipated the natives. Life was one wild delirium and Jones's ward was a phantasmagoria of delirious recollections.

Men exposed the sacred moments of their lives at the top of their voices, and only Jones and his reliefs heard. They cried, Jones soothed; they raved, Jones remained silent; they sewed their lips over their agony and Jones searched Heaven for a soporific. He forgot Flanagan.

Yet one day the stretcher-bearers bore Flanagan into the ward and dumped him on the only vacant bed. He was raving and they helped Jones strap him down.

Jones pulled a stool up to the bed. His lips drew out thin and his chin protruded. He automatically drew out a clinical thermometer, slipped it under the sick man's armpit and held it there.

"Sure, an' ye came home, ye Oirish bla'guard," reflected Jones.

Flanagan looked back unseeingly.

"Am Oi in the hospital?" he demanded.

"Jist thot," said Jones.

"Will ye have the dacency to git me the

commandant's orderly, nurse," he muttered. "His name'll be Jones and I want to kill him. Wit' me bare hands, nurse, ye understand. Will ye tell him?"

"Oi will," answered Jones.

"Say 'sorr,' " whined Flanagan.

"I will, sorr," repeated the steward quietly.

"Hiven praise ye!"

Jones took out the thermometer and entered the reading on the fever chart. He stood for a moment surveying his brother.

"Ye lied to mither av me and Oi thrashed ye for thot," he mused, "and ye stole Kitty from me and Oi nigh killed ye for thot. Ye ruined mither with ye ixpensive ways and Oi beat ye for thot, and ye made a fool of me in public and Oi haven't done innything to ye for thot—yet. Sure, darlint, do ye remember what Oi tould ye on the transport? Do ye remember ut, ye banshee?"

He was about to pull the sheets over the form when a faint rash, as of measles, on the man's skin attracted him. He stooped and scrutinized it.

"So?" he said at length.

The contract-surgeon bustled into the ward and Jones went over to join him. They made the rounds and came to Flanagan.

"What's this?" asked the doctor.

"Lieutenant from the milishy, sorr."

"Trouble?"

"No diagnosis, sorr?"

"Will make it later. What's temperature?"

"Axillary 103, sorr."

"Put on ice-packs."

"Yis, sorr."

The contract-surgeon went out again. The moans and cries resumed their uninterrupted chorus. Jones labored, the time passed, and the contract-surgeon came again to go monotonously over the cases.

"Temperature?" he demanded over Flanagan.

"103 and a half, sorr."

"I said ice-packs," snapped the doctor, as he saw they had not been placed.

Jones looked at him blankly.

"Yis, sorr," he said.

"See that they're put on," repeated the other and went out, grumbling under his breath.

Jones's mind was in a turmoil. He walked several times between Flanagan's cot and the ice-chest.

"What a chance! What a chance!" he exclaimed to himself.

He half prepared the pack and let the ice slip back.

"No," he decided. "Oi'm a nurse before Oi'm a sojer, but Oi'm me own man before Oi'm a nurse. Oi won't do ut."

He went out without the ice-packs. Flanagan motioned him over.

"Nurse," he moaned, "Oi have pains in me back."

"Yis?"

"Why have Oi got pains in me back, nurse?"

"Oi don't know why. Ye moight ask the contract-surgeon. He knows it all," answered Jones indifferently, tucked in the sheets from force of habit and commenced his rounds of temperature-taking.

The quick twilight was on the hospital. The lights were commencing to wing out from the ward windows and the patients in Jones's ward cursed Flanagan because the delirium was on him.

The ward-master was nearing his relief hour. His body ached with the fatigue of an arduous day and his mind was confused. His big, well-shaped body looked like a dull silhouette in its khaki against the window through which he was drinking the cooler air of the day's end. An angry command spun him around on his heel. The contract-surgeon was standing beside Flanagan's bed. He had pulled back the covers and found no ice-packs.

"What the devil does this mean, Sergeant Jones?" he cried across the ward.

The sufferers sat up in their cots and glowered at the surgeon. Jones was god in that ward.

"Wot, sorr?" asked Jones.

"No ice-packs, no ice-packs. I distinctly said ice-packs for this man!"

"Yis, sorr."

"Why in the name of Heaven aren't they here, Sergeant Jones?"

"Oi forgot," smiled Jones.

"You did?"

"Yis, sorr."

"Well, you won't do it again. Go to the guardhouse!"

Jones stiffened up suddenly.

"No, sorr," he answered with a restrained voice, "Oi'm not goin' to the guardhouse this noight."

"And why?"

"Becaze ye can't put a non-commissioned

officer in the guardhouse, sorr, and ye'd know ut if ye was a soldier. Furthermore, Oi won't go inny place until Oi'm properly relaved."

"I'll send you a relief, then," stormed the surgeon, "and you are confined to quarters."

He fairly ran out of the ward.

Jones pulled the covers back over Flanagan and laughed into his drawn, flushed face. Then he went into the ward-master's room to prepare for relief. A sergeant of the corps stuck in his head.

"I'm your relief," he announced. "What's the hullaballoo?"

"Come in and Oi'll tell ye," invited Jones.

They remained with their heads together for a while, and when Jones went off to quarters the other called after him:

"You can leave it to me. The only thing that'll get ice-packs tonight is the refrigerator, Jonesy."

Jones's volatile Celtic spirits sagged into abysses of despondency. He paced the floor of quarters an hour, suffering the reaction of his months of exaltation which had been precipitated by Flanagan's appearance. His thoughts were violently thrown off their track. He had labored with the genius of understanding and humanity and now there was an anti-climax of detestation for his brother. In addition to this the contract-surgeon had hung him on a triple-horned dilemma, his respective duties as a soldier, a nurse, and a man. He finally fell on his bunk where the deep unconsciousness of the worn-out held him through the night.

THE cheery bugles ushered in the sun. Sleep left the hospital and burning eyes opened up. The drone recommenced. An ambulance train arrived. Fifty convalescents assembled on the parade for the march to a transport to take them to the convalescent hospital on Corregidor.

A hand fell on Jones and shook him. He awoke slowly and looked with a sleepy wonder at his undressed form stretched uncovered on the bed. His relief of the night before was surveying him with a grin. He volunteered the information that he, also, was confined.

"No?" exclaimed Jones, sitting up.

"Fact," insisted the sergeant, "the beggar paid me a surprise visit."

"And were the ice-packs on?"

"Not an ice-pack. You were right, Jonesy, there's a rash on the man as deep as cups.

"Thin we're safe," announced Jones but without enthusiasm.

He stretched himself painfully and struggled to get a hold on himself mentally. His mind was heavy and day displeased him.

His erstwhile relief was unceremoniously peeling off his clothes.

"A court-martial won't look so bad when I'm less tired," he explained, and in a minute was asleep.

An hour passed. For the first time in months the exhilaration of awakening day was not Jones's. He wondered who had ward 2. He remained in solitary reflection until breakfast time when he was suddenly summoned before the major-doctor.

"Come and watch me get mine, sonny," he remarked grimly to the orderly and followed down to headquarters.

The contract-surgeon had lost no time in reporting Sergeant Jones to the major-commanding. The regulations are a fetish to the "shavetail" in the Army and he can not worship too arduously before them. So Major Witz had hardly opened his office when the contract-surgeon, who was a young graduate named Harper with the rank of lieutenant, was floridly detailing Jones's lapse from duty.

The major leaned back in his chair and his gaze turned retrospectively out of the window. He saw the parade and the flagpole and remembered an incident of a year agone. He saw Jones, flushed and angry, and he saw Flanagan's red and unrestrained countenance. He remembered that he had said to himself that he had never seen two men so anxious to cut each other's throat in all his experience.

In his heart of hearts the major credited the making of Sergeant Jones to his own deep understanding of men. For twelve months he had rejoiced in Jones's genius for sympathy. Now Lieutenant Harper exposed with a merciless delight the real and venomous Sergeant Jones.

"They're alike as two peas," thought Major Witz.

"He actually smiled when he said he had forgotten," the contract-surgeon hurried on.

"They talk alike," thought Major Witz.

"He seemed to hate the man and discriminated against him," insisted the contract-surgeon.

The two officers walked out, one thoughtful, the other gesticulating. Sergeant Jones came up behind the orderly, stood to attention and saluted.

"The major wished to see me, sorr?" he asked.

"Yes," snapped Witz. "Lieutenant Harper here has presented general court-martial charges on three specifications against you. In my opinion you have committed the most heinous offense in the army. You have not only disobeyed orders flagrantly but you have placed a comrade's life in danger. What have you got to say for yourself?"

The little man's eyes bored into Jones with their peculiar intensity. Jones looked back, hard as nails.

"Nothing, sorr, except thot Leftenant Flanagan has smallpox!"

"Has what?" shouted the major.

"Impossible!" ejaculated the contract-surgeon.

"Smallpox, sorr."

Stretcher-bearers with a shrouded form trotted by. Witz stopped them.

"Who have you got?" he demanded.

"Smallpox case, sir, going to isolation from ward 2."

Witz turned back the sheet and revealed the face of Flanagan covered with pustular rash.

"Good Lord!" breathed the contract-surgeon.

The stretcher party went on and there was a moment's silence.

The major-doctor's anger visibly disappeared. His voice, so characteristically harsh in his irritated moments, softened to the mildness which hid his marvelous and spontaneous efficiency.

"So?" he reflected. "Smallpox! Lieutenant Harper, did you make a diagnosis in this case?"

"No, sir, I had no time."

"Great Heavens! Who has, sir? Did you not know that ice-packs would probably have driven the disease in and killed Lieutenant Flanagan?"

"I am aware that course might be followed in smallpox," agreed Harper stiffly.

"Then why the dev—" The major checked himself, adding mildly, "Lieutenant Harper, you are relieved from duty. Sergeant Jones has saved you from serious charges."

"The devil!" thought Jones quickly.

"Jones," continued Major Witz, as Harper angrily saluted and went off, "you have acted —— irregularly, but the matter turns out luckily for you. You can return to duty."

"Thank 'e, sorr. I would loike to ask the major for a transfer to the isolation ward, sorr, to take care of me—of Leftenant Flanagan."

"Very well, Jones. I will arrange it. And Jones——"

"Yis, sorr?"

"You understand enlisting under a false name constitutes fraud and is punished by two years in a military prison?"

"Yis, sorr."

"But I won't ask you any questions, Jones."

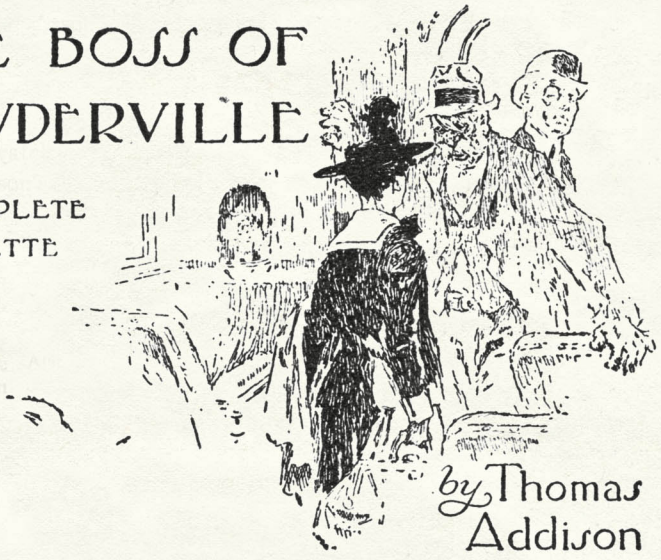
"Thank 'e, sorr."

Witz turned abrupted into his office. Jones walked to the door of ward 2, paused and looked over to the isolation building. He shook his fist at it.

"Oi'll take care of ye this toime, ye omadhoun," he muttered wrathfully. "But wait until Oi git ye in surgery. Won't Oi carve ye up for fair?"

THE BOSS OF POWDERVILLE

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE



by Thomas Addison

Author of "Come-on Charley," "The Peace Hat," etc.

THE belching smokestacks of the vast war munitions plant sent up a cloud that hung like a menace in the airless May noon. To the east the river wound its sluggish way; but crowded up to the dead-line drawn around the landward side of the factories lay a great encampment of flimsy shacks, steaming in the hot southern sun. Most of them were of plain unpainted pine; the others were of sectional corrugated iron.

On the outskirts was a fringe of tents for late comers who could find no other shelter. Since the days of the early mining camps the like of this roaring toadstool colony was never seen.

It was Powderville and in it, from the four winds of heaven, were gathered the sweepings of all races to prey upon the army of hard-bitten Mohocks that gambled with sudden death in the powder plant to the tune of a pay-roll which footed close on to half a million dollars weekly. The place was a stench in the nostrils of civilization—a hell of poisonous activities. And there was no such thing as law and order in it.

On this May day a long train-load of swearing, sweating, stinking human scum rolled in from Johnsburg on the main line. They swarmed out of the coaches shouting in a babel of outlandish tongues, and for a time the platform was a maelstrom in which individual units were caught like chips and whirled about helpless to free themselves.

Joe Ripley, bulking large and coldly watchful, waited for the coach he was in to clear. Then he looked down at the black-garbed girl in the seat he guarded and smiled reassuringly.

"Come, Miss Brown," he said. "The rush is over. Your uncle will be hunting for you."

She stood up, dark-haired, blue-eyed, slim and trim. One would have as soon expected to find a pearl of price in a roadside puddle as her like amid that herd of swine. At least so thought Ripley.

"You are very kind," she told him. Her voice was not quite steady. "I can't understand why he did not meet me at Johnsburg. Yes—let us go."

Ripley held out his hand for her bag, but she shook her head.

"No. It is not heavy, and yours is. Thank you."

He let her have her way. After all she did not know him, and one was wise not to trust a stranger far in this fearsome corner of the earth.

"Keep close to me," he bade her, and set off down the aisle.

He had reached the door and was stepping into the vestibule when a man lurched out from the lavatory and pressed drunkenly in before the girl. Then, as she gave an exclamation and fell back from him, he

swung around and confronted her. Under a shock of coarse red hair a great red face leered at her, and two powerful arms were thrust out to the walls of the narrow passage.

"Oho! So it's you again?" jibed this foul apparition. "Maybe when you've been floatin' around Little Hell for a time you'll know a good feller when you see him. Maybe——"

The word strangled in his throat. He was a big man, but a bigger had him by the collar. He was dragged through the door and slammed up into a corner of the vestibule.

"Now, my friend," said Ripley to him, entirely without heat, "I'll make a pudding of your face if you open it again to that young lady. I put you on notice at Johnsburg when you spoke to her. The next time—you'll get your medicine."

"Oh! Take care!" Miss Brown's voice rang out from the door. "His knife! Take care!"

The man's hand had stolen to his shirt, but Ripley was before him. His fist shot out in a vicious uppercut, and the other slid down in a heap. His knife clattered to the floor beside him. Ripley stooped and picked it up, a wicked-looking dirk that had hung in its sheath suspended from the fellow's neck. Even in that moment it flashed through his mind as more than odd that this apparently well-bred young woman should have guessed at knife-play. What could she know of such things?

"I rather fancy this chap won't be very lively for the next few minutes," he observed. "Let's be getting on."

Several men, the last occupants of the car ahead, had stopped in the vestibule and were glooming at the prostrate ruffian. They were an ill-favored lot themselves, but Ripley's prowess seemed to draw from them a grudging respect.

"It ees Red Pete," grunted one in broken English. "You watch out fer heem, young feller. Heem a ver' bad mans."

"Tell him he can find me at Dick Evans's place—wherever it is," Ripley answered. "I'll keep this little joker for him till he calls."

He thought he saw a quick look pass among them, but he turned carelessly away and helped the girl down from the coach. A row of supporting pillars traversed the length of the train shed, and he shouldered a way through the press to the nearest one. He placed his companion with her back to it, and planted himself before her like a rock for the waves to beat upon.

"I guess we'd better anchor here until this Eden Musée collection thins out," he suggested. "Your uncle will have less trouble finding us."

She glanced up at him, her eyes warm with gratitude. At Johnsburg, where she had left the New York train and stood a lone, dismayed figure waiting for the relative who had so strangely failed her, Red Pete had accosted her. And then this young man had stepped up, and with a quiet word sent him slinking off.

"My name is Ripley," he had introduced himself. "From New York. We came down on the same train, I think. I am going to Powderville. If I can be of any service to you in the meantime, please command me."

His well-featured face, with frank brown eyes that met hers steadily, inspired her confidence.

"I am Lydia Brown," she had replied, "and I, too, am going to Powderville." Then she told him her plight.

"Something has kept your uncle, that's plain," he had comforted her. "The thing to do is to go on to Powderville. We will send him a telegram saying you will wait for him at the station."

And so in his quiet, easy way he had taken charge of her. It was a short run from Johnsburg, and they had talked but little. The conditions were not conducive to conversation. But now she said, faltering somewhat at first:

"I don't know how to thank you, but indeed I am very grateful. And perhaps—this dreadful place I have come to—it may seem strange to you that a woman should venture here—yet I haven't any choice. My mother has been long dead, and I have just lost my father. I have no one but my uncle. He sent for me. We are Greek, but the name—Argostoli—is not good for business, and they changed it, my father and his brother. I was born on the ship coming over, and I have been brought up as an American, taught in the schools as one; but I am unashamed of my people, though all their ways are not mine."

Her head lifted half proudly, half defiantly as she said this. Ripley understood now about the knife—her prescient warning to

him. A Greek prays with his knife in his teeth, as the saying goes.

"We are both adventurers in a foreign land," he laughed. "I don't know a thing about the place, except what all the world has read. From all accounts it's the wickedest hole man ever dug out for himself this side of Suez. But there must be a sound spot in it here and there, and I imagine I'll get a rather close inside view of the works. I'm going to edit a newspaper that's just starting up."

There was a rush behind him, following a cry of joyful recognition, and a thick-set, black-browed person precipitated himself on the girl with outstretched arms.

"Lydia! Ah, such a fright I have had!"

"Uncle Paul! Oh, Uncle Paul!"

A voluble interchange in Greek succeeded, accompanied by a bewildering play of hands and shoulders by Uncle Paul. The man whom his fellows had styled Red Pete dropped sullenly from the coach while this was going on. He took in the scene with a black scowl and made off down the platform. Ripley did not see him. The crowd had thinned, and he drew away from the intimate little drama he had promoted. He was now at liberty to go about his business, but waited to take his leave of the girl. She was quick to notice his withdrawal, and with a word to her uncle led him to the young man.

"It was my mistake," she cried. "I read Uncle Paul's letter wrong. I came a day too soon."

"Ah, but we have to thank you!" broke in her uncle torrentially. "It is a debt. We shall not forget. It is not safe for a woman alone on that train. But enough. We will go. You are my guest, Mr. Ripley, until you have settled yourself. The New York Restaurant is my place. The best in town. It is yours—that and all that is mine."

Ripley restrained a smile at this Orientalism.

"It's awfully good of you," he acknowledged, "but I have an idea Mr. Dick Evans has looked out for me. If you can tell me where to find him——"

He stopped, arrested by a curious change in the other.

"Dick Evans! Are you a friend of his?"

"A business friend. Editor of a paper he is going to start."

The Greek's manner grew openly constrained. His black eyes smoldered.

"In that case," he began and checked himself. "Step into any place you come to," he finished stiffly, "and they will tell you where to find your man. We will go now, Lydia. We must see about your trunk."

"But, Uncle Paul—" The girl's distress echoed in her voice.

"I do not forget," he protested formally. "We are in the gentleman's debt. It shall be paid."

He moved away. But the girl looked back, her eyes wide with appeal. Ripley was stirred by it. She was but little less alone in this buzzing hive of satanry than was he himself. He felt a sudden drawing to her, a wish that he could shelter her from harm. He made her a gesture which, he hoped, would in some way convey this thought to her. She returned it, smiling, and he picked up his grip and made ready to go.

And then a perplexed frown settled on his face. He recalled the exchange of glances of the men in the car vestibule.

"Now what the devil sort of chap is this Dick Evans?" he questioned of himself. "People seem to shy off when he's named. I wonder what I'm up against?"

II

AFTER a commonplace word of greeting had passed between them the two men sat silently taking stock of each other. It was in Dick Evans's office. Ripley had met with no difficulty in finding it.

It was a beggarly room over a slatternly drug-store calling itself, with perhaps intentional irony, the Palace Pharmacy. There was a flat desk with an oil-lamp on it in a corner by one of the windows, a few chairs, and a table littered with books and magazines by the other window. The floor was without covering, and the walls were guiltless of plaster; but a door to one side at the back gave a glimpse of another room, papered, carpeted, and with a section of a brass bed showing.

The lord of this domain was a man in his late thirties. He was not tall, yet his presence was far from ineffectual; it was, on the contrary, compelling. His face, strong in its lines, was like chiseled marble—as white almost and as impassive. He wore a well-tailored white flannel suit and sported a

flower in his coat. Somehow the first sight of him turned Ripley's thought to Lydia Brown; both seemed so entirely "out of the picture" in this hog-wallow of humanity.

"Well," said Evans, breaking the silence, "I think you will do, Ripley." His voice matched his appearance; it was cool and colorless.

The young man looked at him quizzically.

"Thanks," he returned. "To be perfectly frank, I am trying to make up my mind if I can say the same of you."

The straight line of the other's mouth bent a little. It was his nearest approach to a smile, for his eyes, cold as polished points of cobalt, warmed not at all.

"I'll change what I said," he stated, "I know you will do. Now, let us get down to cases. I've fitted up a printing plant around the corner that can take care of a fairly good weekly paper. The *Trumpet* is the name I've hit on for it. I advertised for a live, trained newspaper man to run this sheet, and I put the salary at a hundred a week, for he's got to take his chance of going home in a box."

"I think you intimated that in your ad," commented Ripley negligently.

"I did. And I wasn't flooded with answers, but I picked yours out of half a dozen. I gave you New York bank references, and you found them good or you wouldn't be here. Your first week's pay is in your pocket, or ought to be. What more do you want?"

"A little information about the man I am to work for," replied Ripley pointedly. "At the bank he has a name with a string of figures after it; that's all they knew of him. But I gambled on it and came down. Now, I would like to know what peg in this winsome community this man hangs his hat on before I sign up with him for keeps."

Again Evans's mouth relaxed the merest trifle.

"That is fair," he conceded. "But I'll say to you at the start that your good or bad opinion won't weigh with me. For the rest, I have some schooling—you'll find others here that have—and I don't drink, smoke, chew or swear. When I go out for a thing I try to get it. And I don't make friends. I take it that is as much as you need know about me."

Ripley nodded.

"Thank you for that much, though I could have guessed some of it. What I had in mind was——"

"I know, and I'll tell you. Take a look out of the window. This is Main Street. What do you see? A scattered shop or so where they sell necessities, and the rest—dance-halls. The name covers every listed iniquity. 'Little Hell' they call this street, and it never sleeps. Well, I own it, with other properties hereabouts, and they can't do business—any of them—without seeing me."

"Keep on," said Ripley. "I've a pretty strong stomach, up to a certain point."

"You'll have need of it if you stay here," Evans answered evenly. "This town is an abnormality. It has grown up overnight. We have twenty thousand people, but we can't get a charter until the legislature meets next Winter. There is no civic government. We do our banking in Johnsburg. No bank will open here as conditions stand. There is no protection for it. We have a county police force, but they are a mere handful, and they are grafters. We had fourteen murders here last month, and only two arrests. That tells the story. And I'm not counting in the ordinary shootings and pig-stickings where nobody croaked; they come under the head of polite amusements. Pay and play again."

"Interesting, but aren't you getting away from your text?" Ripley put in. "I'm rather keen on knowing why Little Hell has to pay you tribute. I'm not a moralist, but to be quite plain with you, Mr. Evans, all this doesn't sound very good to me."

The other's eyes narrowed a trifle.

"I'll tell you why," he offered. "When I learned they were going to lay out that murder factory on the river I knew what would happen, and I came on here before it. Six months ago this was a cornfield where we are sitting. I bought it, and when the crowd began to push in I was two jumps ahead of it putting up shacks."

"Dance-halls," interjected Ripley with a curving lip.

"Precisely." Evans was unmoved. "It wasn't a Sunday-school picnic that came down on us. I built what was wanted, and I rented them by the month. I can turn the whole bunch out-of-doors any time on ten days' notice. They know it, and that's where my pull comes in. How does it sound to you now?"

Ripley lighted a cigarette before replying.

He saw, he thought, a bit beyond the bald statement Evans had made; but he was aware that he could not push his inquiries further just then. And in a way the man appealed to him, as would a predatory coal baron, or a ruthless Wall Street buccaneer. His methods differed from theirs only in degree.

"I understand," he observed, slowly exhaling a stream of smoke. "You are the boss of Powderville, and as my opinion cuts no figure with you I'll save myself the trouble of voicing it. Let us get back to the *Trumpet*. The Johnsburg papers cover the field; yours will eat up money as fast as you can feed it in. You have got things your way here; what do you want of an organ?"

"Just a minute," requested Evans.

Heavy, uncertain feet pounded the rickety stairs leading up from the street; and there was a fumbling at the doorknob, a pause and, as if it were an afterthought, a knock on the panel.

"Come in," called Evans. His voice although it was not raised carried singularly.

The door opened, and Ripley saw Red Pete swaying on the threshold—a little drunker, a little redder, and so even more repellent than before. Ripley turned to Evans.

"This pleasant gentleman is in quest of me, for a guess," he remarked whimsically. "We had a brief interview on the train from Johnsburg, and possibly he is hungry for another."

An oath broke from Red Pete, and he made a step forward. But he came no farther.

"Stand exactly where you are, and keep your mouth shut," Evans said to him. He did not stir in his chair, and his hands lay listlessly stretched out on the arms of it; yet his voice, still low and even, held now a deadly quality that was like a sword-thrust.

"How did it come about?" he demanded, addressing Ripley.

"Why, this fellow annoyed a young lady, and I took it on myself to quiet him. I brought this away as a memento of the meeting. Perhaps you will know what to do with it—I don't."

Ripley placed the dirk on the desk. Evans looked at him queerly, his eyes two steel-gray sparks. Then he reached for the knife and laid it, point out, along his palm. He seemed, as it were, to be weighing it. The man by the door stiffened. For the moment his drunkenness fell away from him.

"Boss," he began, choking out the word.

"That will do for you," Evans checked him. "I'll talk; you'll listen. First, you stay away from Johnsburg, or I'll see that they keep you there. Next—and you can pass it on—this gentleman is a friend of mine. His name is Ripley—R-i-p-l-e-y. I'd advise you to remember it. And last, if you come up these stairs again without being sent for, you'll go down them and never know how."

With a lightning movement the boss of Powderville brought his arm sweeping up and forward. The knife hurtled by Red Pete's head—within six inches of it—and stuck quivering in the door-post. Evans's gaze never left the man. He shot a command at him.

"There's your can-opener. Now — get out!"

Pete made a quick, spasmodic lunge for the door, twisted his knife loose in passing through, and vanished without a word. Ripley involuntarily sucked in his breath. He was beginning to understand the real reason of this white-faced man's dominance in a world of thugs.

"I will tell you what I want an organ for," said Evans, picking up the conversation as if the pause had been merely for deliberation. "This powder plant is here to stay, whether the war in Europe goes on or not. The government needs it. That means there is a solid future for the town. But not as it stands. All right. I am going to clean it up, make it decent for decent men to live in; and the *Trumpet* is the tool for the job."

Ripley with difficulty suppressed an exclamation, the man was so contrary in his aspects.

"Do you mean," he asked, "that you are going to run these dance-halls out?" His tone was skeptical.

"Just that. And let me put you right on one point. My methods are my own, but when I pass my word it sticks."

Ripley, studying him, felt a conviction that it would.

"I can believe that," he confessed.

"Then here's the question," finished Evans crisply. "You have had a look at me, and you've seen something of the place. Do you go or stay?"

Ripley got up from his chair and settled his hat on his head.

"Show me where I hang up my coat," he invited. "This is Monday. If you've any sort of a foreman I'll have the *Trumpet* on the street by Saturday."

III

RED PETE, when he had found the air again, stood for an instant considering his condition. It was well on past noon. His recent experience had sobered him largely, and he discovered a desire for solid food. His pockets, however, were empty. He had hoped to negotiate a loan from the boss, but his visit, he now recognized, had been distressingly ill-timed.

"R-i-p-l-e-y." He spelled the name out as if he were pronouncing a curse. "So he has chalked this guy up against us. I'll remember him all right."

Pete pushed his way up the street. It was surging with a never-ending horde of varied peoples through which rickety hacks and an occasional automobile cautiously threaded their way. The virulent activities of Little Hell were confined within a length the equal perhaps of three short city blocks. It was narrow, unpaved, and there were no sidewalks. Little Hell had no time to put on useless frills; it was too busy garnering the harvest of the hour.

The dance-halls opened wide from flank to flank on the thoroughfare. You could see back their entire depth. As they were never closed there was no need of doors.

Just within these gaping caverns a space was held apart for tables. Here painted women sat with weary eyes waiting to be asked to dance and drink: the first implied the second. Beyond these Paphian outposts was the dance floor, hedged on one side by the bar and on the other by the gaming layouts. A player-piano at the rear kept up a hideous clamor concordant with the scene.

Pete pushed by one after another of these places with an indifferent eye. He was headed for the New York Restaurant. When one is about to commandeer a meal the best costs not a whit more than the worst. And a Greek was legitimate prey for a sovereign American born of the unterrified burgesses of Clark Street, Illinois. Moreover, now that he knew where to find her, Pete was minded to have another view of the "queen" he had unsuccessfully approached on the train.

She, too, was Greek—for the best man to have and hold. What else was she here for? She attracted Red Pete. Her freshness and her comeliness had a market value.

The restaurant was on the other side of the way, and Pete now struck across toward it. It was in a two-story frame building, and the immediate neighborhood was semi-respectable; which is to say there was not a bar or dance-hall within half a dozen doors of it.

But Pete came to a sudden halt. At a window in the upper story he had spied Lydia. She was gazing down into the street with an expression far beyond his kind to read. He stood staring up at her. Her eyes, drawn as by some evil spell, turned to him. He pulled off his dingy derby with mock ceremony, and she shrank back out of sight.

"I got that little wren caged all right," Pete muttered. "I'll lift her out when she ain't looking for it."

He tramped into the restaurant. It was a barn of a place. To the left a steep flight of stairs led to the floor above. Beyond the stairs was a lunch-counter. To the right, rows of tables ran back to the rear. They were filled with a motley throng eating audibly, but Pete found a vacant chair at one near the door. A squat Greek waiter came to him.

"A stretch of leather, Irish bullets, two sunflowers, Boston pills, and a mug of ink," was Pete's order, expressed in Powderville kitchen parlance. In other words—steak, potatoes, fried eggs, baked beans and coffee.

The waiter scurried off. Pete tilted comfortably back in his chair and hummed a tune through his nose. The others at the table paid no attention to him. Powderville etiquette insisted on a strict regard to one's own business. Besides, it was safer.

Some one came down the stairs while Pete was thus tunefully beguiling the tedium of his wait. It was Paul Brown. He paused a few steps from the bottom and looked over the rail, searching the room. His eyes finally rested on Pete, who had instantly discovered him and was now carefully engaged with the makings of a cigarette. Brown seemed to consider with himself; then he finished the descent and walked back toward the kitchen.

In due course the steak and its accompaniments were set before Pete, and he proceeded leisurely to regale himself. He was troubled with no qualms about the check the waiter had slapped down beside his plate. He contemplated it with mild amusement, as he would have somebody else's lottery ticket that had drawn a blank.

When at last he had made an end of his victuals he rose with the air of a man who has sought content and found it. The waiter was at his side in the same moment. Paul Brown walked up the aisle.

"Check?" hinted the waiter.

"Keep it for me, bo, till I blow in again. I'm scared I might lose it," returned Pete humorously.

He started off, but Brown stepped in before him. Other waiters sidled up. People at the adjoining tables raised their heads alertly.

"Three dollars," Brown demanded of Pete in trembling tones.

It was not fear that shook him; it was the thought of Lydia, and this man's intrusions on her.

Pete scowled at him.

"Charge it. I'm broke. And pull away from me, you —— dago, or I'll step on you."

Paul Brown bawled out a word in Greek, and one of his men dashed into the street.

"You don't go till you pay," he blazed at Pete. "You drunken dog! You dirty woman-baiter!" His hand shot into his coat pocket. "You'll pay or——"

Pete made a lightning pass at him. There was a muffled report, and a wild scrambling to the floor by the diners followed. Brown lay face down across the table, his pistol arm drawn back over him in a murderous clutch.

The gun fell from his nerveless hand. Pete snatched it up and whirled on the other waiters who, fallen away at first, were massing for a rush on him.

A cry came from the stairway and Lydia, speeding down it, her eyes aflame, darted into the circle. She went close up to the red ruffian, unmindful of his weapon.

"Now God witness me," she said to him, "if you have killed my uncle I shall so do unto you. Uncle Paul!"

The man groaned and raised himself from the table. Lydia, with a little murmuring sound of gladness, ran to him. And then came an unlooked-for interruption—a voice not loud, but compelling. It caused Red Pete's pistol to lower hastily and the Greeks to give way. The diners rose from the floor like corks bobbing to the surface.

"What is the meaning of this?" asked Evans.

He came forward from the door where Lydia's words had arrested him.

There was at first no answer. Paul Brown regarded him darkly. Lydia turned a wondering look upon the erect, well-molded figure in its faultless dress. Evans returned her gaze; then he lifted his hand to his hat and removed it. There was that in the gesture which brought a faint color to the girl's cheek. She felt that in this appalling place her womanhood stood acquitted before him.

The waiter whom Brown had sent into the street hurried in. He was accompanied by a man decorated with a nickel shield on his coat and a pistol in his belt. Brown pointed this person to Red Pete.

"He tried to beat me for a meal, and that's one thing that don't go here in Powderville. Take him away."

"Boss, I was hungry," pleaded Pete to Evans. "I would of paid him when I got some coin."

Evans drew a gold piece from his pocket and tossed it to the scoundrel.

"Do it now," he ordered.

"And he is to get off like this?" broke out Brown angrily. "Evans, don't push us too far. I warn you! This hog insulted my niece on the train today; and again, but now, at my very door."

"Wait!" Evans silenced him abruptly.

He looked at Lydia. His eyes held her strangely.

"It was you?" he questioned.

She inclined her head, for she could find no words. He wheeled on Red Pete.

"The gun," he said, and held out his hand for it.

Pete surrendered it. In this man's presence fear washed him of his bravado.

"I was drunk, boss," he mumbled. "I didn't mean no harm."

Evans motioned to the policeman.

"Hicks, lock him up overnight. I'll be around in the morning."

Red Pete went with Hicks, muttering a stream of curses. At the door he cast a wicked glance at the girl; but she did not see him. Evans was speaking to her.

IV

THERE were few houses on the street where the *Trumpet* had its home. It was to the south of Main Street, and the town had spread out more to the north. The building was of one story, and was iron sheathed. Vacant ground was about it on all sides. Evans was holding these properties, he told Ripley, for later development. Farther on some really substantial houses were going up, a small beginning toward the day of better things.

The door of the building was at the extreme right. Evans showed Ripley in. To the left was the business office, a space railed off flush with the angle of a partition the long side of which formed the inner wall of a passage leading to the farther reaches of the plant. The office contained a table with pens and paper, chairs, a standing desk, and a small safe. The windows were fitted with pull-up shades and, in addition, with solid oak shutters with six-inch peepholes. Shutters such as these may still be found on many old-time buildings in the south.

A man in a dirty blue apron came up the passageway to them. It was Ben Mackey, the foreman. He was a pale-eyed, gangling, shallow-chested individual who might have been any age from forty to fifty. Evans made Ripley known to him, and said:

"Mack, we are going to get the first issue out on Saturday. Whatever Mr. Ripley says goes here. That's all."

Mack ran a shrewd, appraising glance over the editor.

"Suits me," he declared, and turned and went back.

Evans pulled open the railing gate and the two passed inside. There was a door in the partition, and he motioned Ripley to enter.

"Your hangout," he explained.

A closed roll-top desk was placed between two windows. A typewriter was convenient to it. Ranged against the opposite wall was a bed and a washstand with a mirror. In a corner was a long bracket-shelf with hooks for clothes.

"You will find this better than a lodging-house," Evans intimated.

"Rather!" agreed Ripley. "Thanks for thinking of it."

"Mack has some sort of a shakedown outside there," continued Evans. "You won't mind him, though."

"Glad to have him handy," spoke up Ripley, and meant it. Company, even if not a choice cut, was welcome in these surroundings.

Evans opened a door facing the first. It led into a combination press and composing room. At one side was an Adams flat-bed press set solid on the bare ground and, further on, a linotype machine. They were hooked up to a gasoline engine in the corner. Across from this outfit was a pair of imposing stones. On one of them were packages of job type which Mack was sorting into a stand of cases. He kept steadily on without a turn of his head in their direction.

"By the way," Ripley inquired of Evans, when they were in the office again, "who is going to run the business end of the *Trumpet?*"

"You are. The fewer we have about the better. The rates are simple. Display, ten dollars an inch, net; nothing less than ten inches accepted from any dance-hall or bar. Reading matter, two dollars a line."

"Great Cæsar!" exclaimed Ripley. He put out his hand to the wall to support himself. "A new paper—a weekly—and you expect me to get business for it; at those rates?"

"A man plays his cards for what they are worth here in Powderville," rejoined Evans tranquilly. "Don't worry about the ads. They'll float in of themselves, cash down—till the big explosion comes."

"I say! Explain, please."

But Evans ignored the request.

"Ripley, here is your stunt," he announced. "You are to print what happens as it happens. You are to write up conditions as you find them. But editorially you are not to comment on these things until I give the word."

"And then the 'big explosion'? What is to be the nature of it?"

"We will talk of that when the first paper is out."

Ripley took a minute to digest this.

"All right," he said. "I can wait that long. But jot this down where you won't lose sight of it: I'm no man's tool, blind or otherwise."

"You don't look it," Evans countered curtly. "Here are the keys to the doors and the desk. We've no telephones in the

town yet, so if you want to see me any time come around or send some one." He paused at the street door. "The food is all bad here, but you will find the New York Restaurant cleaner than the rest. I will have them send you in some lunch. It's nearing two, and you'll probably be busy with Mack awhile."

He went out and, as has been written, walked into the New York Restaurant at an evil moment for Red Pete.

Ripley strolled down the passage to the composing-room. He crossed over to the Adams press and stood contemplating it thoughtfully. Mack had turned from his case and was watching him.

"What about this old neostyle?" Ripley queried. "Will she stand up to the work?"

"Slow, but sound as a rock," replied Mack. "When shall I call in my linotype man?"

"In the morning. There'll be copy on the hook for him. Got plenty of plate matter?"

"Enough to sink a ship."

"That's good. We'll have to use a lot this issue. Suppose we go into my room and make up a dummy for this sheet of ours."

Mack left his case and came to Ripley.

"Have you circulated around any?" he asked.

"Not yet. I'm going to when I'm through with you. Why?"

They were in Ripley's room now.

"Oh, nothing particular," Mack responded. "Wouldn't ask many questions, though. They're kind of fidgety about that."

"Hello! What's the idea of this?"

Ripley had unlocked his desk and thrown up the lid. A Colt automatic .45 lay exposed to view. There was a box of cartridges for it.

"You don't know the boss," said Mack with a wide grin. "He don't miss any tricks. If he put that there—which he did—it's because he thinks it'll come in handy. If we step on somebody's feelings he may drop in with his friends to tell us about it."

"I see," professed Ripley.

"Yes," proceeded Mack cheerfully. "You can't tell what will happen when we get to going here." He reached over and picked up the Colt, handling it lovingly. "I ain't ever had real cause to pot a man yet; but I got my ambitions."

Ripley stared at the unheroic figure.

"Good Lord!" he ejaculated. "There must be something catching in this air. Put it down, you bloodthirsty old pirate. Let's get to work."

Mack received the stigma as a compliment, it appeared. And it broke the ice between them.

"You are all right, Mr. Editor," he grinned. "We'll get on together."

THEY had laid out a dummy, subject to amendments, when a knock was given at the street door. Mack answered and returned with a box of sandwiches and a can of coffee.

"One of those Greeks," he grumbled. "I like 'em about as much as a boil on my neck. Set out the grub and I'll dig up something for the coffee. There's a couple of tin cups around here somewhere."

Ripley undid the box of sandwiches on his desk slide. A note addressed to himself lay uppermost. He tore it open with a puzzled air. It contained only a brief penciled line:

> You are in danger. Come tonight at eight. My uncle will be waiting for you. L. B.

"By George!" murmured Ripley. "It's from Lydia. I wonder——"

He leaned back twisting the note absently in his fingers. He called to mind Paul Brown's sudden stiffening in manner when he had mentioned Evans to him. What did it mean? Was he in danger from Brown? He dismissed this conjecture as untenable; Lydia would not ask him to walk into a trap.

Could it be Red Pete? Hardly, for Evans had put him on his good behavior in a way that seemed to reach the scoundrel's intelligence. What, then, had Lydia learned? Events, it appeared, moved rapidly in Powderville, in happy consonance with its mushroom growth. He was to find they moved yet more rapidly than he dreamed.

Mack came in with the cups, and they settled themselves to their luncheon. Ripley carefully brought the talk around to Evans.

"I can't quite understand him," he observed. "In one sense he doesn't seem to fit in here at all. In another he seems at home." He recounted how Evans had handled Red Pete. "And Evans didn't turn a hair!" he finished.

"I should say not." Mack spoke up earnestly. "It isn't blood the boss has in his veins—it's ice-water. You can't bluff him, and you can't scare him. He's made of steel. Strong! Say, I saw him once take a man as big as you by the collar, yank him from his chair, and sling him through the door; all in one motion, you might say, and like he was nothing but a sack of table salt."

"Why?" asked Ripley.

"Crooked case keeper. Faro. And the boss ran the house on the square."

"Oh!" said Ripley, enlightened. "Where was it?"

"Leadville. I was sticking type on the *Sun*. Used to take a crack at the little tin box myself when I had the price. Then I drifted back East again, jumped about some, and landed flat broke in Johnsburg six weeks ago. Pretty near the first man I met was Dandy Dick—they called him that out yonder. He keeps a set of rooms there, though he's down here most of the time; and he's got a couple of cars he burns the road up with. Well, to cut it short, he staked me to the job of getting this plant in shape, and pays me like a prince. He ain't what you'd call a chummy chap, but I'd fight for him."

"I've an idea he has some professionals on his staff for that," hinted Ripley. "This Red Pete, for instance. What about him?"

"That big Chicago bum!" The foreman's pale eyes showed an angry warmth. "He's butted in here once or twice—looking for the boss, he said. And he made himself too —— much at home. That's all I know about him; but he'd better keep out of my end of this print mill if he wants to see the town grow up."

Ripley returned to the affairs of the paper. After a time he glanced at his watch, and got up.

"It's getting on to three. I guess I'll poke about a bit, and get a line on things. I'll pound you out some copy later for a starter."

The foreman motioned to the desk.

"Better put that .45 in your clothes," he advised.

Ripley hesitated. Ingrained prejudice was strong in him.

"Does Evans go armed?" he asked.

"I'd hate to tackle him on the proposition that he doesn't. And say, there's one place I wouldn't nose into alone, if I were you. It's Death Valley, beyond the tracks. Bohunks, wops, all sorts. They'll cut a man up down there just to see what's inside him. Little Hell is a Lover's Lane beside it."

Ripley, in a half-shamed way, dropped the automatic in his pocket.

"Perhaps you are right," he admitted. "But I'll be hanged if I ever thought I'd come to be a gun toter."

V

AS HE rounded the corner into Main Street Ripley noticed a rakish, high-powered runabout standing before Evans's office. It was a Stutz "bearcat," a machine with an eighty-mile-an-hour guarantee. As Ripley came up to it Evans stepped out from the stair-entrance. He stopped on seeing his editor.

"Good!" he said. "I was coming around for you. I am going to Johnsburg to have some window-card announcements struck off for the *Trumpet;* but I thought first I'd give you a turn about the town. You will get a general impression of it that may be useful."

"It will," assented Ripley.

They got in the car and made their careful way down the street until they were well out of the crowded section. Evans turned a corner.

"Hello! Here's a brick building!" remarked Ripley. "I didn't know——"

"The only one in town," said Evans. "It's the lockup. Different from the kind you know. If you have the price you don't get in."

He let the car out, and they split the wind. If there was a speed law he ignored it.

"Tent City," he explained, as they came in view of a canvas colony.

On its outskirts they swerved sharply to the right, and the gates of the munitions plant sprang to meet them. Evans had not spoken for several minutes. Now he said abruptly—

"That girl has no business in a place like this."

Ripley glanced at him inquiringly.

"What girl?"

"Paul Brown's niece—Lydia."

Why, he could not have told, but it jarred on Ripley to have her name in this casual way.

"Oh, you have seen her then," he said.

"Yes."

Evans advanced no additional information. He fell silent again. Ripley wondered how the meeting had come about, then remembered that Evans had had the lunch sent to him from the restaurant. He had attended to it in person, it seemed.

They swept by the gates and along the confines of the powder plant at a distance marked by a high wire fence, beyond which guards patrolled the grounds. There were nine stone buildings in all. Evans waved a hand at them.

"Shoot one man with the stuff made in there, and they hang you. Shoot ten thousand and they pin a medal on you." He went on as if this speech were a simple aside: "Brown isn't a low Greek; he is of the better class. But he is not well balanced."

"There are plenty like him in all languages," argued Ripley.

Evans nodded absently. He was pursuing a settled train of thought.

"Did you travel all the way from New York with his niece?" he continued.

"No. I've told you where I met her," Ripley answered, and added, "That man of yours annoyed her, and I interfered."

Evans kept his eyes on the road ahead. It was a bad stretch, and he shifted gears for it.

"You will oblige me by omitting that reference in future," he requested in his colorless tones. "There is a reason why I countenance him, and it is strictly my affair."

"Then," said Ripley measuredly, though his blood was rising, "see to it, Evans, that he keeps away from Miss Brown. You will oblige me if you'll consider that your affair, also."

Evans turned a slow look on him.

"You are interested in this girl, I take it."

"As I would be in any one in her position."

"No more?"

Ripley's pulse leaped into his temples.

"Be careful, Evans," he warned. "You are presumptuous. You've hired me to run your paper; you haven't bought me, understand. My private likes and dislikes are exactly none of your business. Is that straight?"

Evans's mouth tightened, but he answered with a cool composure.

"I asked the question because I find that I am more than interested in this girl; and I want to know what I have to buck against."

Ripley interrogated the other's face suspiciously.

"You haven't gone far enough with that statement," he objected. "Miss Brown is here practically alone and friendless. You have me to buck against if——"

"That will do, sir!" Evans's voice turned dangerously clear. "I am not a skunk. I simply wished to put you on notice that I am in the running."

Ripley was taken aback. He found no rejoinder ready to his tongue. That he himself was in love with Lydia—enamored in an acquaintance of but half an hour—was preposterous. And yet he was aware of a curious sense of resentment at the thought that another man, in a space as brief, should have conceived a passion for her. But he spoke out frankly.

"I owe you an apology, Mr. Evans. I was hasty. And—well—so far as I know, it's a fair field for all and no favor. Suppose we let it rest at that."

"Agreed," consented Evans tersely. And, an instant later, "This is altogether aside from business, Ripley."

"Sure," said the editor readily.

They bowled along by the interminable fence until they came to a steep rise. Here the fence left the road at a sharp angle toward the river. Evans took the rise on high. At the top he threw out his clutch. The way led down into a hollow in which lay a sort of fan-shaped rabble of shacks, the handle of the fan from them, baking in the westering sun.

"They call it Death Valley," offered Evans. "You can hire men there to commit any nameable crime for a dollar bill. It's not safe, even in broad day."

"Not for the boss of Powderville?" Ripley's tone was a little tinged with irony. Evans showed no resentment at the fling.

"It's out of my jurisdiction," he said. "We can cut across here to town, or go through the Valley and over the tracks to it. As you say."

It was a challenge, it seemed to Ripley; a meditated test of nerve.

"Any way that suits you suits me," he responded with a careless laugh.

"Can you drive, if necessary?"

"'Most anything on wheels. I've been watching you with this Stutz."

Evans at once started the machine.

They coasted down the hill and into the settlement. A dusty, treeless street bisected it and mounted to the railroad tracks a quarter of a mile beyond. They took it with a deliberate ease that invited scrutiny. Women leered at them from the windows, men scowled at them from the door fronts in passing.

"They know him," said Ripley to himself. "They don't dare."

Nevertheless he slipped his hand into his pistol pocket, and kept it there. He had Mack to thank that he was armed.

Ahead was a drinking place. Boisterous sounds issued from it. Before it a mangy dog was basking in the dust. Evans, with studied design, drove over the creature's tail. He was really little injured, but his howls brought a hornet's nest about them. Men ran out of the saloon. Others in front drew threateningly near. Evans stopped the car, and scanned the circle of lowering faces.

"Whose dog is it?" he inquired.

"Mine!" shouted a brawny Pole, pushing his way up to Ripley's side of the car. He saddled the declaration with a menacing gesture.

"Well, keep your dirty hound out of the way when I'm passing through here or I'll run over him right the next time."

Under the conditions the amazing insolence of this speech was like a bomb hurled among the scurvy pack. They stared at Evans, fascinated. But Ripley, watching them, knew that something instant was going to happen. It came, though, in a manner he did not look for.

"Make him pay for the dog, Ivan," called some one.

"That's fair," said Evans before the Pole could speak. "How much for a mashed tail?" He drew from his pocket a roll of bills.

Ripley's nerves tautened. This mad act crowned all. There was a closing in about the car, and a licking of hungry chops.

"A hundred dollars," snarled Ivan.

"Oh, that's the game, is it? Come and get it then!" mocked Evans. "Look out, Ripley. Low down."

The Pole made a jump for the running-board. Ripley's fist crashed into his face, and he toppled backward. A general rush followed; but the car, under a sudden flow of gas, leaped forward. Men went down before it, shrieking horribly. The crowd, dismayed, fell back for an uncertain moment, and in it was the pair's salvation. Evans opened his throttle wide, and the bearcat answered to it like a homing bird.

But there was one who hung on to Evans's side as the machine tore up the hill for the dead line of the railroad tracks. And, happily, it was he who held the gun fire of his comrades left behind. Evans, wrestling with the steering wheel, crouching low upon it, spoke to his companion in a voice just audible above the roar of the wind.

"He has a knife, Ripley. He'll make me wreck the works unless you can stop him."

"I'll get him," Ripley answered.

His Colt was ready, and his finger tightening on the trigger when he saw the chance to make a bloodless end to the drama. It was all over in thirty seconds.

The man on the running-board had a hand fastened viselike on the seat-arm of the pitching car. With the other he strove jerkily for the knife in his shirt. His face was a mask of animal ferocity. Ripley braced himself for an effort.

"Yaw!" he yelled at Evans, trusting he would understand; and, as the car swerved violently in response, he reached over back of Evans and brought his pistol barrel smashing down upon the clutching fingers.

There was a wild screech, and Ripley, glancing rearward, saw the fellow bounce a time or two in the dust, roll over, and lay flat. Evans slowed up for the tracks.

"Thanks, Ripley. Very neatly done," he commented. "I won't forget it. That chap would have got me in a minute more."

"He's killed in all likelihood," frowned Ripley.

"Let us hope so."

"And those others. Man, you flattened them like flies! I'll own up—I was scared stiff."

"I noticed it," said Evans with his shadowy smile.

"It was a foolhardy thing to do, if you want the truth," maintained the editor warmly. "We shall have trouble from this."

Evans brought his car to a stand.

"Here's where I turn off for Johnsburg. Ripley, I want you to go to your office and write this story up while it is fresh with you. Do a little word painting, and put a punch in it. Trouble!" His lids drew down. "That's what this town is built on. You haven't seen any yet."

Ripley stood looking after him as he drove away. To save his soul he couldn't tell whether he liked the man more than disliked him.

VI

LAMPS were beginning to flare in Little Hell, and the dance halls were keying up for the night. Ripley promised himself to explore one or two of them before he went to bed. He was on his way now to his appointment at the New York Restaurant. He had written his story and hung it on the copy-hook for Mack who was out at supper.

Ripley stepped in at a doubtful-looking lunch-room for a cup of coffee and a brace of eggs, purposing a better feed after his interview with Lydia. He had not the time for it now. The coffee was mud and the eggs were musty, but he negotiated them with a grimace and continued on his way. He found Paul Brown waiting for him at the door of the New York. The Greek greeted him gravely.

"You have eaten?" he questioned. "If not, will you honor me?"

"I have had a bite, thank you. It will do me until later."

"Then, if you please—" Brown indicated the stairs.

They went up. Brown showed the way to a room at the front. Cheap colored prints were hung about the walls. An art square, a table with a shaded lamp, a plush sofa, and half a dozen chairs comprised the furnishings. Brown invited the guest to a seat, but remained standing himself.

"I am expecting friends. I must go to meet them," he explained. "I will send Lydia in." At the door he turned. "Mr. Ripley," he said soberly, "it was I who prompted my niece to send the note. It was because she is in your debt, and I wish her to discharge it without delay. I hope you will act on her advice." With this he went out.

The man's manner was somehow portentous. Ripley glanced around the cheerless room with a frown. A Johnsburg morning paper was on the table by him, and he idly picked it up. His eye fell upon a column headed "Powderville Notes." A paragraph attracted his attention:

The *Trumpet* is said to be the name of the weekly paper Boss Evans is going to publish. The plant is ready. Who the editor is to be no one seems to know. Evans owns nearly the entire business section of the town, and his paper won't languish for the want of ads. When it comes to milking you can trust Dick Evans to get the last lone drop every time.

Ripley sat thinking this over. Had Evans meant what he said about cleaning up the town, or was the Trumpet to be used to further some ulterior scheme?

He raised his head with a jerk. Lydia was standing in the door. She had changed her black dress for one that was white and soft and clinging. Her dark hair was drawn back smoothly from her brow defining the pure oval of her face. In her cheeks a spot of color burned, and her gentian eyes were brilliant with repressed feeling.

For a bare second Ripley stared at her, the picture printing itself on his memory; then he sprang up and went to her with outstretched hand.

"It is good to see you again," he exclaimed with a warmth that might have covered weeks of absence instead of hours. "I was going to venture to call in a day or so, and it was a pleasant surprise when your note——"

"Pleasant?" She looked at him wonderingly. "I said you were in danger. Uncle Paul pointed it out to me, and I wanted you to know."

"It was pleasant at that," insisted Ripley, smiling. "As for danger—it seems to be bred in the day's work in Powderville. It is only a matter of degree."

"I loathe it! I loathe it!" she burst out. "The dreadful wickedness of it all; the mean, cheap ugliness. If I could have known——"

She left off with a hopeless gesture and dropped into a chair by the table. Ripley resumed his seat. It was across from hers. He moved the lamp to one side a little that he might the better see her. Through the open windows the unhallowed merriment of Little Hell flooded in. As he gazed at the girl she seemed to him like some rare sweet flower blooming in a Stygian waste of ashes.

"Suppose," he suggested gently, "you tell me what this threatened danger is. Then we can discuss it. Has it, by any chance, something to do with this—" his finger tapped the newspaper he had flung down—"this notice of the *Trumpet?*"

"Yes, yes!" she cried, leaning forward earnestly. "They say the paper is to be

used to blackmail the people in business here."

" 'They?' Who are 'they?' " asked Ripley quietly.

The girl's voice lowered almost to a whisper. She leaned still farther forward, her rounded arms resting on the table.

"Mr. Ripley, this place has changed my uncle. Even in this short time I have seen it. He is kind to me—he tries to be—but he is not the same as when we were all together in New York. And I am afraid for him. He has sworn that if Mr. Evans tries to run him out of business he will fight him to the blood. And it means that you, too, as editor will be in danger."

"What does he advise me to do?" Ripley queried curiously.

"That you go away before the trouble comes."

"Oh! And let the next man get it?"

"Ah," breathed the girl, "but I shall owe no debt to him."

Ripley directed an odd look at her.

"And Evans—do you think I would be playing square with him? You have seen him. Does he answer to the type of blackmailer?"

Her eyes wavered from his. He could see the blood dyeing her white neck and flowing to her face.

"He seemed to me—oh, how can I tell!" she cried. "I was afraid of him, and yet I—I was not displeased. Uncle Paul had a shocking scene with him, and through it all he was unmoved. I liked him for that."

She refrained from mentioning Red Pete; he had been troubled enough with the fellow.

"Yes," said Ripley a little somberly, "I know how it is. Now, if I should tell you that I don't believe Evans intends to misuse his paper; that I have reason to believe quite the contrary, would you—Lydia—advise me to run away and leave him?"

The flush grew deeper as he called her thus, and her eyes darkened, though not with rebuke.

"You could never convince Uncle Paul of what you say. I don't understand it all, but it is certain there will be trouble, and you are in danger. I know my people—you are in danger!" She repeated it with urgency.

"I am waiting to be advised," persisted the young man with a lurking smile. "Would you have me cut and run like a boy afraid of the dark?"

There was the sound of persons tramping up the stairs. The girl hesitated, then her eyes glowed on him.

"No!" she whispered fiercely. "I—I should despise a man like that."

His smile broke full, and he put out his hand across the table. She met it with her own, and for a moment they clung together.

"My name is Joe," Ripley said to her simply. "Will you remember it?"

"Yes—Joe," she answered as simply, and sat back waiting.

Paul Brown came into the room. Two men were with him. He introduced them as Mr. Lekas and Mr. Chekales, and sent an inquiring glance at his niece.

"You have explained to the gentleman?" he asked.

Ripley forestalled her reply.

"Accurately," he asserted. "I have told Miss Brown that I am unable to agree with your position. You are quite wrong in it, to my honest belief. I shall stay, of course."

Brown's companions shrugged and passed a word to him in Greek. Lydia, seemingly in response to it, rose. Ripley stood up.

"If you will wait, Mr. Ripley," Brown spoke out, "perhaps we can make the matter clearer to you. Lydia, some Capri is cooling. Will you see, presently, that it is brought in?"

The girl, with a studied bow to Ripley, left the room; but he caught her eyes and found himself filled with a singular content. He turned briskly to Brown.

"I must ask you to make it short," he requested. "I've a lot before me tonight."

They sat down. Brown began at once.

"This Evans—have you known him long?"

"Since this morning."

"Ah! Then you do not know him at all. I pray you listen to me carefully. He is a swine, this man—greedy, gouging, and without mercy. I came here with the rush. I have money. I look to buy and prosper. But no! He has bought it all, this land. He will not sell, not at any price. He builds, and he rents by the month at a sum—ah, Heaven!—that pays him in hand, at once, down to the last nail driven. Is it not so, Leonardi—Alexander?" His jet eyes glittered feverishly.

The two addressed sank their heads in their shoulders, and grunted wofully.

"But wait!" continued Brown, turning back to Ripley. "I rent of him this place. I establish it. It succeeds. The money comes. Well, what then? The next month my rent is increased. And the month after —and after—and after. God! This pig he would devour me! And now comes this paper—this *Trumpet.* Do you not see what follows? We do not perhaps pay more rent; but we pay all the same through the nose. We must advertise, at a charge—ha! it takes not a Solomon to divine it—that is robbery. If we do not advertise, we go. He kicks us out into the street. There is no help for us—we go! And the business we have built up—it, too, is gone! But we will not fatten this already bursting pig with another drachma—another dime. It is the end!"

He paused, breathing heavily. His compatriots were laboring in sympathy with him. Ripley, though, did not find the sight amusing. He discerned beneath it a real menace. And the remembrance came to him ominously of Evans's rate-card, of his easy assurance that the ads would float in of themselves. Yet he clung to that other assurance of the man—that he was going to clean up this pest-hole with his paper. He spoke with slow distinctness:

"I am concerned only with the *Trumpet.* I think I can promise that legitimate business interests will not suffer from it."

"You do not know this Evans," Brown protested. "Have I not shown you that?"

"I take him as I find him," rejoined Ripley. "To cut this matter short, gentlemen, I am here to edit the *Trumpet,* and I'm going to do it."

A rapid interchange of speech among the Greeks ensued. Ripley wished he could understand them. Then Brown addressed him.

"I am sorry you will not be warned. My friends regret it. You are misguided, and will find it out. Against you personally we have nothing, but as the editor of this paper—" He raised his shoulders, then summoned a smile. "But come, let us part in good humor. A glass of wine—ah, it is here! Lydia herself has brought it."

The girl, in fact, was entering the room bearing a tray with bottles and glasses. Brown hastened to relieve her of it.

"Mr. Ripley is leaving. He is pressed for time," he said to her. And, in his own tongue—"Go! We must have a parting word with him."

She disappeared. Brown placed the tray on the table and busied himself with the bottle. Mr. Chekales, speaking for the first time in English, called Ripley's attention to the window. He jerked a stubby thumb at it.

"Out there," he proclaimed, "it is well to keep within the lights. And then——"

He spread his palms to indicate that even then anything might happen.

"Well, some day, let us hope, there'll be a house-cleaning, and a sure enough town to follow," returned Ripley with a laugh.

Brown was at his side tendering a glass of wine. When all were furnished and standing, Brown bowed ceremoniously to Ripley.

"Till we meet again," he said blandly.

"With a better understanding," amended Ripley.

They drank. Mr. Lekas and Mr. Chekales immediately sought their hats.

"They have engagements," Brown acquainted Ripley. "And you—we have kept you too long already. Let us go."

He preceded them down the stairs. Mr. Lekas and Mr. Chekales marched off at once. Brown did not again offer the hospitality of his table to Ripley. His eyes were gloomy as he watched him go.

Ripley, after a few steps, stopped and debated with himself his program for the remainder of the evening. First, he must dine. He had thought of getting a satisfying meal at the New York Restaurant, but in view of what had just passed he was not inclined to return to the place for the present.

There was another restaurant directly over the way between two dance halls. He decided to try it. He was feeling faint. A burning coal seemed lodged in the pit of his stomach. In his head were strange buzzing sounds. And his eyes were heavy, as if fringed with lead.

He wondered dully if some swift sickness had overtaken him. With an effort he shook himself into action and plunged across the street. It was a queer zigzag progress, and he angrily tried to straighten his course. He brought up at a dance hall instead of at the restaurant, and he stood weaving back and forth on his feet in a sort of drunken rhythm.

"Wha's the matter wi' me?" he muttered thickly.

He saw blindly a woman bending over from her table, looking at him with hard, curious eyes. Then a curtain shut her out from sight, and he felt himself diving into deep dark depths.

VII

"R-I-P-L-E-Y."

From a far distance, so it seemed to him, Ripley heard his name spelled out, heard it repeated again and again in a coarse, mocking voice. He roused himself and endeavored to take account of his surroundings.

He was lying on a narrow shelf. Above him, high up in the wall, was a small barred opening through which sunlight was streaming in. In spite of this ventilation a foul odor was all about him. He raised himself up on his elbow. Before him was an iron-grated door and, across a corridor, was a similar door through which he saw the inflamed features of Red Pete gloating on him.

"Soused to the glims!" jeered the brute. "And you the Holy Moses bloke the moll is stuck on! If it wasn't for this mosquito-nettin' between us I'd change your map till she wouldn't know it."

Ripley's head dropped back. He was sick and dizzy. He attempted to collect his thoughts and in doing this relapsed into his stupor. After a time he roused again. Another voice than Red Pete's reached him. Dimly he recognized it, and lay still listening. It was Evans talking, and to Pete who, it appeared, had been set free.

"This is the finish," Evans was saying. "We are quits, Jackson. Here are fifty dollars for you, and you'd better beat it out of this town before something sudden happens to you."

"So you throw me down!" It was a snarl from Pete. "All right, I'll pull my freight; but lemme put you wise to this lobbygow you've taken on—this Ripley bo."

"Well?"

"They towed him in here last night like a drowned hog—stewed to a soup. You'd of had to drop him down a chimney to make him stand up on his feet. Lamp him. There he is!" A grating laugh followed.

There was a movement in the corridor, and instinctively Ripley closed his eyes. He did not want Evans to know that he had heard, and he was sure he would take a look at him. Pete's mocking laugh reached him again. Then the two moved off.

Presently Evans returned with a man who unlocked Ripley's cell. They came in and Evans called to him—twice. The second time Ripley opened his eyes; then with a supreme effort he managed to sit up.

"I'm deathly sick," he brought out painfully, for his tongue was dry and stiff.

Evans surveyed him critically. He placed a finger on Ripley's eye and raised the lid.

"I thought so," he said. He addressed the man standing by. "Anything on him, Lozier, when they brought him in?"

"Picked bare," Lozier replied. "It was in front of Barraco's place he fell. Been drinking in there, I reckon."

"You pack of fools!" Evans shot at him. "You ought to have called a doctor, not the junk-cart. He was drugged."

Evans's car was at the door, and they got Ripley into it. He gulped in great drafts of fresh air as they whirled along and felt his wits gradually coming back. Evans said nothing. They pulled up at the Palace Pharmacy. Evans went in and returned with a glass filled with a cloudy, pungent liquid.

"Drink it," he directed. "They are putting up another dose for later on. We are going to the *Trumpet* after you've had something to eat."

He went back into the drug-store. Ripley, his head rapidly clearing, took notice of a card in the window. There were others, of course, placed about the town. It read:

> The first number of the Powderville
> **WEEKLY TRUMPET**
> will be on sale Saturday. Send in your ads. R. B. Evans

" 'Send in your ads.' "

Ripley read the line again. Was it a request or a mandate? If the latter, why not, when all was said? 'Beware the Greeks bringing gifts.' Brown had shown himself no better than the rest of these conscienceless scoundrels. Why not squeeze them to a pulp? They deserved it.

Coming out Evans saw Ripley's gaze fixed on the card.

"Can we make it?" he wanted to know as he took the wheel. "You've lost a night on the job."

"We'll make it if it's only a folio and half of it boiler plate," Ripley answered grimly. "Where are you going for breakfast?" he inquired as Evans started the car.

"To the New York."

"Why, no, I'd rather not, I think," decided Ripley. "Not this morning."

Evans looked him over and thought he could guess the reason. Ripley's clothes were a sorry ruck of wrinkles and he was unshaven and unwashed. Evans circled to the further side of the street.

"Here's McGowan's," he said. "Bad—but not the worst."

As they were coming out after breakfasting Ripley sighted Red Pete entering a bar a few doors higher up. He was doubtless bidding his friends a fond farewell preparatory to "beating it" from town. Evans did not see the beast, and Ripley found no reason for calling attention to him.

They drove to the *Trumpet*, and when the editor was shaved and washed Evans said:

"What's your loss? Take an inventory."

"I've done it," Ripley told him with a wry face. "Cash, one hundred sixty-five. A Howard watch initialed 'J. L. R.' And your Colt."

Evans handed him some bills.

"It's on your next week's pay, so no thanks. I'll get your watch, and I've another Colt. Now, how did it happen?"

It was a question Ripley was expecting, and yet when it came he was not just ready with an answer. The chug of the gasoline engine and the clank of the linotype working on his Death Valley copy jarred the air while he hesitated.

"I took a glass of wine," he began.

"Wine?" Evans put the question bruskly. "Where? They don't serve it in Barraco's. Not in any of the dance halls. I mean not such as you would drink."

Ripley abandoned subterfuge.

"Look here, Evans. I wish you wouldn't press me on this point; not right now, anyway. I have a reason for it. I am trying to think out—oh, hang it, let it go at that, won't you?"

Evans was silent for a moment. Then—

"Can you make copy of it?"

"I could, but I'm not sure that I will."

Evans scanned him narrowly.

"Take care, Ripley," he counseled. "I am entitled to fair play. If the girl is mixed up in this I want to know it."

It was exactly this that Ripley was trying to decide for himself. Had Lydia been cognizant of Brown's intentions toward him? It was evident that it was the man's idea to put mortal fear into him, regardless whether it led to his undoing, his death, possibly, at the hand of some thug. He wanted him to know that he would stop at nothing in the stand he had taken against the boss of Powderville.

But Lydia! She had brought the wine into them, and he had noticed Brown's swift aside to her. Could she have known? Pshaw! It was inconceivable; and after the intimate talk they had had! He recalled the handclasp she had given him, his name as she had spoken it. No! Rather might the heavens fall before he would doubt her.

"You don't answer me," Evans challenged.

An interruption came. Mack poked his head in at the door giving entrance from the business office. He spoke to Ripley.

"There's a lady——"

But Ripley, looking past him, had seen her. He sprang up with an ejaculation that brought Evans also to his feet.

"Lydia!" Ripley pushed by the foreman.

Evans heard the girl cry out:

"Ah! You are safe! You are unharmed!"

"Right as nails," Ripley assured her. "But why—how did you know? Good Heavens! You should not have come here. Your uncle——"

"Oh, I could not have believed the wickedness of it!" she gasped. "I saw you. I was watching at the window. And when you fell I would have gone to you, but he would not let me. He locked me in my room, and I have just succeeded in slipping out. I—I had to know. I inquired the way—Ah!"

She drew away from him and her eyes grew startled. Evans stood in the door looking at her. He had motioned Mack to pass on through the room to the back.

"I was asking Mr. Ripley how it happened," he said. "I think he was going to refuse to tell. Shall you?"

His tone was new to Ripley. It was mild and wondrously persuasive.

"Oh, I say!" he remonstrated. "This, after all, is a personal matter with me. Evans. And it is Miss Brown's uncle——"

"It shall be as she says," Evans cut in, his eyes dwelling on the girl's.

"Why—yes—I will tell you," she replied. "You ought to know."

"Then I will do it." Ripley took a decided stand. "It is not a pleasant task for Miss Brown."

He briefly sketched the happening, beginning with his receipt of Lydia's note. It was a bare statement of fact in which Lydia was made to figure inconspicuously. And he glossed over Brown's arraignment of Evans. It did not seem to him quite fair, in these circumstances, to dilate on it.

Evans listened without comment, though with an occasional veiled glance at the girl. He surmised that the narrator was withholding details not material to the story but which, could he know them, would determine for him Ripley's progress with Lydia. That he had made headway her presence here was proof.

"I don't imagine anything more will come of it; they simply wanted to scare me off," Ripley finished.

"You appear to have overlooked a point," remarked Evans quietly. "This is not entirely a personal matter with you, as you have suggested. It's a thrust at me over your shoulder; and when a man strikes at me I strike back."

Lydia caught at her breath.

"Oh, by Jove!" exclaimed Ripley impatiently. "What's the use, Evans, of making a fuss about it? And besides, to strike at Paul Brown is to strike at Miss Brown. I don't think you would care to do that. He is all she has."

Evans gave him a dangerous look.

"I don't have to be reminded of Miss Brown's position," he countered. "It is that which I am considering."

"What am I to say?" faltered Lydia miserably. "I have no excuse to offer for my uncle. I can not defend his act. Yet—Ah, I am most unhappily placed!"

Ripley bit his lip, choking back the comforting word on it. He took a fidgety stride or two about the office while waiting for Evans to speak, quite forgetful of conventional restraints.

"Lydia," said Evans, and she started nervously, "Mr. Ripley did not tell it all, yet I know the hue your uncle painted me to him in. And you know it. Black. But there may be another side to me you have not guessed. Perhaps—well, we will leave it there; it might not interest you. But this may; for the future I can not promise, but for this time I sall not strike back at your uncle. We will call it—" there was the faint suggestion of a smile about his mouth—"Mr. Ripley's personal concern."

The girl flushed vividly under his gaze. There was something winning about the man—his voice, his manner—that moved her. She held out an impulsive hand.

"You are good," she stammered. "No matter what they say, I shall remember this."

"Evans!" cried out Ripley sharply, and pointed to the door.

Paul Brown was coming in; and he was at a white heat of passion.

VIII

"SO, IT is here I find you!" Brown hurled the words at Lydia furiously. "Hand in hand with my enemy. Thou shameless one!"

He brought up at the office-rail, a quivering finger leveled at the girl. She had snatched her hand away from Evans, and stood confronting her uncle. The color ebbed from her face. It was white as his own.

"You made a catspaw of me," she accused. "A decoy, a tool, a jackal. I came to see if blood guiltiness was on your head."

"And I must say, Brown, you have an infernal cheek to venture here after poisoning me," put in Ripley, advancing to the rail. He hoped to divert the Greek's attention to himself.

Evans was mute. He ignored Brown. His eyes were only for the girl.

"You were warned," Brown flared at Ripley, and turned from him to his niece. But she anticipated him, speaking hotly.

"Warned! Why, yes, he was warned—warned that danger threatened him unless he played the coward's part and ran away. And because he chose not to do this; because he would not desert a trust; because he believed in the man he is in business with, you sent him to what well might have been his death. Shameless? I would be such were I not here to beg forgiveness for myself and you." Her voice broke. "Oh, Uncle Paul, Uncle Paul!"

Evans stirred slightly, shifting his gaze to Brown. Otherwise he gave no sign. Brown, his features shockingly distorted, leaned across the rail. He was quite evidently beside himself.

"Forgiveness! For me?" he stormed. "For me who would but protect myself against this robber of my till, this pig whose snout is rooting always deeper in my gains, who is plotting now to use this newspaper to plunder all of us of our last dollar! You beg forgiveness for me of him? God! Rather would I have seen you dead!" He lifted writhing hands to Heaven.

Ripley waited for a sudden move from Evans. But he remained singularly quiet; only he brought his eyes back to Lydia.

"Uncle Paul," she exclaimed with low intensity, "you do not know what you say. I—oh, what has this led us to!"

In her distress she clasped her hands on her breast, looking with piteous indecision at her uncle. He made a violent gesture of repulsion; and it was then that Evans spoke.

"It has led us to the truth, though that virtue does not flourish here," he said. "I have made this man pay, as I have made them all. I could do it, and I did. That is one side. The other—what is his charge for food? A beefsteak is two dollars, four times what it costs him to the griddle. At first his charge was one dollar; then one dollar and a quarter, a half, three-quarters, and now two. And the same down through the bill. Why? Because he found he could get the price. Well, I get mine. In what lies the difference between us?"

"Ah, yes! He gets his. Of a truth he gets his!" Brown's voice rose to a scream.

Evans disregarded him. Very gently he pressed his question on the girl:

"Can you tell me? I would like to know."

"I can not distinguish any difference," she answered with a brave uplifting of her head. "It is unworthy of you both. Uncle Paul——"

But the man uttered a loud cry, and lapping his middle finger over the first darted them at her venomously. His eyes glowed with a maniac fire.

"Traitress!" he hissed. "No longer art thou kin of mine. Thou hast chosen, and so thou shalt abide—the sport of him who whistles thee. Thou ——!"

HE WAS gone. The word he had hurled at her was Greek, but as the two men within the rail saw her shrink and wither under it they understood. She sank down at the table, and putting out her arms buried her face in them; and thus she sat motionless and dumb. The clanking of the linotype was stilled now, and the place seemed oddly quiet.

Ripley's nails bit into his palms. He glanced at Evans. The cold face was twitching in all its lines, and the sweat stood forth on it in glistening beads under the terrible restraint the man had placed on himself. But it eased, this pressure, and at length passed. Evans went to the girl and touched her bowed head as he might have touched a sleeping child. He called her name softly.

"Lydia! Lydia! Look up. His anger was for me, not you. He will repent. He will come for you. It will all be made right. I shall see him and make it so. Have courage."

A long, tremulous breath escaped her, but she did not move. Ripley spoke.

"You have friends, Lydia—two! Hold that in mind whatever comes."

They waited awkwardly, for she did not answer. Then, as it dawned upon them that, in the shame heaped on her, to be alone was her one great need, they stole silently into the neighboring room and closed the door.

Evans strode to the window and remained there, looking out. Ripley paced the floor. No word passed between them for minutes, yet their thoughts ran in a common channel. Neither of them had any real hope of Brown's return. The man was plainly crazed from dwelling on his fancied wrongs. And Lydia! She had but this one relative in the world. What was to become of her? Where was she to go? To stay in such a hole as this was impossible to her.

"Evans," broke out Ripley, "we must talk this over."

Evans turned from the window with a warning gesture. He pointed to the wall. It was of simple deal and thin. He beckoned Ripley to follow, and they passed into the composing-room. The linotype operator was working over his machine, and Mack was proving up a galley of type bars. The men did not look at them. Something had happened up front, they knew, and it was in their code to appear oblivious of it.

Evans opened a door in the rear of the room, and they stepped out into the free air.

"Now talk," he said. "And don't be long. We must go back to her."

"Not until we have something definite to

say," objected Ripley. "Are you thinking of seeing Brown?"

"It depends."

"On what?"

"We will come to that. Go on."

"Well, there is one thing certain: Lydia can't stay in Powderville. It is out of the question."

"Agreed. Go on."

"She has told me she had no choice but to come here to her uncle. I gathered from it that she has no money."

Evans dismissed this as of little consequence.

"Go on," he urged.

"Then what is she to do?" demanded Ripley. "She is alone and penniless. She hasn't a place to lay her head. Evans, it has got me going. I—on my word, I'd give my arm to help her. But how?"

Evans sent him a straight look.

"There is a solution of the problem you don't seem to have thought of," he observed.

Ripley's eyes questioned him, and suddenly he was enlightened. It came somehow as a shock to him. He rebelled against it.

"Why, good Heavens, man, you've known her not a full day!" he exclaimed.

"Very nearly as long as you have," returned the other coolly. "Time in this is relative: a day, or a year, it would be the same with me."

"But with her, and as she is placed? Can't you see how it would seem to her?"

"How?"

"That is if pity prompts you. How can she know it is something else?"

"That is up to me—to make her understand. I am playing square with you, Ripley. I couldn't do less after yesterday, and after what she said of you in there. I shall see Brown. I shall make concessions to him. If I fail, then I shall speak to Lydia. Meanwhile you have your chance—if you want it. You have not declared yourself."

A cloud lifted, as it were, from Ripley's mental vision. He recognized, swiftly as it had come, incredible as it would have seemed had it been predicted to him a week—yes, a day—ago, that he had reached to man's supreme desire. His woman had been discovered to him.

"You may consider me declared, Evans," he said gravely. "But I shall wait."

Evans regarded him thoughtfully, as if there were something on his mind he would give speech to. But the impulse passed. He swung around to the door.

"Let us go back," he proposed. "Perhaps now she is feeling better."

They went in, and through Ripley's room to the office. But when they had opened the door they paused, staring blankly around.

Lydia was gone.

IX

A SCRAP of paper hastily scrawled was lying on the table. Ripley pounced on it. He read it out to Evans:

"My Friends:

"I am going to my uncle's. I have done no wrong, and he will know it when his anger cools. Your goodness is a comfort to me. Lydia."

Evans took the note from Ripley and read it himself. Then he carefully placed it in his pocket. It was his as much as the other's.

"She has done well," he approved.

"To go back to that crazy Greek? She is brave!" cried Ripley.

"I have known that," said Evans in his impassive way.

He left Ripley with this and drove off in his car.

What did he mean? Ripley asked himself. Evans had seen Lydia only once before, so far as he knew. What had happened at the restaurant to prove her courage? He sat thinking over his ridiculously brief acquaintance with the man which still had brought them to such close association. He seemed to be above board in his dealings; and yet there was Red Pete, an unmitigated scoundrel if ever there was one. Evans had cried him quits, it was true, but what was the dark bond between them until now?

He shook himself free of these thoughts. He had work before him. It was ten o'clock. He would take in Little Hell now from end to end and get steam on with his copy. At night he would look it over again for human interest stories—colorful incidents, character sketches, and the devil knew what else. Anything might happen, judging from his own experience.

Mack came up front as Ripley was starting out. He was grumbling with the stock grievance of his craft.

"We're out of copy. That was only a bite you gave us."

"Sorry, Mack, but I got sidetracked last night," Ripley proffered as excuse. "I'll turn in a bunch for tomorrow. I'm going after it now. Can't you lay your operator off?"

"Not on your life!" The foreman spoke out explosively. "I stole Hinckley off the *News* in Johnsburg. I'll take no chance of his flying the coop." His curiosity got the better of him. "I sat up for you last night," he hinted.

"It's a bad habit. Don't do it again," Ripley reproved him with a sober face. "Have you seen the window cards?"

Mack had cherished the hope of leading up by artful degrees to the lady visitor, and his curiosity having been so summarily denied, his tone, as he replied, was injured.

"Yes, I've seen 'em. A fat chance we have of getting out this rag by Saturday, the way it looks."

"If there's a man top side of clay can do it my bet is down on you," Ripley cajoled him with a fraternal grin. "And say—about the ads. I suppose they are not likely to begin coming in till tomorrow. But if they should, take care of them for me, will you? I've got to lean a lot on you just now, but I won't forget it, old scout."

"Oh, that's all right." Mack was mollified. "Sure. We got to pull together. And I've got a job-man due here tomorrow. I'll need him. What are our rates?"

Ripley told him, and asked:

"How about it, and with no circulation? Do you think they'll come across?"

"Don't the card say 'Send in your ads?' "

Ripley nodded.

"And it ain't signed? Well, then they'll send 'em in," said Mack with a finality that should have closed the argument.

"But," contended Ripley, "suppose they don't do it? It's got me guessing, this thing has."

Mack chuckled and bit into a plug of tobacco he had been grappling for in a pocket under his apron string.

"If they don't," he remarked, "I reckon there'll be some shops to rent in Little Hell."

RIPLEY returned at half-past five.

"No ads yet," Mack reported; "but they'll be coming in tomorrow."

"All right," Ripley answered abstractedly, and waved him away.

He had "done" Little Hell on this trip as thoroughly as his time permitted. But there was one thing, though foreign to his quest, that troubled him. At Baracco's dance-hall he had stopped for some time hoping he might catch a glimpse of Lydia at her sitting-room windows across the way. But they were closed and the shades were drawn; and they remained so.

It smote Ripley with a foreboding of disaster. It was as if Death had laid his hand on some one there and this curtained stillness was the sign of it. The thought haunted him. Were it not that it might make matters worse for Lydia he would have gone over and spoken to Brown.

The thought continued to haunt him as he drew up to his typewriter and slipped a sheet of paper in the feed.

"Oh, confound it, I'm a fool!" he exclaimed impatiently.

He lit a cigarette and set to at his work.

Mack peered in on him once or twice, and went away complacently assured of copious copy for the morrow. Seven o'clock came, then eight, and Ripley was still pounding at his machine. He had apportioned his material into a number of stories, and he glowed with the knowledge that there was a punch to each. It was growing dark, and Mack looked in again.

"Better stop and fire up with a plate of grub," he advised. "You'll be running down."

"I had a snack at five, and Evans will be here pretty soon to run over my stuff," Ripley informed him. "Guess I'll have to light up, though, to make the finish."

He left his chair, stretched himself with a satisfied grunt and took a lamp from the desk-top. He put a match to it, placed it on the desk-slide convenient to his typewriter-stand and resumed his seat.

"You'd better pull up your window-shades," prompted Mack. "I always do. I've a notion it ain't exactly wholesome to sit around in the light in this shop after dark. Some people don't want to hear us blow our Trumpet."

"Sneak it, you old croaker!" Ripley jeered at him. "I need the air. It's hot."

"Oh, well, it's your funeral," grumbled the foreman. "I'm going to hunt some hash. But keep the lamp between you and the window."

Ripley typed on for half an hour longer, then stopped.

" 'Thirty,' by George!" he proclaimed; and with the sigh of a man who has done his day's work well he got to his feet. Evans ought to drop in now at any moment. Afterward he would get something to eat.

He picked up the lamp with the idea of having a quiet look around the place. But he had moved only a few steps when a shot rang out—and he was in the dark. The lamp had been shattered in his hand.

"Great Scott!" he yelped.

He jumped out of range from the window, badly frightened. Another shot echoed in the street, and the sound of a struggle. Above it he heard Evans calling to him—

"Ripley, are you hurt?"

Ripley sprang to the window.

"Never touched me," he sang out. "What's up?"

"Make a light and come to the door," Evans bade him.

Ripley groped his way into the office. There was a lamp there, he remembered. He found it, lighted it, leaped the railing, and flung the street door open. Some one was being pushed up to it—a whimpering, wordless creature, his hands pinioned behind him in Evans's iron grip. As the light met this person's face Ripley fell away a step dumfounded. It was Paul Brown. Evans pushed him in through the door and kicked it to. He spoke to Ripley.

"I've got his gun. Run your hand over him for a knife."

Ripley obeyed, but found nothing.

"Close those shutters," directed Evans. "We want to keep this business quiet. He tried to pot me, too, as I ran up on him."

When the light was shut in Evans shoved Brown through the railing gate and turned him loose. The man slunk away from him. He peered about the room as if seeking something, the back of one hand ceaselessly tapping the palm of the other. Ripley felt his flesh creep as he looked at him.

"Evans!" he whispered. "He's not right in his head."

"Brown, what put you up to this?" Evans questioned, though not harshly. "You will come to no harm from us. Speak out. Why did you do it?"

The Greek broke through his silence with a passionate wail.

"Ah, God! I can not find her. Where is she? Why do you keep her from me? All day have I waited, telling no one, and now I have come for her—to kill if she has been wronged." His voice rose to an eerie pitch. "Lydia, I am here! Come to me, child of my brother's blood!"

He stood listening, then went to peering about him again. Ripley stood as if frozen. An odd, gulping sound came from Evans. With a stride he was at Brown's side. He pressed him gently down into a chair.

"There's a mistake somewhere, Mr. Brown," he said. "Do you understand what I am saying?"

"I can not find her," muttered the other. "All day have I waited——"

An exclamation burst from Ripley.

"Evans, something is wrong. Let us go to his place."

He told of the drawn shades and his watch on them. As he ended Mack came in. He gazed perplexedly about, but Evans brought him up with a sharp command.

"Stay with this man, Mack. Don't let any one in. Come, Ripley."

They hurried silently along, only stopping for a moment at the Palace Pharmacy. It was to send for Evans's car—a seven-passenger this time. Then they relentlessly bored on through the throngs in Little Hell. Angry scowls met them, but with a glance at the white, set faces of the two they ceased. Danger was written on them. At the restaurant Evans grasped a waiter by the arm. He said to him:

"Answer in a word — has Miss Lydia Brown been here since morning. Do you know or don't you?"

The man shrank under the searching gaze fastened on him. Truth leaped to his lips.

"She has not been here," he answered. "And now Paul is gone without a word."

The drawn curtains were simply the expression of the crazed Greek's sense of loss.

X

EVANS said something to a policeman who was passing as they issued from the restaurant. He cleared off with surprising alacrity. Ripley was to know the reason shortly.

They turned into a dance-hall. Men and women gave way before Evans as before a fiery blast. His eyes were stabbing needle-points. He emanated destruction. At the bar he spoke to a man.

"Jake. Get him. Quick."

The man jumped to obey. In a moment

he was back with a paunchy, puffy person who seemed to be considerably fluttered.

"Yes, Mr. Evans. What is it? What can I do for you?" he fawned.

"A lady—a lady, understand—is missing. Miss Lydia Brown, Paul Brown's niece. Young, blue eyes, dark hair. A thousand dollars to the one who locates her. Shoot the word around in every hall—to every woman. I'll be waiting in my office."

They left the place. Ripley groaned aloud.

"Evans, you don't believe— My God!" He shuddered at his thought.

"None of that, Ripley. You can snivel later. It's action now."

Evans's tone was icy. Ripley pulled himself together with a jerk.

"Right!" he snapped. "Now come with me. You can like it or not, and be —— to you, but it's borne in on me that your friend Red Pete is in this. I'll take you to where I saw him last, when we were coming out of McGowan's this morning."

"I've told him to cut this town," Evans stated.

"Oh, to the devil with that!" growled Ripley. His wrath was up. "It's not what you said, it's what the beast did I'm after. You gave him money this morning——"

"So you heard?" Evans looked at him.

"Yes, if you want to know. You called him Jackson, and said you were quits with him. It was none of my business then, but now—well, you'll have to do some explaining, Evans, if he's at the bottom of this."

"If he is!" The break was ominous.

They came to the barroom, a dirty sty, reeking with vile odors. Ripley let Evans do the talking; everybody knew him. But he unearthed nothing of advantage. Pete had taken a couple of drinks, and said he was going to Johnsburg. That was all. Ripley, his brows knotted in a frown, stopped Evans when they were in the air again.

"We've got to find this man," he decreed. "Look at the facts. It was nine o'clock when we finished breakfast. It was a few minutes after when I saw Jackson going into this place. It couldn't have been more than twenty minutes later when Lydia came to us. The restaurant is on this side of the street. She would have had to pass here and — isn't it plain — Jackson saw her through the window and followed her. When she left us——"

"Well, what?"

"That's for us to find out."

Evans muttered a word to himself. His look was black as the pit. He lunged across the street to his car which was waiting for him. Ripley bolted into the seat beside him. They kept the horn going, and by a miracle wormed through the crowd without a mishap.

In two minutes they were at the lockup. The horn screamed continuously until a man ran out, cursing fluently. He checked himself when he saw who it was.

"Get this!" Evans flung at him. "I want Red Pete Jackson. Two hundred to the man who takes him."

They dashed off. Even in this hour of stress a pang of jealousy shot through Ripley. Money was this man's power to save Lydia, while he— He crushed down the ignoble thought.

"Where next?" he asked.

"The *Trumpet*. We must take Brown home."

They found him still maundering in his chair. Mack showed relief at seeing them.

"Nutty as a hazel bush," he pronounced. "We've been as sociable as a pair of dead cats."

"Give Mr. Ripley your .45," Evans ordered. He touched the Greek on the shoulder. "You are going home, Brown. We are going to find Lydia for you. Come now, hurry."

Brown made no resistance. He appeared to be sunk in his disordered fancies. They seated him in the tonneau of the car, and Ripley got in with him. Mack followed them out.

"Boss, let me go along," he begged. "I've kind of guessed this trouble, and I'd like to be in on it. Everything is shut and locked."

Evans shook his head.

"Your place is here," he told him. "Stick to it."

They left Brown in charge of his own people, and drove to Evans's office. It was quarter after nine. In all, from the time they had first raced out from the *Trumpet* building, but half an hour had passed.

Evans went into his bedroom. When he came back he was in a gray flannel shirt and an old coat and trousers. A cap was pulled down on his head. He held another in his hand.

"Sorry, I can't fit you out," he said, "but we are not of a build. Perhaps you can manage this, though." He tendered the cap to Ripley. "That stiff hat will bother

you. And here's an extra clip for your gun." Outwardly he was his cool, composed self again.

They settled themselves to wait for news. They spoke but little. Ripley was trying to puzzle out a problem. From the *Trumpet* office to Main Street the way was along open ground, and from there to Paul Brown's it was less than six hundred yards; and yet somewhere in this short stretch Lydia had disappeared as entirely as if her body had been resolved into its primal elements.

Ripley was beginning to feel less sure of Red Pete Jackson's hand in the mystery. Even in Powderville, where violence was ordinary, to abduct a thoroughly alive and vigorous young woman in broad day without a hue and cry seemed an impossible performance.

"How in Heaven's name was it done?" In his torture of spirit he uttered his thought aloud.

Evans glanced at him, but offered no reply. At ten-thirty came a commotion on the stairs. Evans whipped the door open. Two policemen entered with an ashen negro between them. "Chief" was lettered on the soft hat of one of the men; and it was he who spoke, without premise or preface:

"She's at Boston Kate's house in the Valley."

"God!" Ripley leaped from his chair. "All this time!"

Evans made him a quieting gesture.

"Go on, Colter," he requested. "Was it Jackson?"

"Yes. I've been rounding up these nigger hackmen, and this moke is the one who drove them down to Kate's. He's got a closed carriage. Pete comes running up to him in front of Bill Curley's place, hands him a tenspot, and tells him to drive around the corner where your printing-plant is."

"He had a gun on me all de time, Chief," moaned the negro.

"Shut up, you!" Colter struck him in the face. "Pete must 'a' spotted the girl going in," he proceeded. "Anyhow they wait there on the chance she'll come out soon and by herself. Pete is laying low in the hack out of sight. They see Paul Brown go in and come out. Then they see the girl. When she comes up, Pete jumps at her, has his coat over her head before she can let out a yip, and shoves her in the hack. She faints, of course, and it wouldn't take him half a minute anyway. And his luck is with him; nobody passing."

Evans cut him off.

"That will do. Get a car and some men. I'll give you ten minutes or we'll go without you."

"Lock him up, Ed."

Colter sent the negro reeling to his subordinate, and clattered down the stairs.

XI

THERE was no moon. With lights out the two cars passed over the railroad tracks and slid noiselessly down the hill. Evans's machine led. Chief Colter was on the seat with him. Ripley and another man were in the rear seat. There were five men in the second car.

The houses at this end of the settlement were scattering. Each had considerable ground around it, insuring a sort of dreadful privacy. Farther on they were set closer together, the whole widening into an arc cut up with lanes and foot-paths. It was from there trouble would come if shooting started.

Colter flashed a torch back at the second car, and it stopped. Evans stopped his.

"We will get out here," Colter said. "It's the fifth house on the right."

They left a man in each car with instructions to follow slowly, and so maneuver that at a signal they could throw their headlights, one down the street and the other full on Boston Kate's. Four men were told off to make a detour to the rear of the place. Colter, Evans and Ripley waited till it was thought the others had reached their stations. Then they moved silently on. Colter carried a fireman's ax.

It was a two-story shack. The door was closed, but the windows were open to let in the air. Lights were in the back, upstairs and down, and there was the sound of voices, one a woman's, shrill and scolding.

"You stay here and cover the windows," the Chief bade the two. "I'll take care of the door."

But Ripley flung out a hand and halted him.

"You will stay, my man," he gritted. "Evans, are we here to look on?"

"Give him the ax, Colter." Evans whipped the command at him. "We are going to be first in."

Colter yielded. He had a thousand dollars at stake.

"Try the door first," he counseled. Then, in a changed voice: "Rush it! They've glimmed us!"

A woman had appeared at a window of the house next above.

"Bulls! Bulls! Bulls!" she screeched, waking the echoes.

The lamps in Boston Kate's went out. Ripley lunged at the door. One futile twist of the knob—and then his ax.

Colter blew his whistle. A bullet sang by his head. Evans's motor, in position across the way, deluged the shack with light. In it Red Pete stood out at an upper window, pistol in hand, but blinded by the glare. Colter let go at him, and missed. Pete had jumped back to safety.

The door was down. Through this gap and the windows the electric light flooded in. No one was in the front. Evans and Ripley ran to the rear rooms. Here it was dark, and a torch in Evans's hand searched them. A negro woman was cowering in a corner of the kitchen. The room across was empty.

"Up the stairs, Evans!" shouted Ripley.

A hoarse howl of fright from above answered this, and a woman screamed.

Evans was taking the stairs. As Ripley followed he saw three of the men detailed to guard the back of the house burst into the hall from the kitchen door; the fourth had held his post. As he reached the top he saw, in Evans's questing torchlight, Red Pete clambering through a window; saw him whirl and grasp the ledge; saw his hideous face; saw Evans pull his gun down on him, hesitate, fire; saw only a blank where Pete had been; and heard a shot outside, and then another. The rapidity of it all was like a nightmare picture film.

The men from below came storming up the stairs, their torches streaming before them, for it was dark here.

"Pete—where is he?" they cried, each anxious to claim the money on his head.

Evans paid them no attention. He was dragging to her feet a woman crouched against the wall of the landing where Pete had hurled her in his leap for the window.

"It's Kate," announced one of the policemen. Evans barked four words at the creature—

"Take me to her!"

He turned from her in the same moment. Ripley was rattling the knob of a door up in front.

"Lydia, are you here?" he cried. "It is Joe—Evans! She answers! The key, the key!"

In Evans's savage grip the woman Kate shrilled out:

"Pete has it. Take care! She has a gun."

Evans was with Ripley before she had finished.

"We are going to break in the door, Lydia; stand away from it," he called. "Now, Ripley—together!"

The lock gave way and they were precipitated into the room. It was brilliant with the light from the street. They saw Lydia, her back to the farther wall, a pistol clutched in her hand, uncertain yet of her deliverance because of the past hours of her peril. Evans whirled on the police, who were pushing in.

"Keep out!" he flamed at them. "Light the lamps. Do something."

When he turned it was to see Lydia borne up in Ripley's encircling arm, all her splendid courage gone. He stood silently by, his eyes devouring her. But she put out her hand to him, and he went and took it in his own, holding it comfortingly.

"Ah!" she cried. "Ah, my friends, I have died a thousand deaths. But now—oh, what gratitude is mine!"

A warm, generous impulse thrilled Ripley. It was to Evans she owed her rescue. And he said it.

"Evans planned it, Lydia. He offered a thousand——"

Evans checked him with a warning look.

"Ripley thought it out," he declared. "But what does it matter—which of us—now that you are found, and safe?"

"Safe? It was that." She pointed to the pistol lying at her feet, and her eyes dilated with a recalled horror. "It was only that which saved me. The woman brought it to me. I think she was afraid—perhaps she is not all bad—but she brought it to me at the very first. And then I knew that I was safe!"

Her smile chilled Ripley, for her meaning was not to be misread. She went on:

"I fired at him once, through the door, and I hoped—oh, I hoped—that I had killed him. But he cursed me and——"

A man darted into the room. His errand was urgent.

"They are coming up from down yonder.

Pete winged Dave Potter and got away. He has set them on to us."

The light outside shifted, and but for a lamp in the hall the house was dark. They hurried from the room. Evans spoke to Lydia. His tone was quietly reassuring.

"Don't be frightened. We shall be away from all this in another minute."

On the instant the girl recovered herself. Something like a laugh trembled on her lips.

"Frightened—now? Why, I am filled with gladness. Only tell me what to do."

Evans drew a quick breath. This was a spirit that drove deep into his own. But he said simply:

"Good. I will tell you, Lydia."

The policeman held the lamp for them, and they went down the stairs. Colter met them outside the door. He was under pressure.

"Here's your car, headed for home. Get in and get off before they take a crack at you. I'm going to stay and get Pete. And say, he plugged one of my men—Potter. I wish you'd take him with you. I've Boston Kate to look after."

Evans nodded; he was placing the tonneau cushions on the floor of his machine.

"I want you to lie flat down in here, Lydia," he directed. "Ripley, you can manage on the seat. I'll take Potter in with me."

It was done quickly. The mob was charging up the road now. But when they were in good range the police car's powerful lights were switched on them. It threw them into confusion for the moment, and they pulled up. Something unpleasant might be getting ready to happen back of that dazzling blaze.

"In God's name why don't you go?" Colter shouted at Evans.

But the car did not move. It was stalled. The starter had refused to work. Evans jumped out.

"The crank. It's under that seat, Ripley."

Ripley found it, and Evans turned his engine over.

"Look out!" called Potter suddenly.

A giant man who had circled around from the main body of the cutthroat crew was about to hurl himself on Evans. It was Ivan, the Pole. Evans wheeled in time. His gun spoke, and the Pole dropped.

A second man and a third ran up, firing as they came. Evans flinched back against the car, but stopped the first of the pair, and a shot from Ripley brought the other reeling to his knees. Evans was in his seat now, and they were off.

A bullet whistled after them, and the windshield snapped with a hole in it. Another came. Ripley felt a quick smart on his cheek, and again the windshield snapped. It was the last. Blood was beginning to ooze through Evans's coat at the shoulder; but the car flew on.

"By Jupiter!" exclaimed Ripley.

He was looking back. Chief Colter was calmly walking down a lane of light to the mob. Ripley's heart swelled in him. Whatever the man might be he was not a coward. And he had saved them.

He glanced at Lydia lying on the cushions at his feet. She reached up a hand to him, and her lips moved.

"Joe!" she whispered.

He did not hear the word, yet he knew she had spoken his name.

They were over the tracks now, and out of danger.

XII

EVANS, his arm in a sling, sat at his desk in his office late the next afternoon reading the Johnsburg *Evening News*. It had just been brought to him.

The paper had made a front-page spread of the Death Valley business. It opened dramatically with Evans's broadcast offer of a thousand dollars reward for information of Lydia's whereabouts, then went back and described the abduction and the events that followed, up to the fight and flight at Boston Kate's. Here it said:

It was only after he had delivered Miss Brown into the care of her anguished relative that Editor Ripley discovered Evans had been hit. A ball had passed through the levator muscles of the left shoulder, and with this painful wound, Evans, without a sign of distress, had driven the car to his own door. A game performance, but not astonishing to those who know the boss.

Further on the picture of Chief Colter's capture of Red Pete was drawn.

Colter walked down into the very face of sudden death. His car followed him foot by foot. Boston Kate was crouching in it. The cops with their automatics stood up ready for action. Colter's bull voice roared out above the curses of the mob.

"Listen to me!" he bellowed. "Some of you people have got hurt already, and a lot more of you are going to get the same if you don't hand over

Pete Jackson to me. If you do it, we'll let this thing drop right here. If you don't do it, I'm gonig to ram this car full tilt into you and shoot you down like mad dogs. This is a riot, understand, and every last one of you is up against the law. But it's back of me, and so is the whole power of this commonwealth. Do you get that? Now, I want Pete Jackson. I'll pay fifty dollars cash for him. Bring him to me, or God have mercy on you!"

Whether it was Colter's sheer audacity that won or whether it was this plus the cash—there were those there who would sell their mothers for far less—he got his man. Pete is now in jail with a stretch of anywhere from ten to twenty years before him. And Boston Kate will get hers too."

The *News* wound up its story with a paragraph that brought a glacial gleam to Evans's eye. It said:

Laudable though it be, one thousand dollars is some money to offer at the shrine of abstract justice; for it is understood that the lady in the case is practically a stranger to both men. Boss Evans does not stand in need of advertising hereabouts. If he does, he will soon have a paper of his own excellency named to toot his praises. The question is: has the boss suddenly turned philanthropist—or what's the idea back of all this?

Evans laid the paper aside. He sat for a while marshaling his thoughts; then he wheeled around to his desk and began to write.

At six o'clock Ripley came in. A seared streak on his cheek testified to his close call the night before.

"Lydia wants to see you, Evans," he reported.

"You have just come from her?"

"Yes. I waited. But she's rested now, she says, and she wants to see you."

Evans pointed to the newspaper.

"Have you read it?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Has she?"

"Yes; and let me tell you she is eager to thank you——"

Evans stayed him with a peremptory motion.

"It is bought gratitude. I don't play with marked cards."

"Oh, good Lord!" exploded Ripley. "Do you imagine she is measuring you with a dollar yardstick? I've told her all you did, and how you did it—for it was fine—and if you think her gratitude is 'bought' then all I have to say is, you are doing her a mean, contemptible injustice. She is heart-full of honest gratefulness, and she wants to tell you so."

Evans gave him an enigmatic look.

"What has she told you, if it's a fair question?"

"Not anything more than she will tell you; not as much, perhaps, as she will tell you. She's changed in some way. Whether it's her distress about her uncle—he is no better—or because of all she's been through, she is changed. I can't tell how, but it's there. You can make out of it what you please, and do as you please—I've said all I'm going to."

Evans appeared to ponder this. Then he said, speaking at length for him:

"Ripley, I've lived to myself for thirty-eight years. In that time I've managed to get what I wanted when I wanted it hard enough. I've never wanted anything as I want the love of this girl. But I'm handicapped in years and a reputation that doesn't meet the general standard. So, at last I am up against it in the one thing I most want. It's a thing that can't be bought and can't be earned. It comes by favor only. Take your chance, Ripley; I'll sit back and wait."

"Oh, I say, Evans!" The young man made an impatient movement. "In the beginning this sort of talk could get by, perhaps; but it jars now. We are not raffling off Lydia between us. Neither of us may have a show. Let it rest at that, and each go his own gait."

A dull red rose in the other's face. Ripley stared, for it was a sight unique in his experience of him.

"You are right," Evans said. "I don't often let myself go."

"Oh, now, by George!" cried Ripley contritely. "I didn't mean it that way, really. I guess I'm a bit upset myself. What I wanted to convey was that Lydia has trouble enough with that crazy uncle on her hands without our helping to pile it on. Let's talk business. We've had a bunch of ads shoved in at us today. If they come in at the same rate tomorrow, to say nothing of Friday, we shall have to hold some over to the next issue."

"What is the total for the day?" Evans inquired.

"Six columns; one hundred and twenty inches; twelve hundred dollars, cash. It's in the safe, and I don't like the thought of it. Somebody will be wanting to count it for us."

"I'll take it up to Johnsburg, Saturday," said Evans carelessly. He got up and stood

at the window poring down on the street.

"If anybody had told me a raw weekly could get a start like this I wouldn't have believed him," Ripley observed with a strained laugh. "Confound it, it's immoral, Evans! It doesn't hit me right at all."

As if he had not heard him, Evans spoke, still with his eyes on the street.

"Yeggs, pickpockets, holdup men, card sharps, courtesans, cutthroats—all the dregs of humankind—this is Powderville as I have helped to make it." He swung around to the editor. "Ripley, there won't be any more ads coming in after this week."

"No, I should say not. They will hardly want to renew at our modest rates."

"It's not that," Evans explained. "I have decided not to wait. The explosion I mentioned the other day comes off this Saturday."

"Well?" Ripley's curiosity was flamant. "What is it to be?"

"I've scribbled an editorial, or perhaps I'd better call it a manifesto—" Evans's light smile touched his lips—"and I'd like you to write something to follow it up with."

He took up from the desk a single sheet of paper closely written and passed it to Ripley. The latter read it slowly. As he got into it his expression of surprise changed first to amazed incredulity, then to black indignation.

"Do you really mean," he demanded, "that you are going to turn these people out-of-doors on June first—on only two weeks' notice?"

"Have you read it carefully?" questioned Evans. "Legitimate business is secure. It applies only to the dance-halls and their like."

"But you have taken their money! I don't care what they are, these people—it's a holdup. You take their money to boost your paper, and then throw them down. I'll not be a party to it, Evans. I resign."

He jumped up and tossed the paper on the desk. Evans sat down again. He was unruffled by the outburst.

"If you will hear me, Ripley," he said, "it may alter your decision. If it doesn't, you will have lost only a few minutes. Shall I go on?"

Ripley nodded a brusk assent, but remained standing. His attitude was uncompromising.

"These places," resumed Evans, "have coined money out of the evil passions of men. In a way I've shared in it by letting them continue; but I hated it more and more till it came to the point where I resolved to clean them out and make a future for the town. I've simply hurried up a little because—well, because of these last few days."

"Ah!" cried Ripley. "And do you think with this dirty ad-money in your pocket you are any better than they?"

"It is that I am coming to," Evans answered patiently. "I'm talking like a book perhaps, but I want this evil to contribute to the good. I want in the new city that will be gradually evolved from this filthy nest a monument to civic pride and progress that may, in part, redeem the past. Not one of them would give a dollar of themselves, and so I am taking secret toll of these hell-holes for a purpose that will make the devil scream."

Ripley's expression lightened, but he made no comment. Evans proceeded:

"For every hundred dollars paid into the *Trumpet* this week I will add a thousand to build a hospital here in Powderville for the down and out, those who need skilled treatment and can not pay. I have drawn up a will, today, providing for this and for—for other objects, in case anything should happen to me. I want you to write an editorial, Ripley, telling of this hospital plan, but keeping my name down as well as you can manage it. My methods are my own, as I once said to you; but if I'm wrong in this —say so."

"Hang it, what can I say?" exclaimed Ripley, relieved yet petulantly perplexed. "The principle is dead wrong, but— Oh, to the deuce with it! I'll stay on. You get my goat, Evans, every way I come at you. And while we are on this I'd like a word of explanation about this fellow Red Pete. I'm entitled to it. You missed that shot at him on purpose."

Evans considered a moment. His mood was right to respond to this request. He said:

"I couldn't do it, Ripley—shoot straight into his face. I won't go into particulars—they are not necessary—but Jackson saved my life in the early days here. He shot the gun out of a man's hand who had the drop on me. I was as good as dead. I couldn't forget that, and I went the limit. But I'm quits with him."

"Why, yes," assented Ripley. "I should rather say you are."

His illusory smile penciled the corners of Evans's mouth.

"And now," he said slowly, "it is you that I'm not quits with."

XIII

MR. LEKAS and Mr. Chekales viewed their demented compatriot with a sorrowful air in which a certain reproach was mingled. He had got them into a mess with the boss of Powderville and had then, so to speak, deserted them by going off his head. And Evans had placed the entire Greek colony in his debt by his rescue of their countrywoman from worse than death. Mr. Lekas addressed Lydia.

"What is to be done?" he plaintively inquired. "He will not speak but to himself —words that tell nothing. What is to be done?"

"I can not say," Lydia answered wearily. "There are moments when he seems to know me, and again——"

She sighed and was silent.

"The doctor," began Mr. Chekales; but Mr. Lekas interrupted impatiently.

"Ah! The doctor! What does he know more than we? 'Rest and quiet'! Well, he has it, here in this room. He eats, he drinks, he sleeps. Tomorrow he may be better. Or the next day, or the next. We wait. But meanwhile what is to be done, I ask again? Shall we also pay for him when we others pay to Evans's newspaper? When he returns to himself—what then? He has sworn an oath that he will not pay."

"Let Lydia say," proposed Chekales. "She is his heritor."

"Do you argue this with me?" Lydia's somber eyes took fire suddenly. "Money! Pay all that we have, and thank him. It would then be still too little."

They went away. Lydia laid a hand upon her uncle's head, and spoke to him. But he sat with his eyes staring on the spread of houses the window of his back room commanded, and mumbled unintelligible words. She left him, locking the door after her, and sought the dreary sitting-room.

It was Thursday evening. She had seen Evans's touring-car pass earlier in the day. He was not in it. Some man was driving it to Johnsburg, she surmised, for repairs on the machine. Why did not Evans come to see her? Ripley, she knew, was busy with the paper. He had told her that the next few days would be stressful for him. Had he forgotten to deliver her message to Evans? No, he could not forget; he knew how earnestly eager she was to put into words her gratitude to this man—this cold, quiet, masterful man of whom every one stood in fear, and yet in whom she felt were unsuspected springs of goodness.

Gratitude was not the only sentiment in Lydia's heart for Evans; he had been wounded in her defense, and it herofied him. But there was a more subtle influence moving her. She had found in him a winning quality of tone and manner that seemed to be unnoticed by all but her.

It did not occur to her that this attitude might be reserved for her only. She experienced the glow and pride of discovery, with the resultant lively interest in the thing discovered. In brief, she was drawn to Evans from varied angles, and it created the desire to know him better.

And all this was without the thought of a warmer feeling, such as she entertained for Joe—he was that to her now in her secret communings with herself, "Joe." With him it was different; from the first it had been so; but it was a thing which, she had decided for no acknowledged reason, he must not too readily be allowed to perceive. Yet when he had called she could scarcely keep caressing fingers from the scar on his cheek. Death had brushed him by—and it was for her!

The evening wore on, and Evans did not come. In the morning, along toward noon, came Messrs. Lekas and Chekales again. They brought astounding news. The *Trumpet* had refused their advertisements. Evans himself had done it. He had said they were overrun with business, and to put their money in their pockets and go home. For the next issue—perhaps. They could come again. Or they need not come at all. It would make no difference.

Messrs. Lekas and Chekales shook their heads. They were a puzzled pair. This Evans was a man past understanding. And here was Paul gone clean mad over nothing at all! It was beyond belief. Lydia laughed in bitter scorn at them.

"This blackmailer!" she mocked. "This pig! This monster who would devour you!

What now? You poisoned his friend. You would have poisoned him. Ah, I have had enough of you. Go! Go!"

THERE were four thousand dollars in the safe at the *Trumpet* office at the close of business Friday night. It represented twenty columns of display advertising brought in and paid for. Mack had scraped up another job man, and at that it was going to be a tussle to pull through.

It was after eight o'clock. The old Adams press was starting on the inside forms, and there would be no sleep for any one this night.

All the reading matter was up. Ripley had just read the galley proofs of Evans's manifesto and the accompanying editorial. He had held the copy out until the last moment for fear of a possible leak to the outside. Mack had offered the opinion, when Ripley brought the proofs back to him to be revised, that "particular hell would be let loose tomorrow;" and he seemed to enjoy the prospect.

Evans had practically lived at the *Trumpet* office since early on Thursday. He wanted it known that he was there, checking off those who brought in their ads. If his disabled arm troubled him, no one knew it. He was listening now to Ripley, dispassionately attentive.

"There's going to be the very devil to pay tomorrow, Evans. It's been growing on me, and I can't see the way out."

"I am within my rights," Evans maintained. "My hold on them all along has been that I could turn them out at any month's end. It is a thing distinctly understood."

"I'm not taking water—I haven't a shred of sympathy for the scurvy tribe—but it's a stickup just the same," declared Ripley. "A man doesn't advertise his business the day before he's going out of it." He moved restlessly about the room.

"They didn't have to do it," Evans reasoned. "No force was used. Fear was all that prompted them—cowardice. Let them make the most of it."

"Well, watch out for the come-back. We'll have a riot."

"There's a cure for that," Evans answered coolly.

"Oh, Colter's way!" Ripley shrugged. "But he had the law back of him."

"It was the guns," said Evans, and dropped the subject.

During the past two days neither man had mentioned Lydia. They had, by tacit consent, avoided it. But tonight Ripley said:

"Paul Brown is the same, I judge. Lydia promised to let us know if he was worse. But now, of course, she won't do it."

"Why?" asked Evans.

"You haven't been near her. She has some pride."

"But you?"

"Oh, she understands how I'm fixed, getting out this paper. But it's different with you."

"Yes," said Evans, "with me it is different. But I thought we had agreed not to talk of this?"

"Well, I'm breaking it." Ripley came to a stand before him. "I've got to tell you, Evans, that you are putting Lydia in a difficult position. You place her under a tremendous obligation, and then refuse to be thanked for it. It's as if you thought she was of too little consequence to bother further with."

"Ripley!" Evans's tone was remonstrant.

"It's so," retorted the editor. "I've said it, and you can stomach it or not, as you please. And I'll remind you, Evans, that in a similar case your own sense of obligation rested heavily on you. Pete Jackson——"

He brought up with an exclamation of surprise. Mack had popped in on them from the composing-room passageway. He was agitated, but endeavored to conceal it.

"Say, that guy Wilson I took on yesterday has blown," he heralded. "And those proofs are missing."

Ripley threw a startled glance at Evans.

"Do you mean those last two?" he snapped at Mack.

"Yes. The revise. I'd just pulled them. They were on the stone. I stepped over to the press a minute. When I came back they were gone—and Wilson with them."

Evans spoke to him.

"Who can you trust out there?"

"Hinckley; Riggs, the pressman; and Sammy Allen, the feeder. I'm not sure of that jobby Howe."

"Very well. Get back there. Lock the doors. Don't let any one go. And find out if Howe has a gun."

"Sure he has, and all the rest of us," declared Mack. "And I've got a Winchester

in my closet." His pale eyes glistened. "I guess if they come around here hunting for trouble we can pass 'em out something hot."

He went away rubbing his hands cheerfully.

XIV

RIPLEY stepped to the door and looked out. A strong breeze from the northwest had sprung up, and he lingered for a while cooling in it. Then he came in and locked the door. Evans was sitting by the table, his brows contracted.

"It has come a little sooner, that's all," Ripley remarked. "But I wish it was in the day, and we didn't have that money in the safe. It's a bait they'll hang before some of these thugs to egg them on to us."

Evans stood up abruptly.

"Ripley, my runabout is out back of the building. I want you to take Lydia and her uncle in it to Johnsburg. The three of you can manage on a pinch. And you'd better hurry before this thing gets around. We don't know what may happen in the town tonight."

Ripley, astounded, stared at him.

"You are telling me that I am to cut and run?"

"I am thinking of Lydia."

"And do you think—" Ripley gulped down his indignation—"do you think she'd let me do it if I would? You affront me, Evans. I'm the editor of this sheet."

"I am the owner. You are fired. Now will you go?"

Ripley's face flamed. Had the man not been injured he would have struck him. Then, as he eyed him, the flame died out.

"I think I understand," he said. "It's fine of you, Evans, but it won't work. There are some things a man can't do. And another thing: you told me once that you didn't make friends. It is not so. I'm with you, right or wrong, and to the finish."

He held out his hand. Into Evans's eyes came for a moment a curious lucent warmth. He took the hand extended to him and gripped it hard. Ripley remembered his words long afterward, though at the time they seemed commonplace enough.

"You win," he said, and walked off down the passage.

An hour passed, and a half more. No one had come about the building.

It might have been a plague spot, so absolutely was it left alone. The press ground on. Its speed was twelve hundred, and the edition was to be five thousand. It would be sold fast enough for it carried a big sensation. Mack was busy over his makeup of the outside forms, Ripley helping. With the exception of Hinckley, who had set up the manifesto, the others were not aware of the pending crisis.

Evans was out back going over the bearcat. It was drawn up close to the door, and had been standing there since morning. He had had it brought around for readiness in any emergency that might require it. Suddenly he stood still in the dark and listened. He thought the wind had brought to him the sound of shouting. He waited for a repetition of it, but it did not come, and he went into the building.

"Make some stone proofs of that piece of mine and pass them around among the men," he directed Mack.

He motioned to Ripley and they walked up front. Here he opened the door.

"Listen," he said. "Do you hear anything?"

"Nothing unusual," decided Ripley, after a pause.

"Perhaps I was mistaken," Evans professed. "But I think we might as well close the shutters around the house. It will be hot, but——"

"What's that?" Ripley's voice was cautiously suppressed.

They heard the patter of flying feet making toward them; and waited tensely. They were not heavy, these flying feet; they were light, almost, as falling leaves.

"Good God!" Ripley leaped forward. "Lydia, is it you?" he cried.

The girl gasped a reply.

"Oh, Joe, Joe! Hurry! They are coming. If there are things to do—hurry!"

He caught her in his arms and drew her into the house. He did not ask for explanations. He placed her in a chair and ran out again. Evans was already working down one side of the building closing the shutters. Ripley took the other side. They met at the back and came in. Mack had passed the proofs around.

"Go to her," Evans bade Ripley. "I've a word to say to these men."

Ripley did not stir.

"I stay with you. Go on and talk," he urged.

"Men," said Evans, "that news you've read has leaked out. Wilson stole the

proofs. We may have some rough play here tonight. I won't blame any of you who don't care to stay; but I've no time to chew it over with you. There's the door. Beat it."

Not one man moved. Mack let out a pleased whoop.

"The drinks are on me tomorrow. Howe, I sized you wrong. Come on now, we'll get this paper out or bust." It was an empty boast, he was soon to learn.

"See that your shutters are bolted," instructed Evans as they left him.

They went into Ripley's room and attended to the bolts there, then on into the office. Lydia rose to meet them.

"They are coming up from Death Valley," she explained rapidly, her voice clear now and incisive. "Chekales found it out and told me. They've been set on to you by the dance-halls. Liquor was sent to them, and money has been paid to the leaders. And they've been told you have thousands here in your safe. They are almost to the tracks—Colter is waiting for them. I was afraid you didn't know, and so I came."

"But the risk you ran!" exclaimed Ripley. "Lydia! You should not have done it."

She held her head up proudly.

"Am I to receive all and give nothing?" She reached out, and her finger-tips fluttered on Evans's crippled arm. "It was for me, this hurt. I have thought and thought of it. I have wished to tell you—ah, there are no words for it!"

"Is there need of any, Lydia?" asked Evans gently. "You are here."

"But she can't go back. It is too late. And her uncle is left alone!" cried Ripley.

"He is safe in his room," she answered. "We have closed our place. There are no lights that can be seen. Others have done the same. He is safe."

"And you? You have come to the very danger-spot of all!" Ripley struck his hands together despairingly. But Evans was ready with the remedy previously refused.

"There's the car. It's a straight stretch south to the open country. You can circle around to the Johnsburg road——"

Lydia made him a little hushing gesture.

"You are asking Joe to leave you—to let you face this danger alone—because of me?"

Her voice was low and very sweet. Evans set his teeth as he replied.

"It is the only thing to do."

She flashed around to Ripley.

"Are you ready, Joe?"

"Lydia! I can't!" he groaned. "I'd give my life for you, but this one thing I can't give."

"Ah!" She nodded exultingly at Evans. "You see? I've got to stay." Then, with a sudden change: "Whatever comes, comes to us all. Oh, I am proud to know that! I would not have it otherwise. I am with my friends."

A popping, as of wine corks, penetrated to them through the shutter vents.

"Pistol-shots," said Evans. He pushed open a shutter and peered out. There was a lull, then an increase of the popping sounds. It became a fusillade.

"They have crossed the tracks. Colter has met them."

He glanced around. Lydia was standing close to Ripley—pressed to him, his arm about her. Evans turned quickly to the window again. The noise grew. It was coming swiftly nearer. And now there were clangorous cries rising above the cracks of guns. Evans spoke.

"Colter is falling back. They are in Main Street now." He pulled the shutter to and bolted it. "I think, Ripley, we had better put out the lights."

XV

PAUL BROWN roused to the tumult in the street. The frightful cries, the gun-shots, the continuous undertone of maddened men at grips, brought him from his chair to his feet. The lethargy of these last days fell from him. Wild fancies leaped in his disordered mind. What jumble of conflicting imageries they were, God only knew; but they stirred in him the desire to add to this horror without; to help it on; to raise it to supreme heights of destroying violence.

He tried cunningly the door. It was locked. He started to the window. Halfway there he paused. The lamp on the table suggested an idea—a splendid climax.

There was a box of matches on the table. He struck one and blew out the lamp. The chimney he toppled off on the bed. The match flickered out, but in the dark he unscrewed the wick holder. He struck another match and by its blaze poured the oil down along the sun-baked boards between the

windows and on the adjacent walls. It took still other matches to complete this task; but when it was done he caught up the box, and going from spot to spot built little pyres of matches, kindling each as it was finished.

He stood, his teeth bared in a crafty grin, watching the flames suck up the oil. Soon he would have a bonfire to light the world.

A BREATHLESS man pounded at the *Trumpet* door.

"Who is it?" rapped out Evans.

"I'm Hicks, the cop. Colter sent me. They're on you!"

Evans opened the door, flashing his electric-torch in the man's face as he did so.

"Come in, Hicks," he said.

"They got Colter," panted the policeman, when he was in. "It was just as I left. There's over a hundred of them—rum crazy—and we were only eighteen. Part of them have gone to the jail to turn Pete Jackson loose. The rest— Ha! Do you hear?"

Around the corner in full cry swept the mob. Some of them bore fat-pine torches. Minutes back, the *Trumpet's* press had ceased its rumbling. The building had ten windows—five in the composing-room, two in Ripley's room, one in the passage, and two in the office.

Evans had told off Mack, Riggs and Howe to hold the composing-room; Sammy Allen was stationed in Ripley's room; and Evans and Ripley were to take care of the front, with an eye to the passage window. The coming of Hicks was a help. Sammy was shifted to the passage, and Hicks was stationed in Ripley's room.

The office railing had been knocked away to give clear swing for action. The table and standing desk had been built into a barricade in the upper corner, and here Lydia was made to take her place, though she protested against it.

The iron-cased, shuttered, silent building was a forbidding-looking object even to the reckless ruffians who charged down on it. If they had thought to fire it with their pine knots they had come a cropper. They drew off across the street, and the leaders held some sort of consultation. One of them finally stepped forward. A torch played him up in weird relief. He bawled out:

"Hey, you in there! Give us the money and we'll let you alone."

The money was in a satchel in the safe. It could be thrown out to them to war over. Evans put his own inclination aside.

"Shall I do it?" he asked of Ripley. But Lydia intervened.

"It wouldn't stop them. They'd think there was more, and come on just the same."

"She's right," concurred Ripley. "And they've had it in for us anyway since Tuesday night. Don't answer."

A torrent of obscene imprecations burst from the man when only silence greeted his summons. But in the midst of it a pistol barked and he fell forward on his face. It was Evans's gun.

It was answered with a bedlam of howls, and bullets pattered against the sheathed walls and oaken shutters. One hissed in at Evans's peephole, but he had stood aside and it bored through the partition into Ripley's room.

A pause followed. The torches had been prudently extinguished. Another consultation was being held. Evans guessed its purpose and ran to the passageway.

"Mack," he sang out. "They are going to rush us. Watch your door."

He returned to his post. The crowd parted into three groups, one running to the left around the building, the other to the right. The third made ready to launch itself against the front. They did not know the number of the defenders, and hoped by a concerted attack to find an unguarded point.

"Steady now, Ripley," cautioned Evans.

The storming party rushed forward. Ripley found himself curiously able to distinguish individual forms where before they were merged into a shadowy mass. The sky seemed to be lighting up, and yet there was no moon. He and Evans fired with a cool rapidity that was deadly in its effect. The gang wavered, crumpled in on itself, and fell back.

Hicks was pegging away like clockwork, first from one of his windows, then the other. From the composing-room came a steady rattle of reports, the sharp bark of Mack's Winchester rising above the rest.

Sammy Allen at his passage window was, after his second shot, silent. A bullet had found the boy's brain. He tumbled to the floor; yet the instant after his pistol was in action again. Lydia had seen him fall. She had left her barrier and taken his place.

The first rush was over. There were cries

and groans of stricken men on the ground about the building. Some were crawling from the place as best they could. Others lay very still. Not one had reached the rear door. Their uninjured comrades gave no thought to them. The man who stood up on his feet was the one that counted; any other was but a clod of clay.

In the respite the little party in the building hastily reloaded. Evans's arm was out of its sling, and he was working two-handed with the rest. His clenched teeth alone betrayed his suffering.

"Lydia!" called Ripley. "Are you safe?"

To his astonishment he discovered her at his side. She had lifted the body of the fallen boy to a place back from the passage, and was now holding out his pistol to Ripley.

"Load it, please," she requested, her voice flat and lifeless. "Sammy Allen is dead. I've been taking his place."

Evans stifled a sound in his throat. Ripley cried out his alarm for her.

"Go back! Get behind that shelter!" he commanded. "You may be killed!"

He tried to force her away, but she resisted.

"I want this pistol loaded, Joe," she repeated. "Am I to skulk here like a dog when a boy can die for us?"

"Here is mine, Lydia," said Evans quietly. He passed her his automatic and took hers. He sensed the tension she was under.

As he spoke a strange glow filtered into the room, lighting it dimly. Yells rose from outside, Mack came running up, his Winchester on his arm.

"There's a fire in Little Hell," he yelped. "With this wind the whole town will go—and the powder plant maybe."

Lydia uttered a cry. She slipped away to her post at the window. Ripley and Evans understood, but they were powerless to comfort. If Paul Brown was in danger, no help could come from them. Death fronted them all.

The glow momently increased. In it the faces of the villainous herd across the way were plainly revealed; and, of a sudden, roars of joyful greetings went up from them. Mack, with an eye at the window, squinted up the street.

"Here come more," he proclaimed. "And—good gosh!—Red Pete is with 'em. They broke into the jail. Well, I got one shot marked 'Good night' for him!"

The heavens were brilliant now with the glare of the conflagration, for it was that. All of Little Hell was afire.

The wind scattered chunks of burning pine among the flimsy buildings. They caught like tinder. The roar of the flames was as the voice of an infernal cataract. Explosions rent the air as liquor stocks burst in the grilling heat.

Screaming men and women ran for their lives. High above them blazing brands were borne eastward by the wind to fall on distant houses and bring them down. Here, there, everywhere flame-sprites were dancing on the shingles.

A few blocks away was a Standard Oil tank. It was filled with gasoline—fifteen thousand gallons. Not far from it a house was bursting into flames. And over beyond this, but half a mile distant, the great powder plant lay, with grim men gathered on the roof-tops, hose in hand, to fight the death riding on the gale. One unheeded spark, and a débâcle to stun the minds of men might have to be recorded.

Sparks rained on the *Trumpet's* metal roof and showered the wolfish pack massed in the street below. They bawled in drunken glee at the vast spectacle of a city burning up. They were doubly drunk—with rum, and with a delirious delight in this wondrous entertainment provided for them. Yet they had not forgotten the business in hand. They were waiting for something before renewing the attack; a detail had been sent off to find it.

Inside the building the heat grew until the baked air scorched the lungs. Sweat poured from Ripley's face, from Evans's, from Mack's. Lydia swayed on her feet, her brain reeling. The men from the composing-room came staggering to the front. Hicks leaned, panting, against the door-jamb of Ripley's room.

"Let's get this thing over with," croaked Riggs. "Let's fight them outside. I can't stand much more."

"Yes," put in Hinckley with an oath. "It's got me. I'll be no good in another minute."

"Look!" Mack was peering down the street. "They've got a joist from somewhere. They are going to ram the door!"

Evans spoke to them. It was not a command now; it was entreaty.

"Boys, hold on five minutes. Then it shall be as you say."

He dashed to where Ripley was bending over Lydia. She had sunk down senseless.

"To the car, Ripley. The finish is here. You must save her. Quick, man!"

Ripley caught up Lydia in his arms. Evans ran on before to the composing-room and opened the door. The bearcat stood unharmed. They placed Lydia on the seat, and Ripley leaped in.

"God bless you, old man! It hurts to leave you."

His voice broke with a sob.

Evans pressed his hand.

"I know. Good-by, friend. Wait till you hear the shooting, then go. They won't have time to notice you." He added softly: "Tell her, some day, that I loved her."

The rattle of the automatics began, and he ran back into the building. Ripley started his machine. Blind with tears he raced southward in the unearthly glow that was all about him.

XVI

EVANS' little party had repulsed the first assault of the battering ram, but they were in bad case. Hinckley's trigger-finger had been shot away, and Riggs's jaw was shattered; and they had run out of cartridges. Mack had two left in his Winchester, and among the others there was a total of only eleven shots. Evans was at the safe working the combination.

Outside they had reformed for another charge. They had lost heavily in men, and a number had deserted. It was not a promising business, these last had discovered.

The joist was manned three to a side. Pete Jackson was one of the foremost. He had not been a conspicuous figure here-tofore; but a long pull at a whisky-flask had put a backbone in him.

Evans sprang up from the safe, the satchel in his hand. Perhaps it would save these loyal men of his. It was doubtful, but it was a chance.

"Open the door," he called to Hicks. "I'm going out."

Hicks did not obey. The charge had started, with a support of frenzied yells and a hail of bullets. Nevertheless Evans ran to the door. As he jerked it open Mack's rifle cracked. Red Pete pitched headlong, a hole drilled between his eyes. And Evans fell.

In the same beat of time a noise as of a thousand thunder-claps shook the earth. It was the oil-tank blowing up. Every standing creature within its influence was thrown down. The *Trumpet* building rocked. A yawning seam showed in its roof and side. Tongues of flame licked greedily at the rafters. In the moment's dreadful silence that succeeded a man scrambled to his feet, mad with fear.

"The powder plant is going! That's the first one!" he shrieked, and made off as fast as his tottering legs would carry him.

Others followed, and soon all the unhurt of the butcherly crew had fled. There was no fight left in them.

Evans did not rise. He was lying across the threshold, his wounded arm twisted under him. Mack staggered over to the spot.

"Did they get you, boss?" he asked.

He knelt down and lifted the other's head into the hollow of his arm.

"I'm going out, Mack," whispered Evans. "The money—is for you—who are left. Men all. Tell Ripley——"

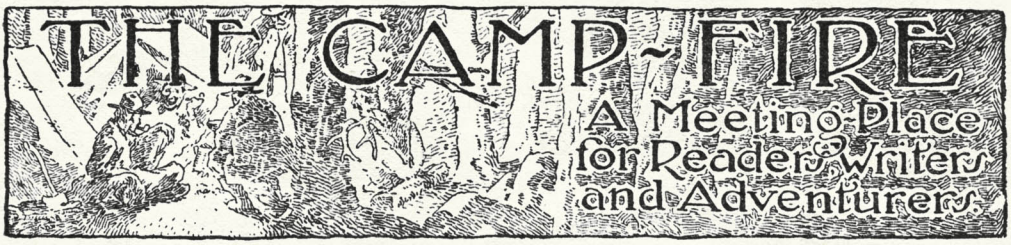
The whisper ceased.

"Dandy Dick! Dandy Dick!" whimpered Mack. "Are you gone?"

Evans's eyes quivered open. A faint, amused smile rested on his lips.

"Tell Ripley—the town is cleaned up—better—than I'd planned."

He turned his head and straightened a little. He was gone.



A POST-CARD from Paris later brought the news that our friend Edmond C. C. Genet of the French Foreign Legion had been granted the leave of absence he hoped for and was, I'm glad to say, enjoying it very much.

By the way, such letters as the following, written several months before you read it, seem to put a quietus on the earlier reports that the Foreign Legion had been wiped out and ceased to exist:

I am at present in the midst of rain, mud and muck in the first line and trying hard, but perhaps vainly, to keep all the dirt here and not send you any on this letter. This April weather is miserable stuff to digest. The trenches are several inches (cubic) of muddy muck and water and I haven't had more than a bare passing glimpse of sun or moon for nearly a week. I feel as though somebody had tried to clean out the trenches with me. The mud here has that interesting way of sticking like a barnacle wherever it lands. I often wonder how many quarts of earth I have eaten in the brief fourteen months I've had in service here. Some considerable quantity I fear.

MY MOST cheerful hope now is the possibility of several days' leave to Paris within these next two weeks. I have a longing to renew my acquaintance with a genuine bed and several over-sized appetizing meals—the kind we used to have back home! I guess that's not an unnatural longing, is it? It's strange perhaps, but one does feel as though he were leagues away from civilization out here along the war-zone. Opportunities to get back to the gayer life are joyfully hailed. They come few and far between.—EDMOND C. C. GENET, Regiment de Marche, de la Légion Etrangère, France.

GEORGE L. CATTON hesitated to introduce himself on the occasion of his first story in *Adventure*, but, having followed with several others, he stands up now and follows our Camp-Fire custom:

Somewhere in Canada.

The guilty one this time was born in March—the wild month—somewhere in the vicinity of 1880 (can't tell you the exact moment because the family Bible got mislaid years ago) in Norwich, Oxford County, Ontario, Canada. Spent what I can recall of the first fourteen years "Sittin' on de bank ob de ribber with de pole in ma hand, waitin' till some fool fish got cotched on de odder end ob de line," and in trying to develop enough human intelligence to earn my board. Then I had to get out and hustle for that board.

THREE years later, work and I had a scrap. The following ten years were come and go, with the accent on the "go." But, five feet, seven and a half, by one hundred and thirty pounds, with a suit-case for a chest and no gray matter to make up the deficiency gets a fellow in wrong when he's got a temper and a tongue. Aside from the loss of seven of my front teeth, scars too numerous to enumerate, three broken ribs, a cracked dome on five separate occasions, both barrels of a duck-gun in the stomach, three bad fingers, typhoid in Juneau, diphtheria in Toronto, dengue in San Antonio, and dysentery in Monterey, those ten years were uneventful.

THEN I made up my mind that, while a setting hen lays no eggs, its head is at least safe. Work and I settled our differences and I wasted the next four years building soups and mulligans in hotel and restaurant kitchens. They called me Chef, and even yet are writing me letters asking me to come back to work, but a man soon gets tired working in a temperature of one hundred degrees and fighting rats, cockroaches and flies.

I decided to listen to that bat that was fluttering around in my belfry and try writing. I still had—got it yet—the "itchy-foot," but I'm getting a little too gray behind the ears for the "I should worry" idea and must have a little of the needful for my travels now. After four years of study I believe I've hit the trail that leads to you, *via* the pen. I am going to try, with the help of a little imagination, to get enough out of my personal experiences past and future, to amuse you. Whether I do or not lies with you. If I do, blame it on *Adventure*. Just at present I have enough framed up to last till I can shake hands with "Noatuk, old Pekue Pahe's daughter."—GEORGE L. CATTON.

AFTER so long a silence that I had begun to believe that our old friend Harold S. Lovett had become one more of the great war's victims two letters from him reached me June 6, one dated May 20, the other January 19. Why one should have been so unusually quick, the other so unusually long, in coming I do not know. The one written in January (perhaps not mailed till later) bore a London postmark dated May

23. For the benefit of our newly joined comrades, Mr. Lovett is an American serving on H. M. S. *Agamemnon* in the Eastern Mediterranean Squadron.

Here's the earlier letter, omitting, along with less interesting matter, a paragraph in which Mr. Lovett opens up on the probable outcome of the war:

Your last letter took a mighty long time to get here; it had been opened by censor, and kept in England I expect.

Have written a line to Captain Evans, care of your office, so perhaps you'll forward.

Glad to be of any use to the boys. So you've had it pretty dirty. Well, so have we of late, and don't you bet that it doesn't freeze out here. Did you read Ward Pryce's account of things in Gallipoli? It freezes all right, and then begins to get cool, I reckon. . . . I've got the account of our times out here ready for you and will keep it until I can send it without doing any harm.

Things are very strict in that line you know, and I guess it ain't surprising. I don't know if I can trust myself half the time, and it's the same all round. . . .

. . . Well, I'm in the pinch, feeling fit and longing for a good share of trouble to fall our way. Nationality immaterial!

The later letter:

Yours of April 21st to hand. I was especially glad to get it as it contains matter I have meant to refer to previously. . . . At present folks at home are getting a lot of fiction and I reckon the truth would interest them more—if they could get it first-hand.

YOU bet the "*Aggy*" will be top-dog. As for *scratches*, well, we've had a few, about 30, already, but none to count, and anyhow the nut has yet to be made that we can't crack—in time.

Since last I wrote we have done nothing, the monotony would kill a sloth and so a real slap-up scrap would improve things some. . . . We've got a few more trenches, etc. ashore and so I suppose I ought to say we are "progressing favorably" so as to give the censor some satisfaction for perusing this.

I'd like to hear of the Legion's progress occasionally—I'm interested, you bet. Wishing it and yourself all luck and prosperity.—HAROLD S. LOVETT.

ARTHUR SOMERS ROCHE is one of our old contributors but he has never before this issue given us a complete novel and somehow or other he hasn't previously stood up and given us an account of himself. He does so now:

Born in Somerville, Mass., 1883. Father was James Jeffrey Roche, poet, editor, wit and historian. Attended public schools Boston and Brookline; attended Holy Cross College two years. Graduated from Boston University Law School in 1904. Admitted Massachusetts Bar 1905. Practised law a year and a half. Sold first magazine story to *Harper's Weekly* in 1907. Have since sold to a score of magazines. First book published in July. Have been a reporter and special writer on New York and Boston papers. Have written alleged humorous columns for newspapers and have sold scores of alleged poems in the same market. Have been abroad twice, once on a cattle-boat, as close to adventure as I have ever come.

I AGREE with the writer of the following letter that 20,000 able-bodied men, though deaf, are a valuable factor in our country's undeveloped resources for Defense. No one with half a brain can read about what is going on in Europe without having it made plain that when a nation, no matter how great her resources, is swept into the tremendous strain and turmoil of modern warfare *all* her resources are needed.

Compared to a war with a first-class power, our "war" with Spain was little more than a small riot and, for all our bungling, mismanagement and unpreparedness, its strain was hardly felt by the country at large. Even the four years of our big Civil War called out only 49 per cent. of the men available in the North. A real war, with a power like Germany, Japan or England, would force us to draw on every available man, just as the South had to draw on 98 per cent. of her men and boys in her gallant but unsuccessful struggle.

INCIDENTALLY, suppose we had had universal compulsory military service in 1861 and the North had been able to put *her* 98 per cent. in the field at once instead of getting out less than half of it scattered through four years. Wouldn't that Preparedness have attained the same end in far less time than four years—perhaps in a few months or weeks—and saved both parts of our country hundreds of thousands of lives, millions of dollars and untold suffering? Wouldn't it have been cheaper for our country to have made her men spend a few hours a year in military training? Won't universal compulsory military training *now* be cheaper for us than having war made on us because we are unprepared or than trying to prepare after the blow is struck?

AND if a real war comes to this country we shall need two armies, one for the firing-line and another, almost as large, back of it to keep it in ammunition and supplies. One big battle of the European

War used as much ammunition as was used in the entire four years of the Civil War. Ammunition doesn't grow on trees. Nor do you get it by wishing for it, or even by praying and cursing and screaming for it when the bitter need descends upon you and finds you helpless and frantic from the lack of it.

"Enough ammunition" means the safety of the country. And "enough ammunition" means not only a large advance supply but also an army of millions of men and women and even children working day and night to meet the daily demand of modern war. Will 20,000 deaf men be terribly needed then or not?

Here is Mr. Robinson's letter:

In your article, "You and Your Country," in the June *Adventure* you mention three kinds of fools. I would suggest that there is a fourth kind of fool, that is, the military officials themselves.

AN ABLE-BODIED man is of some use no matter whether he is deaf. Yet it is impossible to get the military officials interested in organizing the deaf into some useful branch of the service in war-time. There are over twenty thousand able-bodied deaf men in this country and they are not a bit less patriotic than their hearing brothers. Being deaf does not mean that a person must necessarily be of absolutely no use in a military sense.

Deaf men would make splendid gunners as they have nothing to lose from the concussion of gunfire. Then their sign language could be well used to advantage during the noise of a bombardment. Deaf men are normal as much as you are except they can not hear. Many of them are expert mechanics. They own and operate automobiles, motor-cycles and launches. Why wouldn't these men be useful in war-time? The ambulance corps opens another place where the deaf could be useful. They could work in the kitchens, repair-shops, etc., and thus allow more hearing men to be put in the trenches. It is characteristic of the deaf to possess good eyesight and consequently they would make good sharpshooters.

TWENTY thousand able-bodied men form a group that is not to be laughed at. If we are to prepare why not find some way of using these men?

England is training a thousand deaf men and the Germans have been using deaf men in actual trench work. The Russians found quite many deaf in a lot of prisoners they took.

Publish my letter in the "Camp-Fire" and ask the readers to write you what they know about the deaf and you will be surprised at the number of answers you will get. Out West there are seven or eight big game hunters who are deaf and some of your readers must have come across them.

Preparation is a good thing, but to make it really worth while it has to be a pretty thorough affair. The deaf should be included in any plans for the defense of this country.—I. M. ROBINSON, Sioux Falls, S. D.

LETTER-FRIENDS

Note—This is a service for those of our readers who want some one to write to. For adventurers afield who want a stay-at-home "letter bunkie," and for stay-at-homes, whether ex-adventurers or not, who wish to get into friendly touch with some one who is out "doing things." We publish names and addresses—the rest is up to you, and of course we assume no responsibility of any kind. Women not admitted.

(40) Roy A. Rumans, 933 S. 3rd St., Sherman, Tex., wants to hear from men in Asia, Africa, Australia, South Sea.

(41) Patrick J. Brennan, 361 8th St., South Boston, Mass., from men in foreign countries.

(42) Harvey Morris, Co. C, 23rd U. S. A., El Paso, Tex., postcards only.

(43) R. A. Cooper, Canadian Ordnance Corps, Winnipeg, Man., Canada.

(44) John M. Techton, care Beacon Light Co., 515 Market St., Chester, Pa.

BACK ISSUES OF *ADVENTURE*

Note—A department for our readers' convenience. Our own supply of old issues is exhausted back of 1915; even 1915 is partly gone. Readers report that back *Adventures* can almost never be found at second-hand book-stalls. Practically the only way to get special back copies or to fill out your files is to watch this department for offers made by the few readers who are willing to sell or pass on stray copies or more or less complete files. Our office files are, of course, complete and we do not buy back copies or act as agents for them.

1912, 1913, 1914, 1915, complete, $4. Or $1.50 for 1912 or 1913; $1.25 for 1914 or 1915.—GEO L. HICKMAN, 2304 Nicholas St., Philadelphia.

OUR identification cards remain free to any reader. The two names and addresses and a stamped envelope bring you one.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, U. S. A., stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. The names and addresses will be treated as confidential by us. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for purposes of business identification. Cards furnished free of charge, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later we may furnish a metal card or tag for adventurers when actually in the jungle, desert, etc. If interested in metal cards, say so on a *post-card—not* in a letter. No obligation entailed. These post-cards, filed, will guide us as to demand and number needed.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

HERE is the letter suggesting a Highland Brigade. A plan is being worked out so that men can join the Red-Headed Regiment, the Gray-Heads and similar regiments in connection with the American Legion. That is, a man eligible to both the Legion and one of these regiments can by signing one application enroll in both, the Legion having call on his services only in case the regiment is not fully organized and ready to take the field when war comes.

He can, of course, enroll in one instead of in both if he prefers. The plan is designed not only to give those enrolled freedom of choice but to make sure their services will become instantly available in any event. What will be the Legion's official status when you read this can not be foretold at the present writing, but we'll go on building just the same.

I CALL your attention to the last sentence in the following letter. It uses these words, "our beloved country" and speaks of "consecrating" the writer's spare time to her service. It is a shameful fact that when an American means words like that it takes real courage to say them out loud. We're all so afraid some one will think we are soft or sentimental. We'd rather be cowards instead.

What's the use of saying them? Stop and think. It is sentiment of one kind or another that is the mainspring of action. Never was a material thing brought into existence that didn't spring from sentiment in the beginning. We all know that, and we all forget that.

BUT why talk about what you feel even if it is good? Because the thing you smother dies. Just as it clears our thoughts to speak them, just so it strengthens our sentiments to give them voice. And because of its effect on others. Especially because of its effect on others. Think it over. It's a bigger thing than it may seem.

I'm not talking about spread-eagle oratory. That is the language of fools and crooks. But I take my hat off to the American who speaks out the words "I love my country," especially when their sincerity is proved, as in the case of Mr. MacGregor, by the offer of actual personal service for our country. How many of the rest of us have ever done, or offered to do, anything whatsoever for our country? Have you?

Here is the letter:

I have, as you know, been a deeply interested reader of your magazine for several years. It has been my boon companion in many a clime. The worst things I had against Villa and Company was their cutting our communications for over three months and preventing my *Adventure* getting to me on time.

Especially have I been interested in the success of the American Legion. I have applied for admission, and if permitted to join, will do all in my power for the patriotic movement.

IN THIS connection do you not think it would lend impetus to recruiting if the halo of past achievements bore a part? For instance, why should there not be a Highland Brigade? Until I am admitted to the charmed circle I can not place my ideas fully before the proper authorities, but as the start of the movement was entirely due to your magazine, your opinions in the matter should surely bear some weight. Could you not suggest something of this nature? Asking your many readers to express themselves?

The knowledge that we were fighting under the same title as those heroes led by Marlborough, Clive, Wolfe and MacDonald could not but assist in placing on history's page fresh deeds of derring-do. Nor need it stop there. An Irish brigade, a French brigade, a Swedish brigade, each with the impulse of previous heroism, and with the intention of emulating the spirit shown by those paladins whose name they bear.

If I can be of any assistance in propagating the idea and in giving it concrete shape, please command me. My nights are my own, and I will be glad to consecrate them to any work which will prevent our beloved land from becoming a second Belgium.—J. D. MACGREGOR, Denver, Colo.

A SUGGESTION of another regiment organized on the principle that *esprit de corps* arising from common employment, training, section of country, etc.

Now may I suggest that some one raise a regiment of cowboys? In the West there are many men who would be glad to enroll, who can use a horse and a gun. Used to roughing it. Don't you think it worth trying?—WARREN SAVAGE, Woodruff, Ariz.

AND another suggestion of a similar regiment, from Robert V. Carr, designed to meet a particular need. All these regiments are good ideas. But each needs a man or men to take hold of the preliminary organization as is being done for the Red-Headed Regiment and the Gray-Heads.

Here's something I have had in my head for some time—a regiment of men from the desert country of California, New Mexico and Arizona, hardy devils who know the desert and how to get along without water. In case of invasion, California's weakest point is the San Gorgonia Pass looking toward the desert. Once the enemy got in possession of that pass, it would be all off with Southern California. Therefore, why wouldn't a regiment to be known as the "Side-winders," carrying the old rattlesnake flag with the national colors, come in handy? Give it a little boost, if you have time. Of course you know that the desert rattlesnake is called a side-winder and is a bad proposition to tread on. You will recall, "Don't tread on me."—ROBERT V. CARR.

I LIKE the spirit of Mr. MacGregor's suggestion above and I have myself advocated American regiments formed from men of the same foreign blood or ancestry. Recent developments in this country, proving to me and to many other Americans the danger of anything and everything that encourages the idea of hyphenated American citizenship in even the remotest degree, have made me change my mind. I believe such a Highland Brigade would prove stanch and loyal even in case of war with Great Britain, but I believe the idea of any regiments formed on a basis of foreign origin or ancestry is unsound and unsafe as a general principle.

ARE YOU AN AMERICAN?

FROM our old friend out in the California mountains, Frank H. Huston, Westerner, pioneer, American of Americans, comes the following letter.

A short time ago I sent the Sec'y of War a crude draft of an American Flag law. Briefly, only national ensign permitted on buildings, boats, etc., except diplomatic offices, etc., vessels of foreign nations; not to be flown on staffs, on streets, lanes, roads anywhere under American jurisdiction.

This morning I got a fine letter from Adj't Gen., thanking for suggestion and advising I take it up with Cong. Rep. from this district. Immediately forwarded whole thing to Hon. J. A. Elston, M. C. of 5th Dist. Calif., Wash., D. C.

In draft excepted State flags and any flag identified with and purely of American history and action. . . . Foreign ensigns permitted as drapery solely, not on poles or staffs except as provided.

It seemed to make such a hit with the Adj't Gen. I am encouraged to bring it to your notice.

Perhaps such a law would not be practical or wise. Perhaps it would. On the face of it it is a comparatively small matter but deeper down it involves things that are very big indeed, things upon which we should not pass judgment hastily and which call for our earnest consideration.

And, wise or unwise, the spirit of Americanism that prompts this suggestion is emphatically and eternally right.

This country is beginning to wake to the fact that its foreign-born citizens present a problem that shakes the very foundations of our Republic. Americanism *vs.* the Hyphen has at last become a national issue.

LET me make certain things clear at the start. I am not talking politics. In the party sense I have no politics. I have voted the Republican, Democratic, Socialist and, though not a total abstainer, the Prohibition ticket. I believe in country first, party second. I believe in right men and right policies first, in party second. I do not believe in party at all except in so far as some party happens to stand for the things I do believe in. I'll vote for any man or any party that stands for what seems right, in so far as I am given light to see.

I believe in Preparedness, but this matter of citizenship is not a question of Defense *vs.* Pacifism and is of equal interest to the adherents of both policies.

I AM not speaking unneutrally. It does not matter here whether a foreign nation is on one side of the European conflict or the other. What does matter is whether that nation's former citizens who have become American citizens are making loyal American citizens or disloyal American citizens. In so far as they are loyal American citizens I am for them; in so far as they are disloyal American citizens, whatever the land of their birth, I am against them.

They come to this country by their own choice, unurged by us. They may live among us all their lives as foreigners if they please, retaining their old allegiance. If they become citizens of our country they do so of their own free will and preference. The only conditions we impose are made known to them before they can become American citizens, so that they take the step with their eyes open. And this is the law of the United States of America that prescribes the exact words of the oath they must take to become American citizens:

He shall declare, on oath, that he will support the Constitution of the United States, and that he absolutely and entirely renounces and abjures all allegiance and fidelity to every foreign prince, potentate, state or sovereignty; and, particularly, by name, to the prince, potentate, state or sovereignty of which he was before a citizen or subject.

Read that over slowly again and decide what you think of the man who takes that oath and breaks it, even if that man be yourself.

I DO not believe in mincing words or in evading issues. If there is an issue, it must be met, and it never pays in the long run to pretend the issue is not there. In the end it will have to be met anyhow. I am sick of those who call it wisdom to ignore a danger because they think talking or acting about it is dangerous. I know I shall make enemies by what I am going to say. Very well. I shall be proud to have them. I know that I shall make friends as well, and I shall be glad to have them. But neither my friends nor my enemies nor I myself can be of weight in the balance. The only thing that matters is *the truth*. Let us have *the truth* and face it. With it, we need fear nothing. Without it we are helpless.

Lying, dodging, fearing, evading, looking away, all these things are foolishness. The wise things are courage, frankness, truth. The biggest thing in the world, the strongest thing in the world, is clean, stark, naked truth. And this country needs it.

I HOLD that the man who takes that oath of fealty to the United States and then breaks it in act or word or thought is a liar, a perjurer and a traitor.

The words of that oath are absolute and all-embracing. All the casuistry and hair-splitting in the world can not shake the meaning of that oath. If a man is not intelligent enough to understand their meaning then he is not fit to be an American citizen. Any man with even elementary intelligence who swears that oath of allegiance when he takes out first papers, and swears it later a second time after two years or more in this country when he applies for full citizenship, can not help knowing that oath's full meaning, purpose and intent. If he breaks that oath he is what I have said —a liar, a perjurer and a traitor.

THERE is no place in this country for such as that. Every man must be wholly with us or wholly against us. Most of those who have come to us from other countries in this or past generations are, thank God, loyal to the United States. But many others are not. If they can not or will not keep the bargain they voluntarily made with us, then their American citizenship should be taken away from them and they should be sent out of the country they have betrayed. There must be no hyphens in our country. Double allegiance is impossible. *All* of every American's allegiance, in full and without reservation, belongs at all times and under all circumstances to the United States of America alone, over and above all other nations and authority whatsoever.

ALL my own ancestors have been Americans for two centuries back and more, but I do not feel that a man who was himself born in a foreign country can not be as good an American as I or any other native-born. Nor do I feel he should not always hold a warm place in his heart for the country of his birth. It is right that he should. But when he gives his allegiance he gives it. His acts, words and influence belong to his new country alone, and no friendliness for his old country must affect them in any way. He has no right to determine his course as an American by his sympathy for any other country. To him all foreign countries must look alike when the United States of America is concerned.

YET there are in our country at this moment big organizations of probably more than a million naturalized and even native-born citizens deliberately and openly working for the perpetuation in this country of the customs, language and traditions of the foreign countries from which they or their fathers came. For years we smiled indulgently. Of late this carefully planned propaganda has become so big and so menacing that we can no longer afford to smile. It is a movement that works against our unity and our institutions and that can not possibly co-exist with perfect loyalty to the United States.

SOME of the former citizens of one foreign country, Germany, sworn by oath to undivided loyalty for America yet definitely organized to foster and make strong in America the traditions, language, race spirit and culture of Germany, have even gone so far as to declare publicly and formally against two Americans who were being considered by this country for nomination for President of the United States and to declare in favor of a third candidate. And they did this for the avowed reason that they considered the two men unfriendly to Germany and the one man friendly to her.

In other words our national policies and the choice of our President are to be influenced—determined, if these hyphenates can accomplish their will—according to the interests, not of *our* country, but of some foreign country. Are we to choose our leaders and national officials according to American tests and needs and interests or according to the tests, needs and interests of some foreign country? Is America to govern America or is America to be governed or dictated to in any way by whatever foreign Power can plant here the biggest and best organized body of its own citizens who take the oath of entire fealty to us, break it and continue to work in the interests of their original country?

IT IS not a question of any particular foreign country but of *any* foreign country—England, Austria, France or any of the others. I am talking *for America.* And I'm talking against any foreign nation whatsoever whose former citizens make her interests a factor in American public affairs. Nor am I talking politics. As a matter of fact I expect to vote for the man the German-Americans have endorsed, but in spite of their endorsement, not because of it, and because I believe they made a mistake and defeated their own ends by that endorsement.

WHAT are we going to do about it? Work as hard for strict, straight Americanism as the hyphenates from foreign countries work against it! And harder. Organize if necessary. We have with us not only most native-born Americans but also many born elsewhere but American to the backbone. We can do what we set out to do.

In this country foreign languages should be reserved for the homes of those who speak them, and even there they should gradually give place to our own tongue. American citizens speaking foreign languages in public places should not be tolerated. Some American employers have already set the good example of refusing employment to all who can not or do not speak our language. All foreign-born or foreign-blooded American citizens who band together to perpetuate in America in any way the customs, language and race-bond of any nation other than this nation should be made to see that in so doing, however innocent their intent, they are failing in their duty to be the thorough Americans they asked to be and solemnly swore to be. If they can not or will not see this they should be rebuked, ostracized and legislated against until they become real Americans or leave the country to which they refuse to give the undivided loyalty they took oath to give.

WE HAVE boasted of being "the melting-pot of the nations" but of late we've been waking up to the fact that the pot doesn't melt. It took the danger of war to make us see the danger that had been growing up among us. How big and serious shall we find that danger if we have a war with some foreign country whose hyphenated people are scattered broadcast among our very selves?

It is more than time that every American citizen answered, and compelled others to answer, the question "Are you an American?"

And there is only one kind of American—the citizen who is wholly an American.

I SHOULD like to give here, in connection with real Americanism, the story that was told to me yesterday. I believe it true, but, whether true or not, it is a splendid, shining example of the kind of Americanism that alone can knit us into real national solidarity and make us able and fit to carry out the high destiny and good work we believe our country was builded to accomplish.

It was, as I remember, the Ninth Massachusetts regiment of National Guard with most of its members men of Irish birth or ancestry. As the regiment passed the Governor in review on its way to the Mexican border the Governor halted them. He had provided a sprig of Irish green for each man to wear on his coat.

BUT when the sprig of green was handed to the Colonel of the regiment he refused to take it. "Your Excellency," he said, "I am proud of my Irish blood. But this day I am nothing but an American!"

I salute that American. And until all the rest of us learn to say and to feel in similar fashion, not only in war-time or on the imminence of war but in times of peace as well, not only on this or that occasion but on all occasions all the time, until any other attitude has become anathema among us, we shall have reason to be ashamed not only of certain individuals among us but of ourselves and of our nation as a whole.

HERE is a letter, written several months ago, from one of us at the front, an American in the British flying corps from whom we have already heard occasionally.

Somewhere in France.

Last week was very hard owing to the many damaged 'planes, as the Germans are learning to shoot too —— well for any real pleasant joy-rides over the lines.

LAST week I was behind the gun on artillery observation over German territory and after being "archied" heavily for two hours—about 20 a minute I should say—three German machines (two of the famous Fokkers and one L. V. G.) attacked us at one time at an elevation of about 11,000 feet. It is death if a Fokker gets underneath and behind a slower machine so we made a vertical drop of five or six thousand feet and the rattle of four machine guns (three German and our own), the roar of wide-open exhausts, the scream of wires and the crack of the bullets as they passed through our planes made it sound like an inferno of noise.

My fire was mostly directed on the little beast trying to get underneath and I must have strafed him badly as he made off and was followed very shortly by the others. It was useless to pursue them as we were over their territory and our machine was slower. Then, too, it was impossible to see just how badly we were damaged and we started for home and archied again.

IT WAS only the skill and coolness of a pilot of pilots that enables me to write about it. On landing at our own aerodrome (one wheel shot badly and tire punctured) we found that we stood in need of three new main planes, one center plane, one tail plane, one aeleron and one wheel. It was one grand scrap and the whole machine looked like a sieve, but neither of us had a scratch—I can't see how some of them missed us. I am looking forward to another one if it is along with *the* pilot.

REALLY, I don't know how go things on earth but I do know that we are having great success in the air.

I am enclosing a bit of fabric from the planes of a German brought down in our lines a short time ago. Most of them fall on the other side as they don't come over here very much.—DEAN IVAN LAMB.

AT THE August Camp-Fire Mr. John J. Garvey and Identification Card 1927, neither, so far as I know, having ever heard of the other, both suggested the formation of a general order of adventurers. By the time this reaches you responses will have begun to come in, it's a big idea and a fine one, and I believe there will very shortly be something doing.

(My last letter to Mr. Garvey was returned unclaimed. Possibly he's been ordered to Mexico. I'll gladly act as clearing-house until he or another right man takes hold of it.)

The Adventurers' Club, which some of us founded three or four years ago, has become a flourishing institution with chapters in various places. But its membership is not within reach of all because a man's application for membership can't even be considered until he has personally attended a meeting of one of the existing chapters or helps organize a new chapter and gets a charter for it.

IT SEEMS to me that the whole future of the proposed general order of adventurers depends largely upon the methods by which new members are admitted. Mr. Garvey generously offered his time free to get things going and keep them running. I have never met him but undoubtedly, having once wandered on restless feet himself, he knows ten men of the right sort in various parts of the world whom he could trust to select ten more good men each, each of the new ten to select ten more. That would be a thousand members as a starter, scattered all over the world.

Perhaps there should be fewer or more to start with. Perhaps there is a better way of selecting them. But to spread the order quickly and make it accessible to all there should be members or representatives established at definite places as soon as possible.

ON THE other hand there should be some means of checking up on applicants so that the order would not be ruined by a lot of undesirable members whose only idea would be to graft off of other members. Financial or social position, nationality, religion and so on would have nothing to do with the choice of applicants. The order should be wide open to every man who is as willing to give as to receive. But this kind of man doesn't want to be held up by the other kind, the wrong kind. As I understand it, membership would mean only a right to introduce yourself to any one anywhere who wears the badge and knows the countersign. After that it's up to him. If you're a decent lot and he's a decent lot, why, there you are—each of you has found a friend. Even so, however, it is wise to provide as carefully as possible against admitting the "dead ones."

PERHAPS in places all over the world a member could be appointed as a "Guard" who would pass on applicants and

guard the order against the wrong kind. It might be well to have each applicant prove his restless foot by having to get the endorsement of a certain number of Guards in places that must be a certain distance apart from one another, the Guards giving their endorsements not to him but to headquarters, where the rolls would be kept and badges issued.

Perhaps an applicant should be admitted on the endorsement of any ten members.

WOULDN'T it be well to apply some check on men *after* they had been admitted? Require that they show at least one endorsement from some other member whom they had befriended? Or start a kind of honor-roll for the members who could show the greatest number of such endorsements?

Perhaps each member could be given an official number by which he could be recorded and known and which he must show on demand from any other member.

WHAT badge? A lapel-button or a pin in the shape of a ring indicating the endless trail? The initials of the order's name? A moccasin? A stormy petrel? Some emblem of the north joined with one of the tropics?

Expense? Mr. Garvey says none except cost of badge. But of course in common fairness every communication would have to enclose a stamped and addressed envelope if a reply were wanted. Personally I should think there ought to be fees or dues of say five cents to cover stationery, stamps and incidentals.

OF COURSE all the above are merely suggestions. Send me your own suggestions. But no money yet. *Adventure* will be glad to help by serving as a bulletin or clearing-house.

It's a good plan. It would mean something if an adventurer could find a friend in any port of the world in which he might find himself.

Here is Mr. Garvey's letter:

My idea in the matter of the organization I spoke of is, first, to have a bunch of clean, manly men who see more than the surface of life, to pledge themselves to help, if they can, any man wearing the badge of the order, by which badge they shall know that such a man has pledged himself in the same manner as they have and is worthy. The idea is not solely one of helping each other in a material sense, but also in the sense of companionship and sympathy. I believe more help would thus be given to many a lonely fellow in all parts of the world.

OF COURSE we shall have to trust every fellow at first, though possibly we may find some way to eliminate any undesirables there might be later. I would greatly appreciate any suggestions to help the move, and also a title, if some one will oblige with a suitable and simple one.

There would be no fees, save the cost of the badge, and I'd willingly donate my services, so the boys needn't worry about any get-rich-quick stunt or graft on my part.

One thing sure, though, politics and creed shall not interfere with the order on any pretext whatsoever.

In short, I would like the man who loves the big clean things in life to have some way of recognizing such another man as he is, to their mutual interest and perhaps benefit.

Again thanking you for your kind offer regarding the magazine and wishing you every success.—JOHN J. GARVEY, Esq., 1193 S. Main St., Akron, Ohio.

SOME time ago it was announced that Les Bentley of Los Angeles was authorized to recruit on the Pacific Coast for the Red-Headed Regiment. Since then it has been decided that his methods, while enthusiastic, well-meant and sincere, are too much at variance with those of the central temporary organizers for thorough coöperation and the latter feel that better results will be obtained if applications are sent direct to them.

OUR recent delay in filling requests for identification cards was due to the fact that the factory that was to give them a celluloid coating found itself unable to secure the necessary raw material. Five thousand new cards, printed and ready for coating, have at this writing been in their possession two months instead of the few days they had expected would be ample time for the process. I asked them to return some of the cards without their coating of celluloid and by the time this reaches you all the cards will be in hand and all requests complied with.

Stephen Allen Reynolds's articles, "Lost Treasures of the World," published in the December, January and February issues, evoked much interest and brought from some of you accounts of still other treasures, overlooked in even Mr. Reynolds's careful search. These I'm saving till there's space. They'd fill a whole issue of "Camp-Fire."

INFORMATION DIRECTORY

IMPORTANT: Only items like those below can be printed—standing sources of information. No room on this page to ask or answer specific questions. Recommend no source of information you are not *sure* of. False information may cause serious loss, even loss of life. *Adventure* does its best to make this directory reliable, but assumes no responsibility therefor.

For data on the the Banks fisheries, Frederick William Wallace, editor *Canadian Fisherman*, 35 St. Alexander St., Montreal.

Replies only if stamped, addressed envelope is enclosed and only at Mr. Wallace's discretion, this service being purely voluntary.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii and Alaska, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

For Adventurers' Club, get data from this magazine.

For The American Legion, The Secretary, The American Legion, 10 Bridge St., New York.

Mail Address and Forwarding.—This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

For cabin-boat and small boat travel on the Mississippi and its tributaries, "The Cabin-Boat Primer," by Raymond S. Spears; A. R. Harding, Publisher, Columbus, O., $1.00.

Red-Headed Regiment, Fred C. Adams, Chatham, N. Y.

Gray-Headed Regiment, address Major Guillermo MacFergus, care *Adventure*.

Marine Corps Gazette, 24 E. 23rd St., New York.

For rifle clubs, Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

WANTED —MEN

NOTE.—We offer this corner of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to our readers. Naturally we can not vouch for any of the letters, the writers thereof, or any of the claims set forth therein, beyond the fact that we receive and publish these letters in good faith. We reserve the privilege of not publishing any letters or parts of a letter. Any inquiry for men sent to this magazine will be considered as intended for publication, at our discretion, in this department, with all names and addresses given therein printed in full, unless such inquiry contains contrary instructions. In the latter case we reserve the right to substitute for real names any numbers or other names. We are ready to forward mail through this office, but assume no responsibility therefor. **N.B.—Items asking for money rather than men will not be published.**

PARTNER, young, not over 22 years and not under 18. Must be pleasant, agreeable, good company, and no boozer. One that likes the out-of-door sport, to go with me to the west coast of Florida for the Winter. I have a good proposition at which we can make good money. Party must furnish his part of expense, and must be ready to start by the first of this coming November. Some one with traveling experience preferable. All applications must have addressed and stamped envelope for return answer.—Address FRANK DERRINGER, Davenport, Okla.

WANTED, a "Side Kicker." If you're interested in oil, and are not too old, or a grouch or broke, we have a good proposition. Write us.—Address DR. SCOTT or JOHN MCCEARLEY, care *Adventure*.

PARTNER, must bear his share of expenses, for three Mineral Zones in Honduras—about 2,500 acres carrying gold and silver. Have been profitably worked by Molinette and Arastra. Recent legislation demanding certain work or money equivalent monthly puts it beyond the means of holder of title for the last four years. The pick of Honduras after eighteen years' residence as a miner. Have also a gold and platinum mine, a prospective hummer, to include. Want a man to take an active part. No other need waste time applying. A big chance in view of the certain influx of capital after the war.—Address DR. WM. C. ROBERTSON, Galeras, Olancho, Honduras, C. A.

Inquiries for opportunities instead of men are NOT printed in this department.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE.—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

MCWORTH, W. D. (Billy Mac), last heard of in Montreal, Canada. Knew him in Atlanta and New Orleans. Canadian papers please copy.—Address P. A. STRACHAN, 214 Oriental Building, Seattle, Wash.

Inquiries will be printed three times. In the January and July issues all unfound back names will be printed again.

ANY one knowing the whereabouts of the La Blache (White) family, that was settled in Southern States around Tennessee and Arkansas during Civil War, or family of John "Ambeau," will learn something of interest if they communicate at once.—Address MRS. E. C. PERRY, Hudson, Wis.

SPANORO, CORPORAL A. T., last heard from some time ago in France. C Co., 2nd Gloucester Regiment. Or any member of Hope of Gloucester Lodge 795, I. O. G. T.—Address HARVEY MORRIS, Co. C, 23rd U. S. A., El Paso, Texas.

GOURLEY, JOHN H., last heard of about four years ago; was then residing at 1053 S. Olive St., Los Angeles. Was learning to be an electrician. Six ft.; slender build; 28 years; dark complexion. Any information will be gratefully received by his brother.—Address SYDNEY GOURLEY, R. R., No. 7, London, Ont., Can.

DODSON, LUCION (L. H.), last heard from Joplin, Mo., Feb., 1915. Light hair, blue eyes, 5 ft. Information from any one will be appreciated.—Address L. C. Dodson, Rankin, Ky.

HUNT, ARTHUR, operator in the Signal Corps at Tbajay, Panay, P. I., 1901-2. Left P. I. on transport *Warren* June, 1902. Would like to get address.—Address L. T. 332.

MARTIN, W. J., last heard of in suburb of Los Angeles, Cal. Lived in Hacienda Manso Fuente Villa, Mex. —Address A. C. H., Box 514, Gatesville, Texas.

RICHARDSON, FRANK EPLY. Last address, Arlington Hotel, Santa Barbara, Cal. His pal wants to hear from him. May be in "Frisco" or in the transport service.—Address LOUIS ZAPPERT, Letter Carriers' Association, Lorain, Ohio.

Inquiries will be printed three times. In the January and July issues all unfound back names will be printed again.

HUBER, HENRY M., my brother; missing last four years.—Address MISS KATIE HUBER, 5101 Cote Bulliante Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

BURNHAM, FRANK, formerly of Dawson, Nome and R. N. W. M. P. I would like to hear from you.—Address JACK LAMONT, care *Adventure*.

CECETKA, A. F. (violinist). Want to hear from any one knowing his address. Australian. Located somewhere in the West.—Address B. C. C., Box 493, Kalispell, Montana.

WOONTON, CHARLES, signal corps on Luzon, P. I. Came home on transport *Warren*. Supposed to have lived in Knoxville, Tenn.—Address L. T. 333.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

THE following have been inquired for in August and September issues of *Adventure*. They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

ALLEN, ROBERT, formerly of Bucyrus, Ohio; Boston, Jim; Bradley, George Shiffer; Braut, Raymond, sailor from Ky.; Buttgenbach, Frederick (Fritz); Canavan, Henry; Carey, Charles A.; Cooke, James E. (half brother); Crowell, John J.; Dennis, Lee A.; Dunlup, Tom, civil engineer; Foine, Alf.; Getchell, Earnest A.; Glennan, William J.; Gutteridge, Edward J. (Bo); Heffern, Edward; Jefferson, John; Lawrence, Will, Jack or "Bill"; Lockwood, J. A.; Markley, Isohm; Martin, Alfred; Noble, Washington Arthur; Norris, Joe L.; Palmer, Glen.; Ritter, W. M. of Baltimore; Schane, Ben., left New Orleans, Sept., 1915; Spear, Dr., assistant surgeon U. S. Navy; Vail, Daniel, last heard from Cedar Springs, Mich.; Walsh, Billy; West, M.; Wheatton, H. L.; Whitfield, Robert; Workman, Edward.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

MISCELLANEOUS: Soldier of "E" Co., 38th Vols., stationed in Lipa, Batangas, P. I., in January, 1900; any of the crew of the U. S. Torpedo-Boat Destroyer *Dale*, 1903-1906; Any of the Florida boys who were out in the Everglades with Collecheche and Shapley Winter of 1914-1915; Will the red-headed chief steward, who took the *S. S. Berkshire* on her trip to Jacksonville, Fla., from Phila. on Sept. 25, write to me.—F. E. S.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

LAWRENCE STEWART, S. N. Morgan, Christian A. Damm, Mrs. Maude Thomas, George A. Blanchard, Hastlar Gal Breath, L. S. Lorens, please send us your present addresses. Mail sent to you at addresses given us doesn't reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure*.

NUMBERS 56, 68, 73, 76, W 93, W 167, W 140, W 150, W 153, W 183, W 184, W 189, W 195, W 203, W 211, W 212, W 215, W 311, W 312. Please send us your present addresses. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us do not reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

In addition to those features mentioned in our ad. on page 2, the following stories are at present booked for the November issue of *Adventure*, out October third:

THE WORLD NEXT DOOR — *William Dudley Pelley*

A dramatic tale of the days when British soldiers fought to carry the light of civilization to Darkest Africa, and of a girl who followed her soldier sweetheart to the end.

FOR THE LOVE OF ANNIBEL — *W. C. Tuttle*

An angel steps into a Western ranch-town and helps the boys put on an amateur melodrama, with an emotional bronc' in the leading rôle. Fun from box-office to footlights—and beyond.

HE SAID HE WOULD — *George L. Catton*

So he went, after three failures, to his little claim far north of the Yukon. And he vowed he'd bring back ten thousand in gold, or never return to her. You'll want to know the story of that cartridge-belt which still swings in the wind from the limb of a stunted spruce.

ON THE STRENGTH OF THE EVIDENCE — *M. S. Wightman*

A powerful story of Pacific transport life, told by a man who can keep you tense till the last line. Here's a chance for would-be detectives to try to untangle a snarl of circumstance. Also for the "wise ones" to get a rude jolt of surprise.

A RAGGED MOUNTAIN ROMANCE — *M. R. Cochrane*

Up in the Ragged Mountains of Virginia each man is a law unto himself. This is a love-story that will set you thinking.

BILLY JUNE AND THE AMAZON RAILROAD SCANDAL — *Wilbur Hall*

It's up to our old friend, *June*, to save the Brazilian Government millions and to nab the power behind one of the biggest hold-up games ever "pulled" in South America. This time *June* meets a crook worthy of his steel.

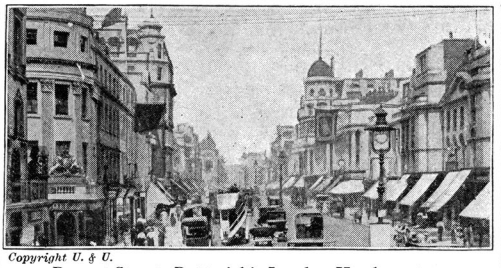
WRECKED — *Robert J. Pearsall*

You who love the sea, its romance, its eternal battle against puny, man-made things, will feel the sting of the spray and hear the booming of canvas as only a skilled sea-writer can bring it to those of us who must stay at home.

SUDS — *Edward S. Pilsworth*

An International Boundary; a few dozen bandits; miles and days of alkali; these mean nothing to *Suds* when the light of his young life has been stolen. He's a scrapper.

NOVEMBER ADVENTURE



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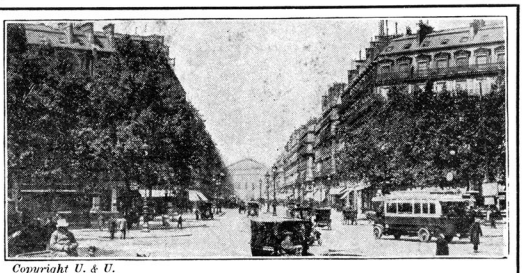

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Butterick Overseas

For forty years Butterick has had an establishment on Regent Street in the heart of London.

A special English edition of The Delineator, printed by Butterick in New York, has a larger sale in the British Empire than any comparable magazine.

Scores of titled Englishwomen are Butterick customers. Letters in our possession advise that the present Prince of Wales, as a child, was dressed with Butterick as a guide.

Butterick's Moden-Revue, The Delineator in German, is the leading magazine of its kind in Germany. From the Butterick establishment, 102 Leipziger Strasse, Berlin, it is circulated through Austria, Russia and Central Europe.

Le Miroir des Modes, The Delineator in French (also published in New York), has a larger sale in Paris and throughout France than any similar periodical.

The Butterick shop, 27 Avenue de l'Opéra, Paris, does the biggest business of its kind in the world.

The Delineator, translated into Italian, is read all over Italy

El Espejo de la Moda, The Delineator in Spanish, published in New York, has its unique place in the Spanish-speaking countries.

Each foreign country regards Butterick as its own national institution.

Great as Butterick is abroad, Butterick is far greater in America.

Just as Butterick's foreign publications are translations from its American publications, so Butterick's supremacy with the women abroad is but a repetition of Butterick's hold on the women of America.

For the same reason that Butterick leads in Paris, leads in London, leads in New York, it leads in Charleston, in Janesville, in New Orleans, in Ogden.

That women everywhere have the same interests needs no stronger proof than the appeal of the same Butterick service in whatever language or whatever country.

What opportunity does woman's loyalty to Butterick service present to you, the AMERICAN MANUFACTURER, and you, the AMERICAN MERCHANT, in Butterick's American publications!

Butterick

Monthly Magazines

The Delineator
The Designer
The Woman's Magazine

Quarterly Publications

Butterick Quarterly
Standard Quarterly
New Idea Quarterly

Becoming a Butterick Subscription Correspondent

An Answer to Your Money Needs

BEFORE October 1st we will appoint 500 men and women as Butterick Subscription Correspondents in their respective localities—a real position of money making, permanent and dignified—introducing THE DELINEATOR and EVERYBODY'S MAGAZINE into new homes. If you are well known in your locality, have ambition, enthusiasm, and above all, are genuinely earnest in your money desires, we will consider your application.

Over 4000 men profit handsomely, and enjoy life through our Subscription Correspondent positions. A large number are young men—married, employed regularly in other lines, but supplementing their incomes through their Butterick work. Some earn $15.00 a week extra, some $25.00—all are well paid. It is salesmanship of a high order—magazines of unquestioned merit—a Subscription Correspondent for the largest international publishing house in the world.

Send your application to-day with two business references. Be very certain of your interests. This is not for the "fly-by-nighter," or the "catch-as-catch-canner." It is for REAL men. If you can measure up, send your application to-day to October Desk, The Butterick Publishing Company, Butterick Building, New York City.

Mail Your Application To-day