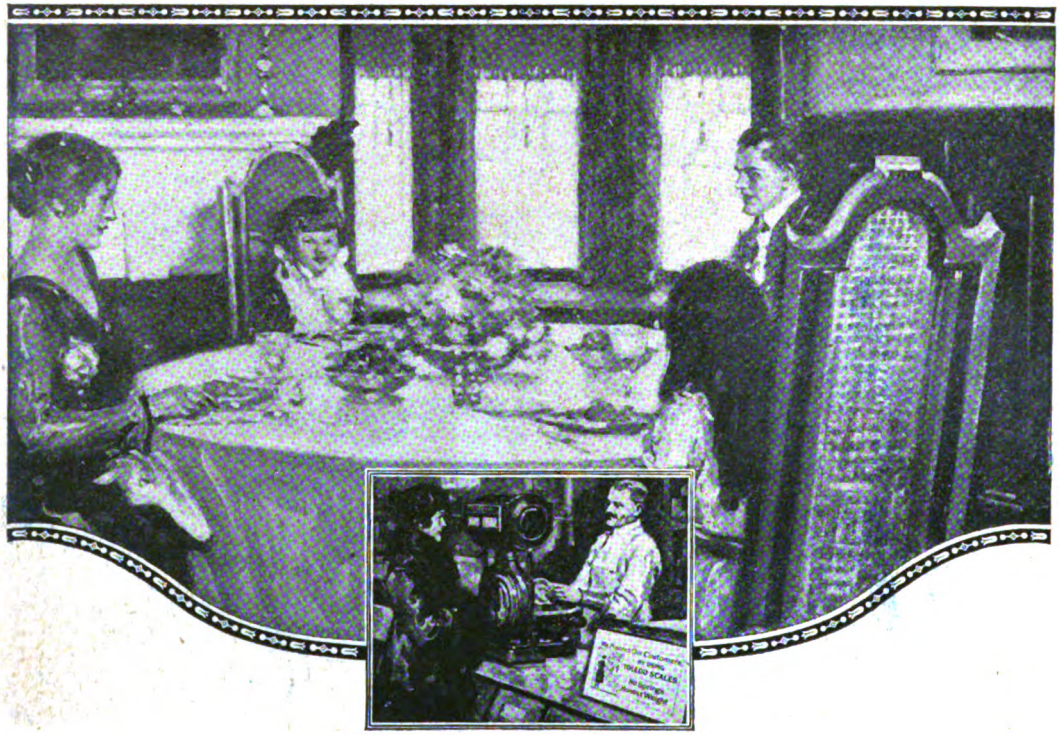
ARGOSY

Issued Weekly

NAKED MEN OF NAGA

by Gordon MacCreagh

10¢ APRIL 17 $4.00



WHILE in the dining room are spent many of the most enjoyable hours of home life, providing for the table is a serious problem.

It is estimated that nearly one-half of the income of the average family is spent for food. Most all of your food is bought by weight, therefore you have a direct financial interest in the scale used in the store where you trade.

Thousands of merchants, recognizing this direct financial relationship between their scales and your pocketbook, advertise by signs conspicuously displayed in their shops that *they* protect *their* customers by using Toledo Scales—No Springs—Honest Weight. Have you ever known of a merchant advertising that he used spring scales?

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Toledo, Ohio

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New $100 Oliver Only $57

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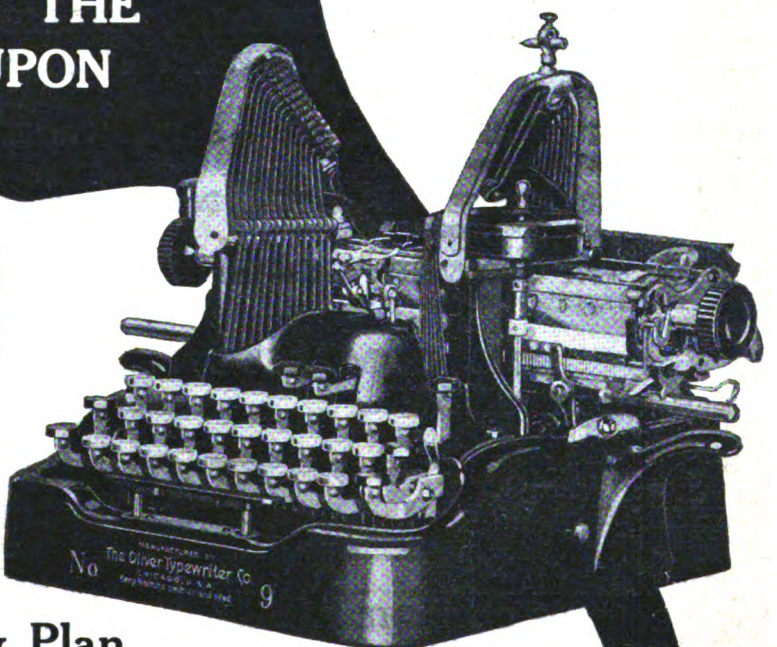
ONLY THE COUPON



YES, we will ship you a new Oliver for five days free trial in your home or office without a cent in advance from you. Mail only the coupon—no money. Use the Oliver all you wish for five days. Choose for yourself whether you want to keep it or not. If you decide to buy, pay only $3 a month. If you don't want to keep the Oliver, send it back at our expense. We even refund outgoing charges; so you can't lose a penny on this offer.

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Famous Oliver Users:

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THE OLIVER TYPEWRITER COMPANY
734 Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

☐ Ship me a new Oliver Nine for five days free inspection. If I keep it, I will pay $57 at the rate of $3 per month. The title to remain in you until fully paid for.

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Name .....

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THE ARGOSY

Vol. CXX ISSUED WEEKLY NUMBER 1

CONTENTS FOR APRIL 17, 1920

FOUR SERIAL STORIES

ONE COMPLETE NOVELETTE

FIVE SHORT STORIES

As tremendous as "The Duke of Chimney Butte," yet with a character all its own.

"LONESOMENESS"

BY GEORGE WASHINGTON OGDEN

BEGINS NEXT WEEK

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 Broadway, New York, and Temple House, Temple Avenue, E. C., London
FRANK A. MUNSEY, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer
Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $6.00 to Canada, and $7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered
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BEAUTIFUL 6-ROOM HOUSE

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Just imagine now for a moment that this beautiful Sunshine Home was yours, located right in your own town or on your own farm, a neat picket fence around it, flowers growing in well-arranged beds, rose bushes climbing the lattice at the porch ends, sending their fragrance into your nice, cool bedrooms. Picture this in your mind and then you will have a picture of what I want to do for you.

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Perhaps you do not own a lot — don't allow this to prevent your sending in your name and address. I'll take care of everything. I'll arrange to buy a lot for you in your own town and you can arrange to have the house built on the lot. Buy the lot in your neighborhood, or in a suitable neighborhood, allowing you to select the site — you will be proud of this home. I will be proud of it, for it will be a monument of advertising for my business. That is where I get my reward and that is why I make this most marvelous of offers — for the advertising it will give my business.

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When I Say Free I Mean Free

This is perhaps the most liberal offer ever appearing in this magazine. I mean every word I say. Be prompt. Rush your name and address quick.

Act Quick

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Please send me, absolutely free, full particulars and plans and colored picture of the 6-Room House you will give away. I risk nothing.

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Town.....

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State.....

Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rates in the Munsey Magazines:

	Line Rate	
Munsey's Magazine	$1.50	Combination Line Rate $3.50 Less 2% cash discount
THE ARGOSY COMB'N The Argosy All-Story Weekly	2.00	

May 22nd Argosy Combination Forms Close April 28th.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

LIVE WIRE AGENTS! WE WANT YOU! Take orders for **The Liberty Line of Made-to-Measure** combination **Top-Coats, Raincoats and Automobile Coats.** Hundreds of orders waiting for you. Our stock of materials is tremendous and deliveries are prompt. Complete selling outfit and sample coat free. Biggest commissions paid. We deliver and collect. Join our sales force of the biggest money-makers by writing for particulars at once. The Liberty Raincoat Company, Dept. 3-D, Dayton, Ohio.

HUSTLERS MAKE BIG MONEY selling patented **Spring Maid** Fibre House Broom. Outlasts 6 corn brooms. New exclusive features makes it big seller. Every woman wants one. Write today. Sample $1.50. Sterling Products Co., 36 S. Desplaines, Chicago.

AGENTS: $60 a week taking orders for Guaranteed shoes for men, women and children. Must give satisfaction or replaced free. Brand new proposition. Write quick for territory and samples. Thomas Shoe Co., 3607 North St., Dayton, Ohio.

SELL What Millions Want. New, wonderful Liberty Portraits. Creates tremendous interest. Absolutely different; unique; enormous demand—30 hours' service. Liberal credit. Outfit and catalogue Free. $100 weekly profit easy. Consolidated Portrait Co., Dept. 22, 1036 W. Adams St., Chicago.

SEND 2c POSTAGE FOR FREE SAMPLE with particulars. No splashing water strainers. Easy seller. Returns big. Experience unnecessary. Seed Filter Co., N73, Franklin St., New York.

WANTED—REPRESENTATIVE to wholesale lowest priced guaranteed automobile tires and tubes on market. Big seller. Other lines added later. Write for local territory. Jordan Tire-Rubber Co., Dept. A, Mailers Bldg., Chicago.

WE START YOU IN BUSINESS, furnishing everything. Men and women, $30.00 to $100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. Ragsdale Co., Drawer 93, East Orange, N.J.

AGENTS—YOU CAN GET A BEAUTIFUL FAST COLOR ALL WOOL "MADE-TO-MEASURE" SUIT without a cent of expense. Write Lincoln Woolen Mills Company, Dept. 25, Chicago, Ill., for their liberal suit offer.

PANTS $1.00, SUIT $3.75, MADE TO MEASURE. For even a better offer than this write and ask for free samples and new styles. Knickerbocker Tailoring Co., Dept. 540, Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS—$40 TO $100 A WEEK. Free Samples. Gold and silver Sign Letters for stores and office windows. Anyone can put them on. Big demand. Liberal offer to general agents. Metallic Letter Co., 431-H, N. Clark, Chicago.

SALESMEN—Side or main line, to sell low-priced 5,000-mile guaranteed tires; 30x3½ non-skid sells for $12.95; other sizes in proportion. Good money-making proposition for live wires. Write Consolidated Tire Co., 618 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

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AGENTS—OUR SOAP AND TOILET ARTICLE PLAN IS A WONDER. Get our Free Sample Case Offer. Ho-Ro-Co, 137 Locust, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS FOR "SECRET OF BEAUTY" toilet preparations. Large profits. Quick sales. Fine repeater. Send stamp for samples and terms. Heron Co., Dept. 30A, Cleveland, Ohio.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS

GOOD HARDWOOD LAND ON CREDIT in Michigan's best counties. Raises fine grain, fruit, truck. **Only $15 to $35 per acre.** Very easy terms. In tracts of 10 to 160 acres. No swamps or stones. Free farm advisers and insurance. Money loaned after land is paid for to erect buildings and buy live-stock. Near good markets, schools, churches, hard roads, railroad, etc. Best land offer in United States from largest company. Write today for free booklet. Swigart Land Company, Y1245 First National Bank Building, Chicago, Ill.

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AGENTS: Reversible Raincoat. Two coats in one. One side dress coat, other side storm overcoat. Guaranteed waterproof or money back. Not sold in stores. Big commission. Sample furnished. Parker Mfg. Co., 106 Rue Street, Dayton, Ohio.

AGENTS—200% PROFIT. WONDERFUL LITTLE ARTICLE. Something new; sells like wildfire. Carry right in pocket. Write at once for free sample. Albert Mills, Manager, 1600 American Building, Cincinnati, Ohio.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO WEAR A BEAUTIFUL NEW SUIT made to your own measure **Free,** and make $35 to $50 every week? You can be the best dressed man in your town and earn a lot of extra money if you write at once for our beautiful samples and wonderful offer. The Progress Tailoring Co., Dept. 284, Chicago.

AGENTS—MAKE A DOLLAR AN HOUR. SELL MENDETS, a patent patch for instantly mending leaks in all utensils. Sample package free. Collette Manufacturing Company, Dept. 306-B, Amsterdam, N. Y.

AGENTS: SELL NEVERFAIL IRON RUST AND STAIN REMOVER. HUGE PROFITS. BIG LINE. SAMPLE. Write today. Sanford-Beal Co., Inc., Dept. A, Newark, N. Y.

BIGGEST MONEY-MAKER IN AMERICA. I want 100 men and women quick to take orders for raincoats, raincapes and waterproof aprons. Thousands of orders waiting for you. $2.00 an hour for spare time. McDonough made $813.00 in one month, Nissen $19.00 in three hours; Purviance $207.00 in seven days. $5,000 a year profit for eight average orders a day. No delivering or collecting. Beautiful coat free. No experience or capital required. Write quick for information. Comer Mfg. Co., Dept. Y124, Dayton, Ohio.

SALESMEN WANTED TO SOLICIT ORDERS for Lubricating Oils, Greases, Paints and Roof Cement. Salary or Commission. Previous experience unnecessary. Address: The Lennox Oil and Paint Co., Dept. A, Cleveland, Ohio.

WE HAVE IT! You want it. What is it? A polish that will clean your windows and mirrors without getting dust on woodwork. Also, the best silverware and white shoe polish. Sponge free. 25c will bring it to you. Agents reserve territory. Gem Polish Mfg. Co., Indianapolis, Ind.

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AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

WANTED—Poems for publication for magazine of Inspiration and Practical Help to young writers. Send Mss. to the Poet's Magazine, Room 101, 916 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago.

WRITERS: HAVE YOU A POEM, STORY OR PHOTOPLAY TO SELL? Submit MSS. at once to Music Sales Company, Dept. 60, St. Louis, Mo.

FREE TO WRITERS—a wonderful little book of money-making hints, suggestions, ideas; the A B C of successful Story and Movie-Play writing. Absolutely free. Send for your copy now! Just address Authors' Press, Dept. 19, Auburn, N. Y.

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC., are wanted for publication. Good ideas bring big money. Submit Mss. or write Literary Bureau, 110, Hannibal, Mo.

Classified Advertising continued on page 2, back section.

IVER JOHNSON
SAFETY AUTOMATIC
REVOLVER

The Sign of Positive Safety

Iver Johnson means Safety, and Safety means Iver Johnson—the two are inseparable.

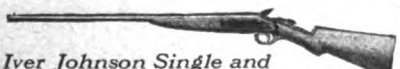
Drop it, kick it, knock it, thump it, "Hammer the Hammer"—it can't go off accidentally. And its safety is automatic—nothing to remember to do to make it safe. That's why women are not timid about having an Iver Johnson in the home.

Choice of three grips: Regular, Perfect Rubber, Western Walnut.

Three Booklets, one or all FREE on request
"A"—Arms; "B"—Bicycles; "C"—Motorcycles

If your dealer hasn't in stock the particular model you want, send us his name and address. We'll supply you through him.

IVER JOHNSON'S ARMS & CYCLE WORKS
140 River Street, Fitchburg, Mass.
99 Chambers Street, New York **717 Market Street, San Francisco**



Iver Johnson Single and Double Barrel Shotguns combine accuracy and dependability.

Iver Johnson "Superior" Roadster Bicycle, $55. Other Models $37.50 to $65.
(No extra charge for Coaster Brake.)

$267.50

THREE YEARS TO PAY

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MEISTER PIANO

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Eight exquisite styles to choose from and the one you select will be sent to you on

30 DAYS FREE TRIAL—ALL FREIGHT PREPAID

If you like the piano we will sell it to you on small monthly payments to suit your convenience as low as $7 per month. No cash deposit asked. No interest on payments. No extras of any kind. Stool free with piano. Write today for our 100-page illustrated catalog in the natural colors of the wood. It's free. If you are interested in player-pianos send for our free catalog. We have a fine selection.

Rothschild & Company, Dept. AC-6, Chicago, Ill.

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Set in Solid Gold

Send Your Name and We'll Send You a Lachnite

DON'T send a penny. Send your name and finger size and say, "Send me a Lachnite mounted in a solid gold ring on 10 days' free trial." We will send it prepaid right to your home. When it comes merely deposit $6.00 with the postman and then wear the ring for 10 full days. If you, or if any of your friends can tell it from a diamond, send it back. But if you decide to buy it—send $3.00 a month until $24.00 has been paid. **Write Today** Send your name now. Tell us which of the solid gold rings illustrated above you wish (ladies' or men's). Be sure to send your finger size.

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$3.48 Buys $8.00 Pants

MADE TO YOUR ORDER

$3.48 SEND NO MONEY

BIGGEST VALUE EVER OFFERED

Beautiful pants to your order, of fine quality striped worsteds, through and through weaves for dress or business, guaranteed to give you two solid years satisfying wear or MONEY BACK, tailored any style or size—No Extra Charges—parcel post or express prepaid. Biggest $8.00 value ever offered or money back. Write for 60 cloth samples. Free Special THIRTY DAY TRIAL OFFER, one Pair to a customer,

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Simply mail name, if you want this wonderful gold Gillette complete safety razor outfit with blades. Top quality tennis rackets, baseball outfits, Eastman kodaks, gold mounted umbrellas and watches for boys, girls, men and women given away absolutely Free for a little spare time work! Real DOLLARS IN CASH, too! Be the first in your locality to represent us. Answer quick, a postal will do.

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This University discovery is the most important health invention of the century. It remakes and rejuvenates the Human Body. It produces normal spines. It frees impinged and irritated nerves, corrects contracted muscles, shortened ligaments, eliminates congestion, improves circulation and drainage of the body. It will increase the body's length.

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EARN $100 TO $400 A MONTH

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Kansas City Auto and Tractor School

Dept. 123 15th & Lydia Kansas City, Mo.

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Conserve Your Health and Efficiency First

"I Would Not Part With It For $10,000"

So writes an enthusiastic, grateful customer. "Worth more than a farm" says another. In like manner testify over 100,000 people who have worn it.

The Natural Body Brace

Overcomes WEAKNESS and ORGANIC AILMENTS of WOMEN and MEN. Develops erect, graceful figure. Brings restful relief, comfort, ability to do things, health and strength.

Wear It 30 Days Free at Our Expense Does away with the strain and pain of standing and walking; replaces and supports misplaced internal organs; reduces enlarged abdomen; straightens and strengthens the back; corrects stooping shoulders; develops lungs chest and bust; relieves backache, curvatures, nervousness, ruptures, constipation, after effects of Flu. Comfortable and easy to wear. KEEP YOURSELF FIT. Write today for illustrated booklet, measurement blank, etc., and read our very liberal proposition.

For Boys and Girls Also

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OVEN BAKED BEANS

SAVE yourself trouble and expense. You needn't burn coal or gas for hours—Heinz has really *baked* these beans, thoroughly, in dry-heat ovens, until they are rich, mealy, digestible, satisfying.

Save yourself worry. Heinz Beans will never disappoint you.

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FOUR KINDS

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Heinz Baked Pork and Beans (without Tomato Sauce) Boston style
Heinz Baked Beans in Tomato Sauce without Meat (Vegetarian)
Heinz Baked Red Kidney Beans

THE ARGOSY

Vol. CXX SATURDAY, APRIL 17, 1920 No. 1

Naked Men of Naga

by Gordon MacCreagh

Author of "Tast And Some Diplomacy," etc.

CHAPTER I.

JEHANNUM OF THE JUNGLE.

JUNGLE! Moist, lushy, sunless! Dim beneath the towering blanket of foliage with the twilight greenness of deep water! Miles of it! Five thousand square miles without a break, except where the dry winds of the hot season withered the hilltops and left them sticking out like bald heads accentuated by a scattering, bristly growth of huge teak trunks whose roots tapped deep springs which reached the surface a thousand feet lower down in thin trickles of ooze.

The first crushing impression of the dim depths was of intolerable, stifling silence; for nothing moved, nothing spoke. Nothing seemed to, that is to say; for the teeming animal life of the trackless underbrush went about their mysterious errands with soft-footed secrecy; and it was not till the ear had attuned itself to the unaccustomed vibrations that it was able to recognize their myriad voices as a single, vast, sublimated hum.

Men there were none; for this was the ragged, undulating borderland between the Lushai Hills and the northerly state of Manipur, a far, outlying district which had been shoveled onto the already harassed province of Eastern Bengal and Assam for administration—which administration consisted of sending presents to the chiefs and asking them please to be good.

The border was an uncertainly defined no man's land, in which the long-limbed, stark-naked Naga tribesmen of the north politely refrained from getting into conflict with the dark and sturdy aboriginal Kukis and Lushais of the southern hills; and which the wily hillmen left with equal courtesy to their belligerent neighbors rather than argue about it—particularly since there was nothing to argue about.

Since, then, this uninviting tract was not altogether safe for anybody else to be prowling about in, it was quite safe enough to be comfortable for a white man. At all events, so thought the white man who lay carelessly confident on his back on one of the bald hilltops with his head pillowed in his folded hands, watching a distant colony of circling kites with narrow-eyed suspicion.

The man lay under a giant, half-starved teak tree, so motionless that he might have passed for one of the sturdy roots himself. His khaki skirt and breeches merged into the general coloration of the earth, and his hard, sun-tanned face and thick arms might well have been knotty limbs fallen from the tree. The shifting sun encroached upon his pigskin leggings and grilled the limbs within till the man, unable to mantain his lazy position any longer, snatched them up and rolled over onto his stomach.

Caution born of much wandering in the waste places of the earth caused him to shoot an instinctive glance from under his brows, bushy and straw-bleached, round the immediate landscape. He heaved himself onto his elbows and craned his neck to see that all was right in the little hollow behind him. A tiny brown tent and a pair of pack saddles made tranquil evidence of humanity in the midst of vast loneliness. Not a very comfortable way of traveling along the borderland of the Lushai Hills.

But when it is stated that the man was Smith, "Go-to-hell Smith," or "Jehannum," as everybody knew him, all the Far East knows that Smith's ideas about comfort and safety are not conventional. After a moment of frowning contemplation Smith called:

"Poonoosawmi!"

His wiry little Madrassi servant stuck a very black and inhumanly crafty face out of the tent with the instant response of a jack-in-the-box. Then, seeing his master's beckoning expression, he emerged and trotted up the slope. He, too, contrary to convention, and in profanation of his own inborn sense of decency, was dressed in a low-visibility khaki.

Smith rolled over onto his back again, fished a pipe from his pocket, and filled it with slow deliberation. Sheltering a match between his wide brown hands, he glanced between puffs from under his pale brows at the man. He smiled slowly to see that the other's quick eye had noticed the kites also. He addressed him with affectionate approval.

"Well, child of many devils, what does the wisdom of your fathers make of them?"

Poonoosawmi showed no hesitation. "That," he said with conviction, "is dam Kuki fellow snooping. Dead animal is not, for then kite would descend with voracious unanimity. Just now the bird is observing fearfully from on high."

Smith grunted. "Poonoosawmi, you're a fool," he said judicially. "I've told you a million times that you'd be a bloomin' wizard if you weren't so blinkin' cock-sure. Consider, monkey without a head: A jungle man wouldn't attract kites any more 'n any other animal would. If it was a village there'd be smoke—or we'd smell it, more probable, with this wind. 'Sides, there's no stinkin' village within miles of here.

"No, me son; they're waiting for what's *going* to be grub; an' there's nothing going to be grub around here except what men leave. More'n one man, or two. Must be a party. Maybe a raiding party making dog feast. Poonoosawmi, me boy, I guess we go look see."

"Yes, marshter," said Poonoosawmi. "Marshter's induction is devilish correct. But look see is unnecessary inquisitiveness. These Lushai savage doing dog feast ceremony is most ferociously—"

Smith shot out a vast hand for the bare black leg nearest to him, but Poonoosawmi leaped into the air with the alertness of an ape and made for the tent, muttering with mournful resignation that his master was surely mad and that they were both dead men already; and that never again would he listen to the voice of a missionary evangelist.

For their present plight was the direct result of an earnest attempt on the part of such an enthusiast to reform Smith. It was that great soul's habit from time to time, when the confinement of the cities oppressed his spirit beyond endurance, to feel the urge of the open places as an elephant does at the time of his *musth*. When these primal impulses came upon him he would heave himself out of the enervating slough of civilization and order Poonoosawmi to prepare the luggage for an exploration.

Poonoosawmi knew just what was proper. He would take the slenderest possible camp equipment that an expert could devise, no food, and much drink.

On the present fateful occasion the good pastor of the mission tabernacle, on hearing Smith's thundering decision that the city was a "gorblimey 'ole in 'ell," had prevailed upon Poonoosawmi to take only one bottle of whisky.

The natural result was that when Smith had placed a whole long day's journey between himself and the benefits of civilization, there was nothing left with which to still the insistent call of his strenuous spirit. The vast surplus of energy had to be worked off somehow, of course; and so Poonoosawmi wept and cursed the noble impulse which had resulted in driving his restless master to the far confines of the Lushai, and which was still running strong.

A couple of hours later Smith stopped with a sudden grunt, and pointed to a broad swath of a trail through the lushy undergrowth. Poonoosawmi looked and sucked in his cheeks like a baby gibbon.

"Yes, marshter," he said, "this is dam funny thing. Kukis is always traveling in the single file like the crook; but this party is going like the elephants. It is, alas, therefore, for the ooziness which squirms between my toes, for thereby is no footprints available. This trail is, moreover, three days old."

"Four," grunted Smith, "or five. Look at that *basuli* vine. Six inches growth a day."

"Verily," agreed Poonoosawmi. "And thereby is yet more wonderful; for having come five days gone, whyfore is staying on bamboo *tope* only six miles forward? How I know it is bamboo? For why, without semiopen foliage of bamboo patch how shall the kite see?"

Poonoosawmi's satisfaction at his own cleverness was that of a tickled monkey. His master's eyes puckered with shrewd approval.

"Good boy," he muttered, and strode across the track. For another couple of hours they ducked and climbed and scrambled through dripping brush and hook-thorned vines till they began to come to firmer ground on a long slope.

Suddenly Poonoosawmi tugged at Smith's coat and pointed in silence. Smith studied the faint trail with narrow eyes and then-pressed lips. Poonoosawmi rose on his tiptoes and whispered:

"Single man. Trail less than one day old."

Smith nodded reflectively, sucking in his breath. Then:

"This one, I think, we follow. He goes our way."

Even to Poonoosawmi, who knew his master so well, it was always a source of wonder to see how that massive man proceeded to drift through the undergrowth with no more sound than one of the great pad-footed cats of the jungle. Suddenly he stopped with one foot raised, like a pointing hound.

Poonoosawmi peered under his arm. For a long minute Smith took in every detail, and then cautiously, very cautiously, he drew back. Well out of sight he backed, and then he stooped to Poonoosawmi's ear, and whispered the single illuminating word:

"Naga!"

Poonoosawmi was quaking with a piteous terror in his face. It was moments before he was able to stammer:

"Marshter, this is most fearsome sign. Those naked savage fellow from the north is up to no good business. I think better, marshter, you shoot him now for the saving of the treachery."

"Shut up, you heathen!" growled Smith.

"Not heathen, marshter," Poonoosawmi moaned. "That fellow is heathen, and I am Christian convert. Therefore, is his rage boundless."

Smith displayed his sympathy by kicking his servant gently in the shins. Poonoosawmi stepped warily back and murmured with a martyr's resignation:

"I am dead. But in God is my trust."

"Fool!" growled Smith furiously. "His spear isn't a war spear. He's just watching the other gang. For what wicked reason is for me to find out. And by the same token I'll bet now that they're a bunch of fool white men. So we'll just duck round an' investigate."

They made a wide detour to avoid the tall sentinel, and headed once again in the direction where they knew the patch of suspicious jungle should lie. Suddenly Smith stopped with an exclamation, and

pointed again. Poonoosawmi was almost weeping.

"O-oh, marshter, this is abomination and desolation. Tracks of the savages is like spider's walk. This unknown bamboo tope party is hemmed in by all sides. What profit is accruing to marshter by sharing their bloody fate? More better is we fly backwards."

Smith kicked him again with gentle reflectiveness while his brow bunched into puzzled corrugations. Then he came to one of his swift decisions, and plunged ahead. A few minutes brought him to one of those unaccountable long strips of clearer ground where the tough, lusty growth of giant bamboo kills off all other verdure and stretches like a winding river through the jungle.

Bamboo grows in huge tangled clusters or clumps. The clumps themselves are impenetrable, even to elephants, but they grow in scattered confusion, thirty, forty, or fifty feet apart. Between them the ground is clear of all other green stuff, and is flat and dry and deliciously carpeted with slender dead leaves. Bamboo jungle is, therefore, ideal camping ground.

Through these open spaces Smith could see the front of a large tent and the glaring white sheen of several smaller ones. Voices and the accompanying clatter of a large and carelessly confident camp drifted to his ears on the puffs of wind. He stood and voiced his amazement.

"Gor-strike me! Don't these babes in the wood know anything at all?"

He made a face at Poonoosawmi, indicating that he was to stay where he was, and then he strode lightly forward. He always believed, as a matter of well-tried principle, in seeing as much as possible before himself being seen. He slipped noiselessly, therefore, from one clump to another, and looked at this astonishing encampment from several angles before he should make his presence known.

Not that his caution was at all necessary. A dweller of the cities could have walked in on this arcadian gathering without being detected till he said: How do you do? There were two expensive-looking tents which had obviously been selected out of some dealer's catalogue, and a large marquee, evidently for eating in, set up in a sloppy manner which made Smith grunt with indignation. Several pup tents at a distance accounted for a crowd of servants.

Pack saddles and camp equipment lay about in what he considered the ultimate confession of amateurishness. In front of him a slender youth, dressed in an appallingly neat shirt and riding breeches, crouched, careless back to the open jungle, absorbed in some occupation with some sort of an instrument.

Smith clucked his disapproval of such fatuous confidence. Then his eyes narrowed in a mischievous smile, and he glided in on the boy from behind.

So engrossed was the young man that Smith stood behind him for a long time watching a mysterious performance with glass tubes and shiny levers of which he understood nothing. Then, as the other stooped, a flash of Smith's boyish irresponsibility which he had never outgrown came over him. With keen enjoyment of the dramatic surprise, he brought his vast palm down with a sounding smack on the tight-stretched breeches.

"Well, son," he ejaculated boisterously, "enjoying yourself on this picnic?"

CHAPTER II.

BABES IN THE WOOD.

THE youth leaped away with a little shriek, and whirled to face Smith, who stood grinning with his hands deep in his pockets, tugging, as he turned, at a toy revolver in his belt.

And then Smith's face went white under the tan and flushed slowly back to a mahogany red. He stepped back with an arm half raised as though to ward off a blow, and his eyes in their terror assumed an expression of staring ferocity which was belied by the looseness of his jaw.

The furious eyes which shot electric fire up at him from about the level of his shoulder were as steely gray as his own, and quite as steady. But there the resemblance ended with an abruptness that was akin to an explosion.

The face was smooth and alabaster white—except where a crimson flush which seemed to have concentrated at the half-hidden ears began to surge back over the perfect oval of the cheeks. The mouth, though tightly pressed, was full-lipped. The cleft in the firm chin was a dimple. *And*—the hair that strayed from under the trim pith helmet was blond, and curly, and long! A rebellious wisp of it strayed full across the blazing eyes!

Smith gasped at the astounding picture, making ineffectual efforts to moisten his dry lips. The girl stamped her shapely high-laced boot, and stormed at him.

"Oh, you! Don't stand there looking like a fish!"

"Garsh!" Smith murmured. "S'welp me! This 'ere's a descent from the sublimey to the gorblimey."

Reversion to the idiom of the cantonment and the barrack always showed that Smith was abnormally shaken from his usual balance. It was a shameful reminder of his unregenerate youth, and it happened seldom, very seldom indeed. Only a cataclysm of the most dire nature could so move him.

With his halting rumble of speech the girl seemed to realize for the first time that this was a man, a huge and miraculous portent out of the empty jungle, but none the less a man—and a stranger! The flush that had been battling with the set whiteness of her face surged over in a hot wave, and she half turned from his gaze, looking piteously about to cry. Smith recovered his poise. He snatched off his belated hat.

"I beg your pardon, miss," he apologized formally. "I thought that—that—" He boggled over his words and drifted into ineffectual rumblings. Then suddenly the girl straightened and turned a surprisingly calm and collected face to him.

"You shouldn't have thought so emphatically," she told him, with calm severity in her voice. "I suppose you want to see my father."

"Why, er—yes," stammered Smith.

"He's in his tent," said the girl. "If he isn't working on an analysis, he'll see you."

She led the way to the large tent, and Smith followed, still blinking his eyes and murmuring: "Garshamighty!" and "'Tain't true!" His mind struggled with a haze of half-remembered stories about nymphs and Grecian goddesses who symbolized the spirit of the woods.

In his strenuous life nothing so perfectly appealing had ever appeared before. He had met women during his periodical sojournings in the cities; but women, ladies, had seemed to him to be fragile creatures of artistic artificiality, nothing at all like the sculptures he had gazed at with such scornful disbelief in the museums. He wondered whether goddesses reincarnating would modernize to appropriate costume. The girl clanged on a tin plate which hung at the tent flap.

"Father," she called. "Here's a visitor to see you."

A pregnant pause followed her announcement. Then a snarl came from within, muffled and not very coherent; but Smith thought that the terse formula was familiar. The girl stepped away quickly with shocked eyes.

"Oh!" she said. "Father is busy. You'll have to wait a while. Will you please sit down?"

The invitation was the unconscious habit of polite convention. There was nowhere to sit, of course, except on the ground. Smith stood, therefore, awkwardly trying to think what he should say to this astonishingly self-possessed goddess.

His dilemma was relieved by a rustle of canvas. He spun on his heel in time to see a tall young man with a sensitive, studious face step out. The young man, too, was dressed exactly like the catalogue of some sporting goods house. He came forward with a white hand outstretched in apologetic cordiality.

"Professor Harrison is very much occupied just at this moment," he explained. "Elias P. Harrison, of Chicago, you know. He begs that you will have patience for a little while."

This euphemistic paraphrase of the snarl which Smith had heard passed over his head. He was wondering who in thunder Professor Elias P. Harrison of Chicago

was, who wandered about the Lushai Hills with the equanimity of a moving-picture outfit, and whose fame seemed so obvious to the tall young man with the horn-rimmed spectacles. But the young man was addressing him again with drawing-room courtesy.

"May I inquire whom we have the pleasure of entertaining?"

"Huh?" said Smith. He was still looking after the girl, who had returned to her task with the unfamiliar instrument. "Oh, Smith is my name. 'Jehannum' Smith." And he added, with a flash of his satirical humor, "You know."

Very obviously Smith, in the presence of mere man, was recovering his poise.

"Ah," said the young man, with evasive politeness. "I'm very glad to make your acquaintance, Mr.—er—how do you say it—Smith. My name is Van-Eyck. I have the honor to be Professor Harrison's assistant and that of his daughter, who is his coworker."

Smith's vanity must be forgiven if he reflected that these people must be very new in the country. But the young man was growing more surprising every minute. He was smiling with engaging friendliness and asking:

"In what way can we be of service to you, Mr. Smith?"

Smith's grunt was an explosion. He was entirely unaccustomed to having people offer to *help* him in any way at all in the jungles. And from these lost children! It was staggering.

"Say, son—" he began, but the petulant voice from within the tent interrupted him.

"Show the gentleman in, Howard."

The young man smiled in pleased anticipation and drew aside the tent flap. Smith stooped under the scalloped frill, strode in—and stood spellbound. He had entered a magician's den, it seemed to him. A long trestle table occupied two sides of the large tent. It was covered with more shiny instruments like that which the girl had been toying with, and with glass tubes bent into all sorts of queer shapes, and with test tubes in neat racks, and with a litter of other things.

A burly man, whose salient characteristic seemed to be a pair of dreamy eyes under startlingly prominent white eyebrows set at random in a red, perspiring face, stood watching a glass retort with intense concentration. Smith knew that all this paraphernalia constituted some sort of field prospecting outfit; but it was unlike any outfit that he had seen, and he thought that he knew them all.

The young assistant was introducing Smith to the old man, but the professor remained in absorbed contemplation of his retort. When he finally spoke, it was with a sudden clap of his hands and an air of pleased expectation.

"Well, Howard, there it is! In a few hours we ought to know whether Dryobalanops Malayensis will crystallize out in commercial quantities, as I have always maintained. And I think, my boy—I feel confident, in fact, that success will crown our experiments. We have proved it to be dextrorotary, and the levo-modifications—" Suddenly he stopped and peered fiercely at Smith from under his pent brows.

"Who is this—ah, giant that you have captured, Howard?"

The assistant introduced him over again, while Smith grinned at the word "captured." The professor shook hands with him quite cordially, and led him immediately to the retort. His attitude was that of an enthusiastic lecturer returning, after an unwilling interlude, to an absorbing subject. There was no time to waste. He commenced at once to run over the previous points of importance for the benefit of the new pupil.

"You see, Mr. Smith, we are trying to establish that D. Malayensis will render a product similar to the commercially known Borneol, which will be more familiar to you doubtless, as $C_{10}H_{17}OH$. The trees, as you see, abound in this locality, and—"

His daughter had slipped in unnoticed, and now she laid her hand on her father's arm.

"You know, dad," she reminded him, with quiet emphasis, "that you agreed not to talk to anybody about what you were doing. You were told to confide in nobody, remember."

The professor scowled fiercely at this un-

ceremonious interruption of his lecture. He took a few strides back and forth, muttering and snapping his fingers and shaking his head testily the while. But presently he came back to a material world and he stopped short and shot a hostile glance at Smith.

"Well, sir, what can we do for you?" he asked abruptly.

Smith felt an uneasy diffidence in the presence of the girl, but the situation was so astounding that he could not suppress a certain sardonic humor. Here was this party of strayed children, flagrant amateurs, surrounded by stealthy tracks which ended up in tall, stark-naked spearmen, demanding with cool condescension what they could do for him—him! Jehannum Smith!

He grinned understandingly. He had come across parties like this before, eager nimrods, usually fresh from the shires of England, with titles hanging to their names and assistant game-keepers to carry their guns; and it had fallen to his lot to pilot them to safety. So he proceeded with calm decision to take charge of affairs.

"Well, now, professor, there isn't exactly anything that I need. I saw the kites watching your camp from about ten miles back there, so I came to investigate; and—I guess I'm just about in time to snake you out of this."

The professor looked startled at the revelation of his betrayal, and then puzzled.

"Ah, a remarkable process of deduction. I must study something of these birds later on. But why, er—why do you suggest removal?"

Smith looked at the girl, and dissembled.

"Do you know where you are, professor?"

The scientist looked offended.

"Why, certainly! What a preposterous insinuation! We are in the southern extremity of the state of Manipur."

"H-m!" said Smith dryly. "Not exactly. You're over the Lushai border by fifteen miles. Not that that makes much difference; but this isn't exactly a wholesome country to linger in; so we'll up stakes an' light out with to-morrow's sun."

The great white brows met in a heavy crooked line. The old man shot a fierce glance at the young assistant, and concentrated it on Smith's confident face.

"Mr. Smith, you—surely you are presuming to, er—intimate an extraordinary authority. We—my assistant and I—are engaged in important experiments here, and we have no intention whatsoever of leaving this place until our researches are concluded to our entire satisfaction."

The tall assistant added an unexpected forcible assent to the old man's pedagogic announcement.

"No sir-ree. By heaven, we won't!"

Smith's eyes narrowed pleasantly, as though to humor petulant children. Yet there was a hint of grim purpose.

"Yes, I guess it 'll feel bad to quit; but—all the same, I guess we'll go."

The scientists looked at one another in helpless astonishment at this astounding stranger who descended upon them like the predatory kites that he spoke of. Then they turned amazed and expectant eyes to the girl. She stepped into the discussion with calm confidence.

"I have already found that Mr. Smith presumes quite extraordinarily," she said, looking at that burly autocrat with a pointed austerity which put him to confusion. "Of course we're not going until we make up our minds to do so."

She challenged his hinted determination with calm gray eyes, and Smith found himself at a loss how to deal with this new, and, to him, unaccustomed kind of obstructionist. He shifted uneasily on his great feet. He had not wanted to frighten the girl; but he reflected as he looked at her that she did not at all convey the impression, as other women did to him, of being a person who would scream or faint. In desperation he blurted out his knowledge:

"Well now, folks, I'm not aiming to come the goramighty over you; but—well, to put it to you straight, this place right now isn't safe!"

"Rubbish!" said the girl with decision. "Nobody even knows that we're here."

"Huh!" Smith, driven to extremity, snorted his proof. "Let me tell you, gentlemen"—he found it impossible to argue direct with this steady-eyed girl—"that right at this moment your camp is sur-

rounded by Naga warriors! *You'd* never see them; any more than you see the leopards that hang around camp waiting for a chance to grab one of your dogs. But I'll bet you that your every move is reported by runner to old Chief Mata-Pembe down at Danaghor!"

CHAPTER III.

JEHANNUM DESERTS.

THE two men were very obviously startled by the positiveness of this statement. The girl, too, was shaken from her equanimity; but only for a moment. She regained her poise quickly—it is always easier for a woman to disbelieve what is not pleasing.

"I don't believe that there are any men round us at all—any more than I believe there are leopards," she said defiantly, looking squarely into Smith's eyes. Her challenge was distinctly hostile. But hostility always exhilarated Smith. Under its stimulus he was suddenly able to assert his manhood.

His eyes narrowed—not humorously this time. The pucker below the lids and the crow's-feet at the corners were just the same as when he grinned; but there was a hard glint in them, and his mouth set in a thin knife cut.

"H-m!" murmured Smith quietly. "Well, now, for about two cents—if I thought it would hurry your decision any—I'd go out an' bring you in a specimen of either inside of half an hour!"

His hard eyes held them, and it was the girl's turn to waver before his gaze. There was something in the glitter of those eyes and in the hard expression of that weather-tanned face, and in the aggressive forward poise of the great shoulders that forced the conviction that this extraordinary boast was not just talk. For a moment the girl's eyes dropped.

"I beg your pardon," she said soberly. Then she looked up again quickly, confident once more in a new explanation which had come to her.

"But that doesn't alter our decision. Those men have probably been sent to act as a bodyguard, since you say that we are over the Lushai border."

"Bodyguard—hell!" was Smith's explosive thought. But all he dared to say was:

"Queer sort of bodyguard. Why do they hide from you, then?"

"I can't say," the girl defended. "I don't know the way of these natives. But I'm quite sure that we have nothing to be afraid of, because all arrangements were made beforehand, and presents were sent from Imphal to the chiefs."

Smith was a long way from being convinced that the stealthy, naked watchers were well-disposed guards; but he was nonplussed in the face of this argument. All that he could do was to shrug his great shoulders; and the two men now chimed in to follow the girl's lead.

"Quite so. Of course. A great deal of money was spent to propitiate the chiefs along the border. A very great deal, Mr. Smith. It seemed to me, in fact, that it was a profligate waste to pay these, ah—illiterate primitives a sum of money which would endow a chair in any institute of learning. Er, the fact, then, that we are watched does not to me convey any cause for alarm; though I must admit that it was a surprise to me. On maturer reflection, however, I can well imagine that these savages would be curious, for I understand that they believe we are engaged in some form of magic."

Smith had nothing to say. He was always chary of making sweeping statements which he could not prove up by facts. Here he was faced with a mysterious situation about the foregoing events of which he knew nothing. But he knew natives much too well to believe that silent spearmen would watch a party of white men with all the stealth of stalking tigers simply from an ultrasensitive desire not to be obtrusive.

Yet his knowledge, after all, was an abstract sort of thing. He could put it to these people only as his opinion; and they were far too contented with their knowledge of their careful precautions which they spoke of with such cheerful assurance to be convinced of a possible danger on the word of a stranger who appeared out of nowhere.

Under ordinary circumstances it is probable that Smith would have forced his opinion by sheer weight. That is to say, he would have browbeaten the white men, bullied the camp servants, pulled stakes, and dragged the party off to safety in spite of their helpless ragings. Later they would have found cause to thank him, for Smith's judgment of the queer twists of the brown man's doings was uncanny; and where he failed Poonoosawmi was always able to reduce the problems of native intrigue down to their ultimate coefficients.

It had fallen to his lot to save foolish wanderers from their own folly on more than one occasion, and he had always accomplished the feat by irresistible weight; weight of grim, dominant personality, and weight, sometimes, of hard fist for those who were obstreperous.

That was under ordinary circumstances; ordinary for the jungle, that is to say. Here Smith was up against the extraordinary. The party, to begin with, was unusual; never had Smith seen such childish confidence. The business on which they were engaged was extraordinary. Smith thought he knew in intricate detail every kind of business which might possibly lure men out into the jungles; but these queer retorts and things baffled him.

Their talk, too, of an elaborate system of bribery, was a mystery. And then, there was the girl, by long laps quite the most extraordinary thing that Smith had ever met.

He was diffident of speech and action in the presence of any woman. It is possible that in any other circumstances he would have withdrawn himself from her compelling presence and then plowed ahead as usual and carried out his plans, anyhow; but this girl was something entirely new. He had met nothing like her in the jungles before—and he knew everything that ever happened in the jungle.

She just did not belong. Her rightful place was in a treatise on Greek mythology, and her startling presence here unbalanced him. It was plain to him that she ordered the destinies of her rather impractical menfolk in her own quiet way, without fuss or flurry; and he felt helplessly that she was just as calmly ordering his with the same clear-eyed confidence.

So he shuffled his big feet and moved about the tent awkwardly; the more so since the professor had resumed an earnest contemplation of his retort, and he felt that he had to deal with her alone.

Yet the professor, all unconsciously, came to his rescue. He called his daughter to observe some mysterious and highly exciting phenomenon in the apparatus, and Smith saw a chance to escape. With a quick resumption of his usual decision, he seized the tall assistant by the upper arm and propelled him irresistibly to the opening of the tent. Outside, he led him with speedy anxiety to the outskirts of the camp.

Away from the girl's hypnotic influence, his confidence was his own once more. He let go the young man's arm, and stood off facing him with interrogative scrutiny.

"Son," he began judicially, "now you tell me something about this."

The young man's quick irritation was full of mistrust. He caressed his arm where Smith had gripped it.

"Tell you about what? I don't know what you want to come butting into our business for, and I'm not going to tell you anything."

Smith waved his suspicion off with a vast motion.

"Lord, man, what the bloomin' 'ell do I care about your business? What I want to know is, why do all you infants think you're so dashed safe, and what's all this talk about presents to Pembe and the rest of the gang."

The young man faced him with smoldering doubt. "That's a part of our business, Mr. Smith. I don't consider that you have any right to ask that."

"Oh, all right, then; never mind that—I'll find it out anyhow. You and your wizard in there can go to Jehannum you own sweet way; but—what about the girl?"

The young man was suddenly very stiff.

"I cannot conceive that even that is any of your affair, Mr. Smith. But if there should be any danger—which we don't admit—I would—both her father and I—would defend her with our lives."

"H-m," said Smith dryly. "As long as your lives lasted, of course. It would do you good, son, to attend a rain ceremony and watch the young buck Nagas throwing spears at a scared dog. It's belike that I'm oversuspicious, an' I don't know anything about your system of presents. Maybe they've fixed things for you. But just take one piece of advice from me: For Pete's sake get your camp together a bit. Pitch your tents closer, an' stack your duffle in a ring, outside."

The young man's suspicious hostility had given place to puzzled doubt. He seemed almost about to say something, but Smith resumed:

"Now I got business to attend to at Dimapur; an' that's a long way from here. It's easy seeing that nobody around here 'll miss me; so you say good-by to the folks for me, an' tell *her* how to fix your camp."

The young man of science was still plainly puzzled how to take the man of the jungles. Smith's seriousness carried conviction. Under it the other's hostility faded, and suddenly he held out his hand. Smith took it with a pleased grin; and the young man winced.

"Well, good-by," said Smith, and set him to wondering again by adding: "You'll see me again." While the other was still wondering what he might mean, he subjoined quickly: "Now, one more thing. See that clump of bamboos by the big tree fern? Well, if you want to check me up at all, I'll tell you that there's one of your 'bodyguard' watching from behind it right now!"

The young man looked startled at this bringing to the front of a hitherto quite indefinite and not wholly credited state of affairs. He hesitated, looking searchingly at Smith. Then his lips set purposefully and he turned and strode direct to the clump, pulling a nickel-plated revolver from its shiny yellow holster as he went and looking amateurishly to see if it was loaded.

"Good-by!" Smith called after him, and strode off himself at right angles, looking shrewdly over his shoulder as he went. He saw him walk forward with unfaltering resolution, but toying with the revolver in a manner which to his practised eye denoted unfamiliarity and considerable nervousness. He saw, as the young man approached, a brown figure flit from behind the bamboos and dart into the deeper jungle. He saw him stop with startled hesitation and then run forward to the edge of the bamboo *tope;* but the lithe brown figure was swallowed in the undergrowth.

The man of science peered into the dim shadows; but he realized that it was useless to go farther. He turned and looked toward Smith. It was the patent admission of belief and appeal for advice. But Smith waved his hand in farewell, ducked under a vast, orchid-festooned trunk, and disappeared himself.

He plunged on through the heavy growth with a smile of satisfaction. The smile slowly spread into a grin. The hard lips parted, and Smith began to chuckle to himself.

"Good lad!" he murmured. "Went right up to it nicely. Guess he's got guts, all right." He looked thoughtful awhile and then chuckled again: "An' I got to give Poonoosawmi a bakshish; the little devil caught on in a minute and played right up to me like a bird."

Again a spell of thoughtful consideration, and then a satisfied grunt: "Sort o' hard test to put a raw hand to, but I guess that girl 'll believe a few things now an' take an' straighten up camp so it can't be rushed so easy."

The business which Smith spoke of so glibly was no lie. He did have business—he had created it that same instant. There was other business, of course, a matter of certain consignments of rubber to the far distant coast. But that was a matter involving only rupees. Rupees might be dealt with at any time; but an extraordinary affair such as this moving-picture camp with its stage professor and its studious young man *and* its girl—by no means could he forget the girl—was an event of the ages. So he made it his business to have business in Dimapur.

Dimapur was away up in the northerly part of the Manpur country, in the more settled part, where the chiefs came in once a year to call on the commissioner and to

receive an exhortation to be good, along with a bag or rupees. At Dimapur a thin trickle of a desultory railroad line came into the jungles and was there suffocated by the thousand creeping things that grew up and choked it.

At Dimapur, therefore, there would be white men. Among them, Smith knew, would be a person or persons connected with the other end of the winding line which ended up in the toy camp—for so helpless an outfit could surely never have existed without some guiding spirit to bring it into being.

It was a good ten days' travel, even for Smith, to get to Dimapur. Under ordinary circumstances it would have taken two weeks; but the circumstances, as we have seen, were far from ordinary. Poonoosawmi, who had the abnormally alert eyes of a very old and a very crafty ape, and the intuition of a very young imp, summed up the circumstances pretty accurately when he said:

"Marshter, thät Miss Sahib who marshter is beating in the pant is not at all fearful, is it not?" Then he wondered why Smith growled at him. But he chattered on in impersonal appraisal: "If the uneducated heathen is seeing he will say: 'This is incarnation of Sita Devi.'"

The rumble in Smith's throat was that of a discontented elephant, and Poonoosawmi realized that he was treading on that inexplicable thing, the white man's sensibilities. Smith, as a matter of fact, was wishing, in an indefinte sort of way, for the first time in his life that he might have known as much about Greek mythology as he did about the Hindoo gods and goddesses; or about science, or about anything else that would place him on a more even footing with this amazing girl. But all he did was grunt and stride tirelessly forward.

At Dimapur, as Smith had felt sure, there *was* a white man. There were other white men, of course, lone exiles of the railroad, and one or two seedy looking, half-white unaccountables. But this particular white man was not that kind of a person; he was clean and businesslike and much too new to have lost the white man's sense of decency in his appearance. He had established himself in the railroad *dak-bungalow*, and he lived there for no apparent reason, and he was quite mysterious and quite perturbed.

Into his disquiet of many days burst Villiers, who had once been a gentleman himself. He was now permanent station-master at Dimapur, a thousand miles from anywhere. Therefore, he was permanently drunk. He came with stiff gravity into the white man's room and told him with awesome seriousness:

"Mr. Nicholson, we've been talking about the devil, and now he's here. 'It's a bally miracle, old chap,' I said to him, and he said: 'Go to hell;' so this is him."

He was tugging at what appeared to be an immovabe rock outside the door; but he might as well have tried to drag the unwilling foundation of the house in with him. Presently the resistance gave way and the man they had been talking about so much filled the doorway. He had delayed while he tightened up his belt and tucked his shirt straight; for he had a sense of decency, too.

Mr. Nicholson looked dubiously at the great, rough-hewn frame, and the mahogany face with its short thatch of pale straw and its paler eyebrows, from under which half-shut eyes looked at him in uncompromising appraisal.

Till suddenly Smith smiled. He gently laid a vast hand on the station-master's chest and swept him with calm unceremony through the door, and closed it. Then he strode, and gave support to the reference to the devil by saying:

"I knew you were wanting me about ten days ago, so I came along to look into your proposition."

CHAPTER IV.

AT DIMAPUR.

NICHOLSON'S start was of more than surprise.

"How?" he demanded, with quick suspicion.

Smith smiled with his eyes only. Nicholson knew, looking at that face, that this man would speak no word more than he

wanted to. He knew, moreover, that there was something more than stubbornness in the face. So he suddenly decided to trust him.

"It's true, Mr. Smith. I've been looking for a man who could carry out what appears to be a very difficult job for me, and everybody said that Go-to-Hell Smith"—he smiled apologetically—"was the one man in Far East who could help me—if only I could find him. So you can imagine my surprise when you walked in. Now, this is my proposition:

"I represent an American syndicate which is in possession of information to the effect that a certain valuable product, the market in which is at present controlled by Japan, can be distilled in commercial quantities from the woody fibers of a hitherto unexploited tree."

Smith grinned with a sudden quick understanding. That reference to Japan had shown him the way to a daring guess.

"Oh, you mean camphor, I suppose," he said, with easy familiarity. "From Dryobalanops Malayensis."

Nicholson's suspicion was a sudden revelation. He dropped his right hand quickly under the table and his shoulders stiffened as he leaned aggressively forward. Smith's eyes narrowed and he sat still.

"How do you know that?" Nicholson asked tensely.

Smith smiled tantalizingly, and groped back in his memory.

"Oh, I know that the trees are plentiful down toward the south; and I know that the crystallization is dextro-rotary. Some authorities claim that it will render a product similar to the commercially known Borneol, which will be more familiar to you doubtless as C-something-H-something-OH—I've forgotten the exact figures." The pompous words had made a lasting impression.

Nicholson looked relieved, and his hand came up from under the table.

"Oh, you must excuse me, Mr. Smith. I had not known that you were a scientist"—Smith graciously waved away the compliment—"Well, then, since you understand all that, and know the uses of the camphors, I don't have to tell you how important it is to my country to develop a source of supply. So we've sent an outfit down to follow up this lead that we've got; fitted them up with everything necessary, the best that money could buy"—Smith smiled his thin smile at the recollection of the blatant tents and the shiny new trappings which he had seen—"and now, frankly, Mr. Smith, we're kinda worried.

"That was something over a month ago, and we've had not a whisper from them since. The arrangement was that they were to report by messenger every week how they were getting along. Of course, I don't know that we have any call to get excited, because we got permission from the commissioner at Imphal and on his advice we sent a stack of presents down for distribution to the chiefs; but, darn it, why don't they communicate?"

"Did you send anybody to find out?" asked Smith.

"Lord, man, how could we? I understand the jungle there is so thick you could wander around within a mile of them and never know they were there unless you knew where to look for them. That's why we've been waiting for a messenger giving exact location. They'll be needing supplies and all that by now, so why don't he come along?"

"Now this *backsheesh* that you sent along, are you sure that old man Mata-Pembe didn't grab it before it ever got to the lesser chiefs?" Smith asked judicially.

"Absolutely. We were warned that we ought to get to the other men first, so our agent, man with the best recommendations I ever saw, fellow called Pappadopoulos—"

"Ha!" ejaculated Smith, and sat up straight.

"What's the matter?" Nicholson's face was blanched with apprehension.

Smith's eyes were thin slits. He was searching back into his memory and weighing his words.

"Now this Pappadopoulos; lemme think just where I connect him. Ah, yes, he's a greasy actin', dark-faced swine of a Levantine pearl-shell thief, isn't he?"

Nicholson knew none of these things against the man, but he nodded. Somehow the description seemed to fit.

"An' he's always smiling and shaking hands with himself, isn't he?" Smith reminisced further. "An' he's as polite as a French cook. Yes. Well, he always has good recommendations, too blasted good. Had one once from Sir Frederick Soule. The L. G. had never seen him, yet the signature was genuine; so the whole staff is still guessing. He's associated with a fellow by the name o' Manook, Ahudi Manook, an Armenian rice trader—an' they do business with the firm of Ichiya Fundoshi, of Nagasaki! So there's your agent."

The pithy summing-up was a shock. Nicholson gripped the arm of his chair and sat silent. He did not need to ask questions; the whole description was full of ominous suggestions. Finally he uttered, slowly and painfully:

"Is there any danger, do you think?"

Into Smith's mind there flashed a vivid picture of the stage property camp with its two impractical and wofully helpless scientists surrounded by long-limbed, naked spearmen who faded from behind tree trunks like the ghosts of the evil jungle dead.

But Smith had no surplus of sympathy for helpless men. His gruff opinion was that helpless men belonged in the cities, where they fought one another with pens and with legal injunctions. If such should venture out of their proper element and should, as a result of their unshakable stubbornness, in the course of strenuous events be killed — well, that was a part of the chance that men took in life.

His anxiety was for the helpless girl—yet helpless seemed to be no sort of adjective to apply to her—who would under no circumstance be *killed*. That picture was unthinkable; yet all that Nicholson saw was a suddenly very grim man who grunted impersonally and asked with judicial gravity:

"Well, now, this information that the professor is digging up, his notes and analysis an' things, could anybody else use them?"

"Commercially alone, aside from any possible international significance, they'd be very valuable to anybody who could get the dope and acquire a concession."

Smith scowled reflectively and grunted several times.

"Now I won't say there's actual danger right at this moment. But it's easy guessing that they know what you're after, in spite of your secrecy; an' I'll tell you: *If* those fellows really want to grab your stuff they'll not be held back by such a little thing as a few lives."

Nicholson groaned. "So that's why no messengers came through. But I can't imagine that this Pappadopoulos would ever be a man to have the nerve to do anything so desperate. He might well be a slick trader, but—"

"Pappadopoulos hell!" snorted Smith. "Fundoshi an' Company!"

Nicholson sat suddenly stiff and white. The name opened up possibilities of a scheme of pitiless intrigue which stretched far beyond the plottings of mere businessmen. Smith read the far-reaching ramifications of the horror in his eyes, and he sat still, waiting. Nicholson whispered hoarsely:

"How can we get them out? My God, how can we *find* them before the notes and things are taken from them?"

Smith looked at him with a sudden coldness.

"You seem to be a darn sight more excited about your experiments than about your people," he growled. "It 'll take me ten days to get down there. I'll find 'em on the tenth. I'll bust camp an' I'll start for somewhere—I don't know where, but I start—on the eleventh."

Nicholson could not help finding comfort in the cold confidence of that statement. He was feverishly eager to make arrangements.

"I'll rely on you, Mr. Smith. But, good God, man, *time!* We've got to hurry. Since they know what we're after, there's nothing to prevent them from getting the information independently and getting in first. We cannot permit any hostile—er—any unfriendly company, I mean—to acquire those rights. How soon do we start?"

Rights and international complications did not interest Smith. He was thinking about two foolish men—and a calm-eyed girl. His growl was ungracious.

"*We* don't. I'll have trouble enough with three babes in the wood. *I* start in an hour—and I'll want all the money you can collect in Dimapur—in *rupees*, not paper."

Nicholson's anxiety had been so far relieved that he found time to be offended. He drew himself up stiffly.

"I'm sure, Mr. Smith, that you'll find my check honored at any bank."

Smith sprang from his chair, and his eyes suddenly blazed out at the man.

"Gor-blast your blinkin' commercial hide! Have I talked pay to you? Rupees are bakshish, an' they may save blood! I'm putting my neck into the hole for the sake of—" He checked himself and growled on lamely: "Well, because I don't like your polecat of a Greek. When I've got your people clear I'll give 'em back to you for nothing—an' I'll charge you a bill for your damned note-books that'll twist the liver an' lights out of you."

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

The Debt

by William Merriam Rouse

AT the end of a prosperous winter Harry Stowe brought home a wife to keep house for him and his partner, David Burns, in the log-cabin on Mink Hill. She had been Molly Martin, of Twin Ponds, and everybody said that a nicer girl never wore shoe-leather. Nobody called her pretty, because she wasn't; but there had been a baker's dozen of men ready to marry her in spite of the fact that her father didn't have a dollar, and it had taken all the best manners and bold courting of handsome Harry Stowe to get her away from the strapping woodsmen and well-to-do farmers who wanted her.

Dave Burns took to her right away. He liked her clear skin, her white teeth, and the way her dark-blue eyes contrasted with the brown hair that never hung in strings over her ears or down the back of her neck. Too many of the girls in the Mink Hill neighborhood were like that when they were at home. But Molly was as neat as a pin, always; and when she had cleared out their litter of guns and traps and hound-dogs without hurting the feelings of the dogs or jamming the sights on the guns he acknowledged her, in a wholly unemotional way, as peerless among the women he knew.

The attitude of the partners toward Molly differed, naturally, because of the difference in relationship; but there was something more than that. Stowe accepted her and her ministrations as a matter of course, while Burns considered her a blessing unequaled and undeserved. This was the first time that they had looked at the same thing with different-seeing eyes, but David would have said that the divergent view-point was a matter of no importance.

Through summer and autumn, life was very pleasant in the log-house. Money from the previous winter's trapping bought everything that they needed—flour and corn-meal, bacon and tea and tobacco—and various small sources of income that could be tapped during the warm weather provided luxuries. Molly had a white dress, her husband a new suit of clothes, and Burns got a good, second-hand cook-stove to replace the rusty cripple that had served their bachelor days.

For months Molly sang as she worked in their four-room home; and the men,

each after his nature, expressed the conviction that life was good. The shoulders of Harry Stowe took on a wider swing and he caressed his mustache with an air of satisfaction as he talked; which forced David to suppress many a smile of friendly amusement. He felt exactly as Stowe did, with the difference that he took his feelings out in roundabout attentions to Molly, whom he held to be a kind of human rabbit's foot. She'd brought luck, comfort, and, although he did not name it that, an ideal into their lives.

Winter brought the beginning of a change; a change that worked slowly and pitilessly, like a malicious fate, until all those external influences which affected greatly the lives of the three were the opposite of what they had been a year before. Snow, for one thing, piled up in layer upon layer until the trapping was practically spoiled. An ice-fishing venture on Lake Champlain brought hardly enough to cover the cost of the shanty and outfit. Burns tried to get a job chopping at last, but it had grown late and the difficulties of drawing wood out from the mountains were so great that year that he failed.

And so a March blizzard, that came roaring down upon Mink Hill just after there had been promise of a thaw, found the two men and the woman penned up, something after the manner of the animals that furnished them the greater part of their living.

Like all of their breed, neither Burns nor Stowe saved. A tireless body, a steady hand with a rifle, and the friendliness of the out-of-doors were thought to be sufficient insurance against the future; but David, feeding wood to the stove on the second day of the blizzard, began to doubt these gods.

He looked at Molly, paring potatoes in the afternoon twilight for their supper. Her cheeks, so curved and faintly pink even at Christmas, had hollows in them now; he knew that she had not been a dozen yards away from the door in weeks, because her moccasins and overshoes had gone beyond repair. Stowe sat behind the stove, elbows on knees and head in hands. He had hardly spoken during all that dark, wind-pierced day. At the clatter of the griddles he roused and drew the bitten corner of a plug of chewing-tobacco from his pocket. He bit off a carefully measured piece.

"What you got for supper?" he asked, turning his head toward Molly. With the hint of a smile that always preceded her words to him she answered cheerfully.

"Boiled potatoes, Harry," she said.

"And salt!" grinned Burns, dropping into a chair with a thud.

"Bah!" Stowe spat at a stove-leg. "Why don't you fry 'em? We had boiled potatoes for dinner!"

"The pork-grease is all gone."

Burns was looking up under his eyebrows as she answered, watching her face. He saw that she framed the words mechanically, with her gaze upon the ugly blotch her husband had made upon the clean kitchen floor. Before her coming, as was common enough among Mink Hill bachelors, the floor had served as a cuspidor. But her mere presence, without a word of protest or nagging, had been enough to change all that until this hour when Stowe, coming out of his day-long brooding, broke restraint.

"This is a hell of a life!"

The master of the house got up and shook his six feet of toughened muscle and sinew. Neat darns were upon the elbows of his blue flannel shirt, and patches, equally skilful, upon his trousers. His eye found in them now fresh evidence of his poverty, and he growled into his mustache as he tried to rub the frost from a window-pane and look out. "We're tied up here like a couple of old women!"

Molly winced at that. Dave, his thick, powerful shoulders squared against the back of his chair and his head still bent, saw her; and resentment began to burn within him like the slow flame of a sulfur-match. He could no more have been brutal to Molly than he could have struck his own mother —and Harry was her husband! Harry! who was now rummaging on the pantry shelves and muttering to himself.

"Say!" he cried, turning back into the room suddenly. "Ain't I got another plug of tobacco?"

"No." Molly held her head lower as she began to sort the potatoes out of the

parings, and Burns saw a drop of water that was not from the pan splash on her hand. "It was the last one I brought you yesterday, Harry."

"You can chew my smoking at a pinch," offered Dave. "There's quite a lot of it yet."

"All right." He began to pace the floor, hands deep thrust in pockets and his oiled moccasins padding heavily. "The spring drives will begin the first of the month, Dave, if the snow goes like it usually does. Three dollars a day and board for the best men!"

"Yes," agreed Burns. "I was thinking of that a little while ago."

"Drat the luck! Six to ten weeks of work on the river, and a good time thrown in!"

It was as much as to say that he was not going and Burns, wondering, was about to ask him why when a second thought stopped the question. There was Molly. It had been just after the river work of the spring before that Stowe had brought her home and so the problem had not been faced before. Of course one of them would have to stay with her—at least, that was the way it looked to Dave—and there was no doubt that it must be her husband. He knew many a man who left his wife to split wood and carry water, but it did not occur to him that Harry Stowe would his—not such a wife as he had.

"I won't need much of my pay," said Dave, at length. "Now I got a home I won't need it and I'll send it along, Harry, every time we hit a post-office on the river."

"Hey?" Stowe halted and glared, although not in anger at Burns. His wrath was against fate. "Nobody's going to support me!"

"Why—why—" Dave did not know exactly how to deal with this unexpected turn. "Ain't we partners?"

Then Molly turned from the stove, where she had put the potatoes to boil, and laughed a ragged laugh.

"Why, Dave! You've put in everything you've earned since I been here—you can't keep on doing that!"

"I got my pay back all right," said Burns. "Don't you cook and wash and mend for me? I ain't been taken care of like that since I was knee-high to a grasshopper and lived at home."

"That don't amount to anything!" This time her laugh was wrought with a little note of pleasure. "That's what I'm for, I guess!"

"If I ain't left out of this," came rumbling from Stowe, "I'll say I guess we are pardners! Same house, same grub, same traps, same wife, same—"

"Harry!" Her utterance of his name was more poignant than a scream. It stopped him, and he and she faced each other, motionless.

He was too saturated with the sullenness of the discontent he had been nursing to feel the import of the moment—but it went to Burns, after a fashion. Dave knew that Molly had been given a wound that would leave a scar, although it might be ever so minute. He saw it in her hurt, blue eyes and in the slack muscles of her face.

As for him, his first impulse was to catapult from his chair and strike down the insolence of that outburst. Then the thought of the woman held him, and reason told him that Harry Stowe did not mean what his mouth had said. And it was so; for a deeper red than the snow and wind had given brushed Stowe's face from chin to forehead and his eyes fell before the combined gaze of wife and friend.

"Aw, don't get on your high horse!" he exclaimed, apologetically. "I'm only talking! It's no joke to be kept off the river when we need money the way we do!"

"You can go, Harry," said his wife, very quietly. "You didn't marry a doll!"

"You can stay right here and work on the place," put in Burns. "We're pardners—and that goes for what I earn this spring!"

Stowe swept his sheepskin coat from its peg and jabbed his arms into it. He put a hand to the door-latch.

"I won't go in debt to nobody," he muttered, and swung himself out into the driving white curtain that flapped and sifted into the room before the door closed behind him.

Dave and Molly looked at each other;

and then she turned her face away to hide the trembling of lips and the threatened dimming of her eyes. He wriggled uneasily, stricken with that embarrassment natural to man in the presence of tears.

"You cheer up!" he said gruffly. "Harry's kind of crotchety on account of the bad luck this winter, but he don't mean a word he says. I've seen him like that before, Molly. He'll get over it."

"He thinks—I'm a drawback!"

"Shucks!" He got up and stamped around the room. "He don't think no such thing as that! Why, he could go and I'd stay here, only—"

David, not given to the habit of concealing his thoughts, had blurted out something he would rather not have said—or so nearly blurted it out that she understood.

"Only he might even be jealous of us!" she finished for him.

That, somehow, made further talk impossible. Burns, even though he hated to entertain the thought, knew that Molly had spoken the truth. For the first time he realized that Harry Stowe, brooding over bad luck and burdened with an obligation that hindered his freedom, was not his prosperous and unfettered partner of other years. This puzzled David, and he felt as though he were mentally stumbling through underbrush.

How could a man with a wife like Molly fail to be happy? How could anybody doubt her perfect fidelity, even in a tantrum? Of course, he told himself, Harry would not even think such a thing except when he was in a fit of the blues.

A long meditation was broken by the return of Stowe. He came staggering into the kitchen, in a swirl of wind-blown snow, with a clanking burden over his shoulder. He dumped a score or more traps down in the light of the single oil-lamp to which necessity had reduced them and stood panting from his battle with the storm. Burns walked over and knelt beside the pile, wondering.

"What in the world are you taking in traps in this storm for?" he began, and let his voice die away as he looked closer. He rubbed the snow from one of them and lifted it to the light. "Why, this has got Fred Abare's mark on it!"

"It won't have, after I've put a file on it," said Stowe, calmly. "We'll have a big feed to-morrow if the storm lets up so I can get down to the village—and I'll buy enough chewing to last for a while, you can bet your bottom dollar on that!"

David stood still, holding the trap in his hand. He saw that Molly was standing still, too, and looking at her husband. Dave did not know what to say. It was far from good form to question the ethics of another man, even one's partner, on Mink Hill: on the other hand, it passed the boundary-line of what was square to tamper in any way with another man's line of traps. It was not done except by those individuals who were more or less pariahs in the mountains. Yet Burns made allowance for his partner, knowing how tight their belts were.

"So you're going to sell Abare's traps?" he asked, rather feebly.

"Yes, and what of it?" retorted Stowe with an outthrust lower lip. "I'll make it up to him some way out of my pay on the drive."

Burns guessed that this was a sop for Molly, because it could not be made up without self-betrayal; but he was more concerned with the announcement that Stowe was going on the drive, after all. He went back to the fire and sat down again before he spoke.

"If we're both going on the drive we can get trusted for all we want down to the village," he suggested.

"Ask favors and go in debt?" Stowe shrugged. "You get in debt to a man and he's got a hold on you. I won't do it."

With that flat refusal the matter was dropped; nor did either of the men revive the discussion when Stowe came home the next afternoon through a sparkling, sunlit world of white with his shoulders bent under a pack of provisions. He had a dozen plugs of tobacco, bacon and tea and sugar and other staples: and Burns saw that the hands of Molly were not quite steady as she sorted the packages out upon the kitchen-table.

That supper, although it was prepared with all the deliciousness that Molly knew how to give to food, tasted like chips in the

mouth of David Burns; and he saw that she did not eat more than long enough to make the pretense of hunger. It was for her sake that he had sat down to the meal without protest and it was for her sake that he let the days slip on, one after another, without trying to settle the issue raised by the stealing of Fred Abare's traps. It remained open, with infinite possibilities of future trouble, while the snow sogged down at the touch of the spring thaw and the time for them to go on the drive drew near.

It was understood that both men were going. Stowe would not stay at home and David could not. Easy-going Mink Hill would not have gossiped, perhaps, about Molly, because even Harry's former sweethearts liked her; but Harry himself was ready to entertain any dark suspicion of anybody. He was oppressed by the weight of poverty, he was fettered by a wife, and he did not have enough chewing-tobacco to satisfy unstintedly his taste: such, finally, was the reluctant judgment of Burns.

He puzzled over this, sitting long hours in the kitchen thinking, until he remembered that neither Stowe nor himself had before been subjected to the grind of prolonged misfortune. Quick, hard blows, yes; and dangers overcome in a moment or an hour. But nothing like the past winter. He was both sorry and worried about his partner, and his partner's wife, and he was glad when at length there remained but one more night before they were to go north to the headwaters of the Skeene River to begin work.

It was the same river that ran within a few hundred yards of the log-house, and from which they carried their water in pails. On the morning before the men were to leave it was Stowe's turn to do the chores. He was more cheerful that day than he had been in weeks and as he sauntered out after breakfast, with the pails clanking in his hand, he turned and called to the others to come out into the spring sunlight. Dave followed Molly out of doors and they stood together in the path that led to the river.

That path was like a dark-brown sponge beneath their feet. But only in such places, where the snow had been shoveled away did the earth show. The rest of the world was covered by a damp, white covering that was plowed by gurgling rivulets—rivulets that flashed in the sun and sang joyously of the changing seasons. The river still held its ice bridge, black and gray-black and dirty white. It looked the treachery that was in it and it struck Burns suddenly that to go to-day to the water-hole, which had been cut well out from shore, was dangerous.

"Take a pole, Harry!" he shouted. "You're liable to get ducked if you don't!"

A pole to test the ice ahead of him, or to fling up horizontally as a support if he should go through—that was the precaution Stowe should have taken. But he laughed and shook his head from the bank, and leaped beyond the doubly dangerous strip at the edge. They saw him walk off confidently toward the water-hole; but both Molly and Burns were moved to go swiftly down to the river-bank. Again they stood side by side, not a stone's toss from Harry Stowe as he filled first one pail and then the other and turned so that he faced them on his way back.

He had taken two steps when the rotten ice refused the added weight of those two pails of water and broke into ragged cakes under his feet. The pails thudded and splashed away from him. He went down to the arm-pits in the welter of heaving fragments and then his instinctively clutching fingers found brief hold, so that he remained head and shoulders out of water. This was the moment in which he should have had the pole, to bridge over the broken area until help could come. For his respite was of seconds only. His pale face, scowling and drawn by desperation, sank lower as his fingers dragged along the ice.

In the instant when the water-pails dropped and the feet of his partner went out of sight a strange thing happened to David Burns. He saw a picture of the future, as sharp and clear as though it had been photographed for him, and this was what he saw: Molly's firm, warm hand close within his own, her blue eyes lifted to his and filled with the light and happy tears of love, her red lips parted with a quick breath at the approach of his own. Of course Harry was dead, and she was his to love forever.

That vision was and was not, in the span of a second. Then Burns found himself actually looking into the eyes of his friend's wife.

He saw her soul stripped of every rag and ribbon that it wore. She loved him. Look answered look between them, as flame leaps to the snapping pitch-pine. And there was more than that: it was as though they had taken time to talk it all out and explain to each other that by a little delay or carelessness or blundering the man out there in the river would go strangling under the ice and their only chance for happiness would be lost.

The fingers of Stowe had just begun to slip, the pails had not stopped rolling, when David leaped up the spongy path with feet that had never gone more swiftly upon any errand. He wrenched away a heavy plank that had served to guide the drippings from the eaves of the house and fairly hurled himself toward the river. He sent the plank sliding out over the ice and dropped upon it, face downward, as a boy rides a sled. The impetus carried him out to the opening that had broken about Stowe, and one end of the plank went within reach of Harry's hands just as his hold upon the ice relaxed.

They lay face to face for a moment, panting; Stowe's fingers pressed white against the plank and Burns striving to get back the breath that had been bumped out of him at the beginning of that quick slide. A stone, with a rope slithering behind it, bounded to his hand and he realized that Molly had been as quick as he to act. He thanked God for that; and he cursed whatever devil had put the other black thought up to his mind.

Burns noosed the rope, threw it over the head of his partner, and drew it close after Stowe had worked it down under his armpits. Then he shouted to Molly to hold fast on the bank while he crept in on hands and knees, shoving the plank ahead of him, over ice that cracked and threatened momentarily to break up, now that it had been given the initial blow.

Dave reached shore and took the rope from Molly's hands without looking at her. Then he kept it taut while Stowe, to whom he had flung the plank, worked his slow way in. They stood together on the bank in silence for a moment, shaken and wet and trembling; and in silence they walked back to the cabin.

"Empty the Jamaica-ginger bottle into the dipper, Molly," said Stowe, "and fix it up with sugar and water. I got to get warm inside and out."

Burns, trying to dry out his own knees by the fire, heard the slap of wet garments as they fell from Stowe in the bedroom. Molly started to go in with the drink, but he met her coming out, dressed in the suit he had bought the summer before. He drained the dipper in two long drafts and sat down so that he faced David from the other side of the stove. His eyes grew a little clouded as they swung from the face of Burns to that of Molly, who was trying to smile at him as she hung his wet clothes upon a line back of the stove. It seemed to Dave almost as though there was a sneer under the mustache of his partner as he spoke.

"You saved my life," he said, a little thickly because of the Jamaica-ginger, "and I owe you a debt."

"Oh, shucks!" wriggled Burns. "You'd have done as much for me—and it was more Molly than me, anyway!"

Stowe appeared not to have heard: he seemed searching for what he wanted to say—either that or struggling to keep down some tremendous press of emotion.

"By God, I'll pay that debt!" he roared with the suddenness of a crash of thunder.

Out of the silence that followed, the monotonous ticking of the clock made itself heard. The fire snapped. The sound of hurrying drops from the eaves penetrated into the room.

Stowe sat stiffly upright in his chair, arms curved and clenched fists resting upon his knees. He was a little bit loosened by the drink—enough so that the things in his mind were ready to come out into the light. Molly had shrunk at the outburst; but her head lifted and her gaze held unwaveringly to the face of her husband. Dave, after the first shock of astonishment had passed, held determinedly to one thought—peace for the sake of Molly.

"You don't owe me nothing," he said, quietly.

"Maybe I wouldn't have owed you nothing a year ago!" Stowe had lowered his voice, but it was no less intense. "I do now—I saw you two look at each other on the bank!"

Without being conscious of any movement, Burns stood upon his feet. He saw Molly's lips part as the red surged into her face, but he spoke first.

"Hold on, Harry! You're a going to say something you'll be sorry for all your life if you don't stop right now! If you're mad at me we can fix up our business without bringing your wife into it at all!"

"That suits me," said Stowe. He cooled perceptibly and the cocksureness of his rage lessened, although there was no lessening in the steady anger with which he looked upon his recent friend.

"I'll leave here right off this morning," grumbled David, "and I won't come back after the drive is over. Now what do you want to do about the traps and fishing-tackle and stuff we own together?"

"And the fish-shanty," added Stowe.

"And the boat—it ain't worth much, but it 'll float." Burns scratched his head. "Neither one of us has got money to buy the other out."

"Nor we won't have after the drive—not and have anything to piece out through the summer. This winter has set us back."

Burns considered. He stole a glance at Molly and saw that she had gone about the business of washing the breakfast-dishes as though nothing had happened. Perhaps Harry would see, in time, how foolish he was; certainly he would never have any cause to renew his wrath. And so David was led to think of the easiest solution, and the most profitable, and the one most filled with possibilities of trouble.

"The stuff has all been bought for a pardnership, Harry. For instance, there's only one first-class rifle, and one double-barrel shot-gun."

"That's right."

"Well, trolling needs two men, one to row and one to tend the lines. So do lots of things. We can make half again as much money if we work together."

"Ye-ah"—doubtfully.

"I'll be living somewhere within a few miles of here," continued Burns, "and we can hunt and fish together same as usual if you want to. You ain't under any obligations to do it, Harry, but if you want to try it through the summer I'm agreeable. In the fall, or next spring, one of us 'll have enough money to buy the other out."

Suspicion slowly faded out of the face of Stowe; his expression became inscrutable as he chewed over in his mind this proposal. He was calm now, or at least, self-controlled.

"All right," he agreed, after an interval, "I guess that's the sensible thing to do."

With the agreement made, Dave climbed up to the loft where he had slept for nearly a year and packed his scant clothing into an old canvas grip. When he came down again Molly took her hands out of the dish-pan and dried them.

"Good-by," she said; and she walked over and shook hands with him as a man might have done, giving look for look frankly and without any hint of that other glance on the river-bank.

Her husband watched them from his chair. He did not get up, but as Burns passed out of the door he called a carelessly spoken "So-long!" and David answered him in kind as he set forth to look for another home.

He found a friendly welcome for that day in the house of a neighbor and, as soon as he had made some half-explanation of his need for shelter, he went plodding off alone along an old wood road. It was in the depths of the brown woods, away from the complicated thoughts and purposes and desires of men, that he wanted to look into his own heart and find out what had happened there; for he was still in a measure stunned by that revelation that had come to him upon the bank of the river.

Over and over he swore to himself that never had he looked upon his friend's wife as other than the wife of his friend. He knew that this was true, but he needed to reiterate it to himself, for in this hour of introspection and self-analysis he wanted every prop that he could find for his self-respect. David Burns had sinned rather

joyfully since he could remember, but never had he violated that somewhat loose code that the mountains taught him and his kind—such of them as cared to learn.

To be strong, to be fair to men and kind to women, and to be utterly faithful to a friend—these things were among the foundation-stones. Reason told him that he had been faithful, but despite that he could not understand how it had come about that he and Molly loved each other. Being wife and friend to the same man, they had no right to; but they did. Their love was as sure as it was certain that the trees would bud and bear their richness of beauty.

All that remained to him was to live up to the letter of his self-made law. He knew that never again even by a glance would she reveal herself to him and he understood clearly that it was his part to keep away from her. Not to him or to her was given the right to shape events. That right was vested in Harry Stowe. If he should fling her away, like a wornout garment— David pulled himself back from thinking further in that direction. And yet a hope as faint as the first hint of a winter dawn comforted him minutely, although even as he took comfort in it he realized the folly of cherishing any hope. He must stand on his feet and play the game with the score against him.

That was what he did through the months of spring and early summer, with a labor of spirit new and torturing to him. He worked in the same gang with Stowe, and often helped roll the same log into the river. All one day they struggled with a jam within sight of the log-house on Mink Hill—Molly went in and out about her duties gracefully and Burns cursed the fate that had sent the Skeene River flowing that way.

Between him and Stowe there was civility, neither more nor less. It required no eye of great discernment to see that his former partner hated him with a repressed hatred, but Burns, believing that it sought no outlet in action, gave it small thought. He was concerned solely with being more than fair to Stowe in their work and with settling up the partnership as quickly as it could be done without loss to either.

So he welcomed the return to the Mink Hill neighborhood and the opportunity to make woods and water yield all that was in them. They fished with considerable success, dug ginseng with profit, and even took to farm labor through the haying season in order the sooner to settle their affairs. They worked together without friction because neither spoke many words and each seemed to be intent upon his own end—David knew that his own was liberty, and supposed that the same was the sole desire of Stowe.

On a sweltering morning in August they met in the village, according to their custom when there was no particular work planned for the day. Stowe wiped his beaded face with a hand that trembled lightly; there was a bruised look about his eyes, and Burns guessed inwardly that his partner had been where boot-leg whisky was plenty the night before, but he kept his thoughts to himself. Harry it was who proposed, after a desultory curse at the weather, that they forget work for the day.

"I'm a going to work anyway," Burns told him, "because it's just the blazing hot kind of weather I've been looking for. I'm going over to Red Rocks."

"Red Rocks?" stared Harry. "There ain't nothing there but rattlesnakes?"

"That's it—rattlesnakes!"

"A rattlesnake ain't good for anything but an excuse to take a drink!"

"There's a bounty of a dollar apiece," said David. "They'll be lying out all over the rocks to-day and if we can't make fifteen or twenty dollars before night I'll eat a rattler! Nobody's thought of hunting 'em for a dozen years, not that I know of."

"I'm game!" cried Stowe, with a flush of enthusiasm. "They ain't as thick as you think for, but we'll make good money."

So they started, with their rifles in the crooks of their arms and their steps swift along the highway. That pace, however, did not last. At the end of a few miles Stowe lagged and more than once Burns halted to let him catch up. It was after an hour of this kind of progress that Stowe broke the silence which always enveloped their joint undertakings.

"Got any booze?" he ask, puffing. "We'd ought to have some for snake-bite."

"Yes." Burns hesitated before he added, slowly: "I've got some—for snake-bite."

"You mean that you will not give me a drink?"

"I don't want to be mean, Harry, but all I could get was a pint."

"Aw, come through with a nip! I was over to Thurman's Hollow last night—and you know what that means!"

"A pint ain't any more than enough, if one of us should get struck," he replied, stubbornly. "Ever see a man swell up with rattlesnake-poison?"

Stowe opened his mouth—and apparently remembered his pride and their quarrel. He reached to his pocket, drew out his plug of tobacco and bit off a chew. His face screwed up and he spat disgustedly.

"Can't even take comfort chewing!" he growled, and started off with such a stride that for a time Dave labored to keep up with him.

It was close to noon when they reached the vicinity of Red Rocks, which was the name given to a lightly wooded section of treacherous ravines and sun-baked ledges. They ate the scant lunches they had brought and Burns prepared at once to go to work. He had provided himself with a bag, for it was necessary to take the rattles to the town clerk in order to collect the bounty, and now he went searching through the undergrowth for a couple of suitable forked sticks and two hardhack clubs. This labor he took upon himself willingly, for his partner, at the end of the journey, was in need of rest.

The hunting was successful from the first. The weather had had the effect that Burns predicted and the rattlesnake—at least, that member of the family that dwells in the northern mountains—is not the terror he is reputed to be. He is inclined to be sluggish, and he fights only when attacked or surprised. So the partners, working near each other for safety in case of accident, caught half a dozen snakes with their forked sticks and clubs before an hour had passed.

It looked like a good day, and Burns was well pleased with everything except the chances Stowe was taking. Harry leaped carelessly over stones and fallen logs and walked with his gaze anywhere but upon the ground—and that was exactly the way in which one should not hunt rattlesnakes. Twice Burns cautioned him without effect; and at length David grew thoughtless of his own safety in the attempt to watch the feet of his partner. It was in one of those moments when his eyes were turned away from his own path that a warning drone came up from the jagged rocks over which he was walking.

He crouched to spring away, but before his glance could find the source of that sound and tell him which way to flee a needle of pain pricked his thigh and he knew that death would make a decision in that place within the next handful of minutes. His first movement crushed the head of the snake with a blow of his club, his second whipped his big jack-knife from a pocket, and his third tore a slit from waist-band to knee of his trousers.

"Harry!" he shouted, as he worked. "I'm struck! Run and get the whisky in my coat!"

He slit away the cloth in strips—trousers and drawers—until the two purplish-red marks lay free and clear to view. Criss-cross twice he slashed that small wound and bore down with his hands against the solid flesh to make it bleed. Damn the beast! Why hadn't it struck lower, so that he could get at the wound better? He could have sucked the poison out, perhaps. Why hadn't he carried the whisky on his hip instead of in his coat?

Burns jerked up his head with the consciousness that something was wrong. And there was something wrong—incomprehensively wrong—for Harry Stowe was stumbling toward him over the rocks with a strange look upon his face.

"Why the hell don't you go?" yelled David. "I'm done for if you don't!"

Stowe came up to him, staring as though taken by some new and tremendous idea. He opened his mouth and his words jerked out:

"I drank that whisky—when you was gone after the clubs," he said.

For a moment Burns resigned himself, or tried to resign himself, to the thought of death. Then the hands of Stowe shot out, Burns was pushed backward upon a

boulder, and his partner's lips set themselves against the wound.

At the end of a time that David took no thought to measure, Stowe stood away from him, still grimacing and wiping his mouth. Even as Burns started to rise, searching for words out of his lean supply to express the gratitude that filled him, Harry backed away and started running toward the spot where they had eaten lunch and left their coats and rifles.

Burns was shaken—too shaken to give much heed to this eccentricity—and concerned with the angry swelling that now had gone to his hip. He believed that his life was safe and that Harry would soon be back, perhaps with a drink of water. He was filled with emotion rare to him, so that both of his hands went out eagerly when Stowe reappeared. That Harry carried a rifle in each hand meant nothing to him just then.

"I'm much obliged," he said, unsteadily, "much obliged—old feller—"

Stowe shoved a rifle at him. The barrel fell into one of his outstretched hands.

"There's your gun," said Harry, through a strange huskiness.

"Gun?" Burns looked at it stupidly.

"Yes—gun! I've paid my debt now, ain't I?"

"Debt? What debt?"

"You pulled me out of the river, didn't you?"

"Oh!" He tried to laugh, in spite of the strangeness of what was happening. "You've squared that, all right!"

"Yes, damn your soul! And now you're going to even up for something else! A man my wife looks at the way she did at you ain't going to live if I do!"

"Harry—you're stark crazy!"

"Crazy? I've been crazy enough to wait till I could square up with you before I plugged your black heart full of lead!"

"And you've been laying for me all this time!" The rifle slipped from Burns's inert hands and clattered at his feet. After all, he couldn't expect anything much better of a man who didn't appreciate Molly.

"Pick up your gun!" Stowe was backing away. His speech had thickened. "So help me, I'm a going to drill you as soon as I get over to that hemlock stump at the edge of the woods! You got—got your chance!"

He continued to move backward, facing toward Burns and picking his way among the rocks. At intervals he shook his head like a dog that has snapped at a hornet, and cursed his partner to the deepest hell he could picture.

David was weak and nauseated by pain, and stunned by the buffetings that sent him back and forth between life and death. His leg was useless from foot to waist and there was no possibility of flight. He was not sure that he could shoot, even if he wanted to. And he did not want to. If he were to kill the husband of Molly, then she would be forever and ever removed beyond hope. More than this—the mere fact that Stowe was her husband stayed the hand of Burns.

He could not have explained why, but he knew that it was impossible for him to send a bullet after that retreating figure. He watched it, wavering a little to his gaze, as it reached the hemlock stump and knelt for a surer aim.

The instinct of self-preservation made Dave move quickly; he slipped and rolled, with a jolt of agony, down beside the boulder so that it was between him and Stowe. A bullet took a chip from the rock and went whining on.

"Poor shooting!" muttered Burns, bracing himself up with his arms. "And damned slow!"

He leaned against the boulder and rested his head there. Harry would have to shift around now for the next shot, he thought; and wondered why it was that he felt neither regret nor fear nor any great interest. The answer came in a flash when he suddenly realized that his world had become hung with shadows, that it was darkening and going away from him. Dying? He decided that he was, with indifference. And contentedly he drifted into oblivion.

The sweetness of pine woods and the fresh smell of dawn were the first sensations of Burns as consciousness grew again into being within him. He was lying down, with his head very comfortably raised upon something soft. Stowe must have failed

somehow of killing him—or had the man changed his mind? Dave was slow about opening his eyes, for fear of spoiling his deep and delicious comfort, but curiosity compelled him at length.

He was lying in a little grove of pine that he remembered having seen the day before near Red Rocks. He tried to move; and brought instantly a hand upon his arm —a firm, kind, shapely hand that he recognized, but which he believed was a ghost of his imagination until Molly moved into view and sat beside him.

Her blue eyes were dark and brimming with the look that he had seen there once before. She lifted his head and gave him a drink from a tin cup:

"Feel better, Dave?" she asked.

"Yes." He drank again. "I'm—all right. Where's Harry?"

"The boys carried him into the village," she replied, gravely. "We started out a searching-party when you didn't show up at midnight—but the doctor said you wasn't to be moved till you come to."

"Harry—is he—"

"Harry's dead." She looked away into the swaying tops of the pines. "He was a laying on the other side of the rock from you, with his rifle in his hands and his head and face all swelled up. He must have been struck by a snake, but we couldn't find any marks on him."

David stared straight up into the blue of heaven and thought hard for a few moments. The poor shooting was explained now. Stowe had been on his way to get around the boulder and finish the job at close range when he himself had gone down. But how? No rattlesnake that Burns had ever heard of could strike as high as a man's head.

"Say, Molly," David looked into the beloved face bending over him, "Harry didn't have a cut lip, or anything like that, did he?"

"Why, no! But I guess he did have a sore mouth from chewing so much tobacco." Tenderness welled more deeply in her eyes as she rearranged the blanket under his head. "You mustn't talk any more now for I want you to get well quick."

ATAVISM

WHEN winds are warm and sweet
And spread blue wings on high,
My soul no longer knows itself—
I am the sky!

When winds are slow and soft
With sound of tears in fief,
I leap back ages, swift and sure—
I am a leaf!

When winds are furious
And white and fast they go,
Then lonely, chill, I press the earth—
I am the snow!

When winds are leaping, mad,
And hungrily are free,
And whole in green or patched in black—
I am the sea!

When silence bars the day
And night, nor winds pass by,
My soul takes shape of hopeful dreams—
And I am I!

Winifred Virginia Jordan.

Resurrection Day

by Jack Bechdolt

[Author of "The Torch," "Twenty Questions," etc.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I.

A HOMECOMING.

THE squall came pouncing out of some recess of the gaunt Coast Range, blotting out all normal sights and sounds. There had been, within half an hour, clear sky and pale sunlight, a sudden hurry of all enveloping cloud, premonitory quickening of the wind, a dead calm, with the channel waves running long and smooth, like highly polished granite, then the snuffing out of everything when all the weird sisters of sea and land joined hands to dance about, about.

The whaleboat and its passengers, a man and a dog, rode the heart of the squall. In that witch's carouse of snow and spray and howling wind the man who guided it might as well be blind and deaf. There was nothing to do but run before the wind under a bare pole—and hope.

He crouched over his steering oar, a large figure of a man with heavy shoulders, the upper half of him muffled in a hooded *parka*. His eyes were as gray as the blur of snow. His jaw was heavy and the thin lips parted on a gleaming grin of teeth. He handled the kicking oar with the ease of strength and long practice, and the heavy boat answered him as readily as a canoe.

The dog was a rough-coated Airedale. He pressed close against his master's knees, his muzzle turned skyward, his brown eyes watching the man's face. Occasionally he made odd little whimpering noises in his throat that told his doubts of their wisdom in holding the course.

Here the channel was about a mile wide, and subject to sharp twistings. The floor of it was lined with greedy reefs distinguishable in fair weather by their floating manes of kelp. The land on either side broke abruptly, and its irregular contour of cliff and cañon abetted the erratic course of the wind, shifting it from point to point, sometimes spinning it like a top, sometimes losing it altogether.

The ocean tide flowed in from either end of the island that fenced the lane from the sea, and toward flood-time the currents met. In calm water you could see swift, flashing ridges splitting the smooth surface like thin ice cracking; weird bubbling and boiling as if the sea were a great tea kettle and the white plumed cavalry of rival currents charging, clashing, retreating until the whole surface was a battle ground.

In the snow squall all this went on unseen, a fitting accompaniment to the insanity of the wind and sky.

Swift as the weather had changed, Frazier Dean had been given his moment of decision. He might have landed in a sheltered bight and watched it pass, dryshod and safe. If necessary, he could have

camped, built a good fire of drift, and passed a cozy night in blankets. Or, quite quite as likely, the whole thing would blow over within the half hour and let him go on without risk.

He elected to keep on because of his desire to reach home. So eager was he for his own roof and his own bunk that he risked everything the elements could conspire against him, carrying on through this purgatory of weather because of the hearth-fire hunger in his heart.

You would have laughed to see the home that drew him on!

There was icy water in the bottom of the whaleboat, water that flooded in over the gunwales no matter how skilfully she was handled. When he could spare the effort Dean baled with a desperate haste. Often in the squall's three hours of deviltry he was so close on the rocks he almost could see them, and safety passed out of reach of human endeavor—a matter for prayer. Soaking wet, cold, snow encrusted, he held on, content that he had saved an hour or two in the journey home.

Fortune, Alaska, was once a town, with a dock, houses, two saloons, a church, population, and high hopes. To hear its inhabitants, it was going to be a second Juneau. That must have been all of twenty—no, twenty-five—years ago.

Back in the Coast Range was a mountain of pure copper. A syndicate owned the mountain, and proposed to mine it. To get out the ore a railroad would be necessary, and Fortune was the spot selected as the tide-water terminus of a few miles of narrow gage. Labor gangs were shipped to Fortune, and housed in long, board shacks. Machinery, rails, pile drivers, and a tug boat came on. With them came the saloons, gamblers, a half dozen draggled women for the dance hall, a pioneer pastor. Oh, Fortune was going to have everything!

That was all so long ago it is doubtful if to-day you could find an Alaskan who ever heard of Fortune.

A financial panic wiped out the development syndicate, and the railroad was abandoned at the point where a half mile of right of way had been grubbed beyond the sand dunes of the beach. The Klondike was discovered, and the few who remained in Fortune, hoping, disappeared. After the more valuable construction equipment was finally salvaged there remained nothing but a crooked street of cheap frame buildings that turned their sightless eyes on the desolation of sand and an empty sea, bleaching their bones in the eternal rains of the southeast coast, waiting only the day when the drifting sand would give them decent burial.

Fortune was gone, forgotten. It passed without regret in the hectic days when all the world moved toward interior Alaska.

The jagged teeth of broken, weed-hung piling marked the grave of what was once a dock. A half dozen board buildings, faded to lavender gray, partially buried in sand, made up the street. Before, behind, to right and to left of it stretched mile on mile of peaceful wilderness. In fifteen years but two living things had clung to Fortune—making an exception only of the shy, wild beasts. They were Frazier Dean and his dog Fang.

Dean was given one opportunity for decision—no more. Having made up his mind to carry on through the squall, he had to sail or sink, and for three hours he could not have told you which he would do in the next minute.

Then the squall blew away as quickly as it had come, leaving a nasty sea and a pitch-black night. He realized then that his impatience had cost him progress, but there was no help for it. He took his loss with philosophical resignation, and kept on through the blackness—since he must keep on—trusting himself to an uncanny instinct for dead reckoning.

It must have been close to midnight when he found his beach. He knew it was his beach by the familiar landfall of jagged hills, bulking dim against a star-lit sky. There was no light to greet him, and that being the normal state of things, left him comforted and without suspicion of what followed.

Landing was nasty work in the dark and a lively surf. Dean knew how to handle the whaleboat, and he proved it in a manner that might have evoked applause had

there been any observer present besides Fang. As it was, the dog, first ashore, thanked him with a sharp bark, and was off into the night in an ever-widening circle, nose to earth, tail high, giving thanks for a safe voyage, and home.

The whaleboat was loaded, forward, with various supplies, staple food, coal oil, and clothing. Dean paused long enough to inspect it by the glow of an electric torch, estimating any possible damage by salt water, making sure the tarpaulin covered it well.

He was too tired for anything more. His body was one vast ache of fatigue. Cold and wet had numbed him. The earth swayed unsteadily beneath his feet, for his cramped muscles still felt the pitch and swing of the whaleboat. Only one desire remained—home and sleep. He had not far to go.

Fortune's one street had been the beach, the straggling row of wooden shacks facing seaward, and roughly following the curve of the little harbor, which was less harbor than indentation of an inhospitable shore. The southernmost building of that line—the only one still deserving of the name dwelling—was Dean's. It stood apart from the ruined village by some little distance, a one-story structure, stoutly built of wood looted from the ruins and the abundant drift, larger than seemed necessary, and boasting the luxury of a rough-stone chimney that testified to its owner's love of a generous fire and his unlimited leisure for building.

The low house or cabin—whichever the observer pleased—huddled against a hillock of sand, one of a hundred dunes along that sandy bar.

The color of this home was the color of the dunes about it, so that even on a fine day it was difficult to distinguish from its background. It was as unusual, inside and out, as the man who had built it and lived in it—altogether too fine for a beachcomber; rather primitive for a gentleman of means and leisure.

If you had asked about its owner at Romanoff, the settlement where Dean appeared about once in a year to buy supplies, you would have learned little.

To the trader and the few who had seen him, Dean was a conundrum, a strapping big fellow with with a cold gray eye and pugnacious jaw who minded his own business. He was generally supposed to be a prospector, though what he hoped to find in the sands of Fortune nobody could see. At best beach diggings were a low-pay proposition.

He paid for what little he needed in money. He seemed always cheerfully self-contained, and the few who saw him or knew of him were too busy with their own affairs to make a thirty-mile journey to discover what he was up to. They realized he was a man of education, and they set him down as a "nut."

It was an ideal country for a man who wanted to mind his own business, and Fortune was the ideal place in which to mind it.

Sure that his boat was beyond reach of high water, and its cargo safe, Dean turned homeward, slouching wearily through the soft sand. Fang he left to his own devices.

There was no lock upon his door, and there never had been need of one. He lifted the latch, and entered. Stopping short within the threshold, his eyes held by the glow of coals on his own broad hearth.

He had been absent five days, delayed by bad weather. He had left a cold hearthstone. Now a bed of coals winked a sleepy welcome.

He had come home more than half asleep on his feet, utterly done in by the long fight against the squall, but the sight of coals, and the warm breath of the room waked him with rude hellos.

Instinctively he shifted his position along the wall, glad he was in shadow, silent, stealthy, ready for any surprise. His right hand fumbled for the holstered pistol in his belt.

There was no sound nor sign of life in the room, the largest and chief of his three rooms, but his eyes, slowly accustoming themselves to the dim glow, sought the shadows eagerly.

Never had there been a visitor to Fortune. He wanted none. It was imperative that he know at once all about the person or persons who had paid him this attention,

He knew it was quite possible that here, by his own fireside, lurked a peril far greater than any that had dogged him through the storm.

Gradually he became certain there was no one in the room. There were the other two rooms yet to explore.

In his fastidious building he had devoted one chamber to his night's rest, an almost unheard-of luxury for beach-comber or prospector. That room became the object of his attention. It was curtained from the larger living quarters.

Dean began to sidle along the wall, intent on reaching its door.

He was familiar with every inch of this home—as would be any man who had spent a dozen years there. He knew each chair and stool and shelf; the big table, the case of books, the rugs and baskets, where each stood. His fingers saw and recognized them, one by one.

But neither his fingers nor his eyes could see that an object foreign to his home reposed on the floor before his feet, a metal-bound object, large and heavy. He collided with it noisily, missed his balance, groped wildly with both hands, and sent a half-dozen books crashing to the floor.

All the philosophy culled from fifteen years could not prepare him for the shock of what followed. That anything might happen he was well aware, but of all things this was most staggering.

"That you, Mr. Dean?"

A woman's voice.

It was rich, low-pitched, musical, and a little blurred by sleepiness. From its tone you could picture its owner, rousing from warm blankets and perhaps leaning on one elbow as she spoke, indolently curious, but nothing more.

Frazier Dean, who fondly imagined he had settled every problem of life—who believed himself able to meet every emergency quietly, and without bungling—stood petrified, voiceless.

To answer the owner of that voice was as far beyond his power as second-sight.

From behind the curtained door came a stirring, and the faint rustle of blankets. The question was repeated, this time a little more alertly: "Oh, Mr. Dean? Hello."

After what seemed eternity Dean managed an answer. "Hello," he said, and the taut muscles of his aching throat made the words curiously guttural. As a reply it was stale and flat, but he could think of no way to voice all the questions that demanded to be spoken.

"Oh, I'm glad it's you." The musical voice seemed reassured. "Please don't come in, though. I made rather free with your house, but there was no other place. And I'm in your bunk just now. I hope you don't mind? You'd just as soon make up a bed by the fire, wouldn't you?"

There was a pause in which Dean tried to answer and could only grunt.

"Thank you; I knew you'd feel that way about it. You see, I really know you quite well. I took the liberty of reading most of the things you have written. I was anxious, naturally, to know what sort of a person you are. I hope you feel complimented by my trust in you? Now I know you must be dog-tired. It blew frightfully, didn't it? Shall we say good-night—"

"Look here," said Dean hoarsely. "Who are you? What are you? Why—"

"Oh, *must* you, *to-night?* I'm sure you're tired out, and it's a long story. And I'm—" He was certain she yawned then. "Surely your philosophy will fortify you for whatever morning has in store!"

Dean fancied he read mockery in her tone. She could not have used a surer weapon against him. She had read most all he had written, so she said. From that she had formed her judgment of him—and trusted him like this! She understood those theories of life and conduct he had worked out with such painstaking labor; the arguments he had written, confident they would be read only by his eye, yet proudly conscious of the world's loss. She had examined things he believed sacred against all invasion—thoughts very close to his heart.

And now, when emergency had betrayed him into curiosity, she found something to smile at; something incongruous between theory and action at which to mock. The blow struck home. He determined to show her.

"Good-night," he said, trying to make the brief dismissal absolutely impersonal.

Hurt pride drove him to make a light, improvise a bed, and roll in his blankets without as much as a glance toward the curtained doorway. And once rolled up, though he was positive such a thing could not happen, the demands of an overworked body plunged him into a dreamless sleep of utter exhaustion.

CHAPTER II.

MARTA KREE.

DEAN waked early, troubled by the memory of a preposterous, incredible event which at first he attributed to nightmare. His open eyes stared upward at a low-pitched roof, weathered brown, and he knew he was at home. Sore muscles reminded him soon enough of the hardships of his return.

Then he shifted in his blankets, brows knit as he tried to marshal his thoughts, and shifting, he saw on the floor a steamer trunk, metal bound, and beside it a half-dozen books sprawled in disorder.

Then memory came.

He rose to one elbow, staring and marveling.

Actually the thing had happened to him!

Over that unfamiliar trunk he had stumbled in the dark, and a woman had spoken to him—a woman snug in his own bunk.

He pressed his fist hard against his eyes, knitting his brows, opening the eyes suddenly; closing them, trying again. Surely he was awake now, but the trunk remained there on the floor, a fact. Still he was sure there was some mistake, some queer mingling of fact and fancy—a freak of a tired brain, driving on after his body had surrendered to slumber.

He tried assuming that the trunk was his, a purchase recently made and forgotten in the weariness of homecoming. There was no getting away from the truth. A stranger was in his home, the home sacred to him alone during fifteen quiet years—fifteen years of happy exile.

And the stranger was a woman!

He sat up, throwing off the blankets, alert at last. Another type of man would have held his head and marveled that he had been so drunk the night before. Dean knew better.

He stared at the curtain closing off the sleeping chamber. It told him nothing. He listened for sounds, almost persuaded he heard a soft, measured breathing—but the wind was astir among the sand dunes, whispering against the planks of the cabin, sighing in the chimney.

A stranger. *Only one?* He remembered, piecing together that absurd, brief conversation of the night before, that she had said she was alone. How did he know she was alone!

His sock-clad feet made not a sound as he rose, crossing the dim room directly to the wall opposite the fireplace, where a big Navaho rug had been nailed up like a tapestry. He gave the rug a keen glance, felt along its sides to be sure the nails were firm. While he did this he almost ceased to breathe, and his eyes, turning restlessly, were watching on all sides and behind him as if he feared observation. What he discovered brought a gentle sigh of relief.

Then Dean turned his attention to the small place used as his kitchen. There everything was as he left it, and no sign of an intruder. In the big living-room there was no evidence of an interloper except that metal-bound steamer trunk, and, yes—he saw it tardily—a gay cluster of flowers, *Indian paint brush* and *lupine*, natives of the dunes, arranged in a bowl. Of course *she* had done that.

He padded anxiously to the curtained doorway and hesitated there, his fingers touching the drapery. A slight push would have moved the barrier aside, enough for him to peep. There was much more at stake than curiosity. His common sense told him to take every possible advantage while there was opportunity. It was vital that he know all he could learn about the uninvited visitor.

Yet he hesitated to look. She was a woman, a guest under his roof. She had taken him for granted in their brief talk in the dark; assumed that he was all the things promised by what he had written in his long years of seclusion. He realized

that to spy on her was something worse than bad manners; more serious than any rebuke she could offer—it was to destroy his own faith in himself. Curiosity challenged his patiently planned philosophy, pleading self-defense as its extenuation; but his ideals held firm. He turned away.

Dean quietly opened the cabin door, and stared out at the familiar desolation of home. Light was still dim, and the gray sky hesitated between rain and snow, which was the normal variety of weather in Fortune. Fang, busy with his own affairs among the dunes, smelled his master, and came bounding. Dean greeted his dog, but left him outside the door, fearful of disturbing his visitor.

Quietly he renewed the fire on the hearth, and started a breakfast. Then he opened the door again, and stepped out, in his place admitting Fang. The dog could wake her more tactfully, and he was anxious she should wake quickly.

His philosophy had undergone all the strain it could stand. There was an overwhelming majority of reasons why his questions should be answered, and as quickly as possible.

Not the least of his questions was how the woman had come to Fortune. No steamer routes were near; overland, the thing was out of the question. He searched the beach for sign of a launch or skiff, and there was none. An airplane he dismissed as too improbable.

"How" and "why"—these were the big questions. He granted her an impatient half-hour for dressing, and on top of that another quarter hour. His impatience could stand no more.

He knocked on his own door—a little thing, but it struck him as more fantastic than the whole program; more unreal. He entered to a warm smell of newly made coffee and potatoes and ham frying. Not since he had been a very small boy had he noticed such odors, and something deep down under a crust of stoicism—something he had thought long dead—stirred faintly. In all his years he had not realized loneliness as this homely, warm smell brought it to him.

This all in a few seconds' time, for his eyes went directly to the woman, and each stared frankly at the other.

She stood in the doorway of the little kitchen, a coffee-pot in her hand. The color of her dress struck him at once, a golden brown of some soft, woolly stuff, cut all in one piece, and belted loosely about the waist. The same, warm golden hue was on her neck and face, though her hair, piled in a plain knot behind, was jet black, and her cheeks and lips a warm red.

She was a slender woman and, he judged, not above five feet and a half in height. Her eyes were as black as her hair, not very large, but glinting with a dancing light. They met his, unashamed.

She gave him the impression of being very well groomed, self-possessed, sympathetic. Her hands attracted him by their slimness and the polish of the nails. Finally he noted that she wore slippers of soft suede leather, and brown stockings—and the stockings were of silk!

If his visitor had been an elephant in pink tights, playing a ukulele, she could have been no more utterly absurd and out of place in this plain board cabin, built among the ruins of a town dead the last quarter century, on a wilderness coast of a land forgotten.

So he stared.

She smiled, and he discovered that her mouth was whimsical and generously good-humored. "Good-morning, Mr. Frazier Dean. I am Marta Kree—K-R-double-E—Miss Kree."

Dean inclined his head gravely, and tried to select a first one from all the questions that bothered his mind. She guessed that.

"If you'll sit down at the table and let me have one cup of coffee I'll tell you everything," she promised, still smiling. "Coffee is a vice with me. I'm no use in the morning until I've had a cup. I find most men have the same weakness—"

"I—how—certainly," Dean answered. There was a place arranged on either side of the table—a table set for breakfast with such circumstance as his china closet afforded, the bowl of flowers brightening its center.

Marta Kree served the meal with a sure deftness that left Dean paralyzed. True

to her word, she drank her coffee before she volunteered any more information. But while she drank she studied her host, approving his well-kept hands, his clean-shaven face, his steady gray eyes, the brown hair curling slightly and recently close cut about the well-formed skull.

She set down the coffee cup and laughed, a low, musical note that Dean liked instantly. "I do congratulate you, Mr. Dean. Your philosophy is shock proof—and I can guess all the questions that are fighting to be asked. I'm sorry I doubted your self-control—"

"I'd like to think it a triumph of philosophy," Dean smiled back. "I'd like to think I could come home, as I did last night, and take a—a miracle—for granted that way. But I'm afraid it was less philosophy than exhaustion. The storm—if I had been more than half awake—"

"You need not suffer any longer—but please don't neglect breakfast. The ham and potatoes are good—they're from your own stock. You eat, and I'll talk. It's an absurd story."

A moment's pause, with knitted brows, then: "I am Marta Kree, a business woman, born in New York and until a month ago, never a hundred miles away from there. Like a great many people who live in New York, I probably never even thought there was a world west of the Hudson River—not until a month ago! Well, I learned rapidly—"

"But how—" Dean interrupted.

"Oh, please, let me—"

"And why—"

Her smile became mischievous. "Very good, I'll answer those questions. *How?* By a boat, Mr. Dean. *When?* Three days since. *Why?* To be married!" Marta Kree's eyes danced. "Now I hope you're happy!"

Dean found himself laughing with her. He had not laughed like this for fifteen years. He forgot all his curiosity in the sheer, reasonless enjoyment of laughing and seeing her laugh, hearing her laugh, tasting the heady wine of her companionship.

"You see how it is? I'll have to tell the story in order if I'm ever going to answer you rationally. I'm trying to give it all to you in the shortest possible time. I owe you that much for your hospitality—"

"Oh, that—"

She ignored the interruption.

"I went into business at eighteen—stenographer. By the time I was twenty-five I had climbed to the berth of private secretary, and it was a good berth, too. I have no people living, and my salary was more than enough. I liked the work; I liked responsibility, the chance to use my head once in a while. I worked for a rather successful and very interesting man, George Burchard. Perhaps you've heard of—no, of course not, living here alone!

"When I was twenty-seven, that was last December, I faced the big question that bothers almost every woman who has taken up business life. A man wanted to marry me. The man is Mr. Burchard, my employer, a decent sort in every way. I think I understand him pretty thoroughly—a thousand times more clearly than any woman in the home can understand the man who asks to marry her.

"There are many good things about George Burchard; more good than bad. He's a business adventurer, a plunger at times; but he has an anchor of common sense. He will make and lose big stakes before he's through; but he'll be decent to the woman he loves—and he loves me. I'm proud to say it. Best of all, the woman who marries Burchard is going to see a great deal of the world and the life that goes on in the world—more than most women can hope to see. You don't mind listening to my heart throbs? Really it belongs to the story—"

"Mind? Oh, please, Miss Kree!"

"Well, the other choice was a sure-thing—business career—income gradually growing—life in a good hotel—a club—eventually I suppose a cat, or dog or parrot, and the usual wind-up that comes to single ladies. A sure thing? Yes, and sure to be lonely before the final curtain! On the other hand, adventure. My philosophy is not like yours, Mr. Dean—I chose adventure."

Dean reddened, and she added quickly:

"Please don't think I am disparaging. Only, we look at things from a different angle. So I chose adventure—the big chance. I promised to marry Burchard. No, I'm not wearing a ring. Don't care for rings. The rest of the story is brief.

"Burchard is something of a speculator, as I told you—a big man with big ideas—and a business gambler. A consolidation of independent Alaskan salmon canneries was his latest. A fortune in it, if it succeeded. There was a stock company organized, and capital secured. We had a lot of options—on good trap sites and plants. But we had to turn our profit quickly—either that or nothing.

"Well, it was nothing. An off year, I think they call it, anyway, a catch way below par. Notes coming due; the conservative, heavily financed competition alarmed, and spreading propaganda; stockholders asking questions; smash! By this time there are probably a dozen lively criminal proceedings and lawsuits. Burchard was in the north on his own yacht when it came. He dare not come back in reach of subpoenas and warrants—yes, it's as bad as that! But he wanted me, and I'd promised. I was glad to come.

"Somebody told him of this place, quiet, out of the way, forgotten. My instructions, wired in code, were to meet him here. One of our cannery tenders brought me from Juneau, and he will call. He expected, of course, to meet me. Something, storm or fog, I suppose, delayed the yacht. I came three days ago, and the tender captain was worried about me. But I convinced him it was perfectly safe to leave me to your hospitality, and decidedly dangerous for him to remain and possibly attract attention to us. You know, if Burchard does get in range of the law it will probably mean—prison. And that's the story."

A preposterous story!

Dean, who had listened judicially, reached a silent conclusion. Yet was it preposterous? Or rather, what combination of circumstance could be more impossible than her very presence in his cabin, across the breakfast table—a city flower transplanted to a sand dune? And she was reality. He could no longer doubt that.

He rose, preoccupied, sought out a pipe, filled and lighted it and, smoking, stared from his window at the vacant beach. Marta Kree watched his broad back a little anxiously.

Finally: "When will this yacht come?" He asked it without glancing back.

"Surely to-day! Very soon, I hope. I— Mr. Dean, truly I'm sorry to force myself on your hospitality. If there had been any other way—"

Dean shrugged impatiently.

"I hope Burchard will come *very soon*." She said it with almost a spiteful emphasis.

Dean disregarded her meaning. "Do you realize," he began bluntly, "you did a very foolish thing—took a very great risk? How could you know what sort of man—"

"How? By his home, Mr. Dean. I was not afraid. I found the home of a gentleman. And I took the liberty of prying a little. Excuse that to self-defense, can't you? After what I read of your manuscripts I was sure that—that—" She was smiling, he knew, by her tone. "Mr. Dean, would you like to know the sort of man I pictured—"

"Eh!"

She was laughing now. "A graybeard. Honestly! Shining bald head with a little white cotton about the ears; a wonderful long white whisker. A real hermit, a kindly, gentlemanly hermit—"

"You took too great a risk, much too great. Last night—"

"But I was so sure of you. And"—she added it deprecatingly—"of course I was armed. I know how to use a pistol, too! But this morning—imagine how I felt when I saw you!"

"So only a graybeard should think as I do? Only a doddering old fool with one foot in the grave?" Dean was thoughtful.

"It is not—usual—in a young man," Marta Kree defended.

"Some men learn early in life," Dean murmured to himself.

His guest left the table to stare uneasily from the open door. He knew she was thinking of the yacht, and presently, when she walked slowly toward the beach, he followed her, conscious he had been a little

rude. He made an uneasy apology that was laughed aside, half finished.

They walked together then, an aimless stroll, Dean answering her questions about the dead town and his lonely life. They were returning to the cabin when she remarked of it: "You built with excellent taste—really. There's a very fine line to it, simple as it is. I think you might have been a very successful architect, if you had tried. But one thing's odd. Did you build it *into* the dune—or did the sand come afterward and bury it? Sand and house seemed linked into one."

Before she had finished Marta Kree was aware that a perfectly innocent, idle question had terrorized her host. He gave her a look black with suspicious fears.

CHAPTER III.

BLUEBEARD.

DEAN'S look slightly alarmed Marta Kree. For several moments he continued to act in a very peculiar way, like a man who had received a fright, who suspected her of some wrong-doing, who might even anticipate some sort of revenge upon her.

Her comment on the shape of the cabin had been perfectly innocent, the result of a real enthusiasm for the little home this recluse had built with his own hands. It was well designed, and she applauded it—as she applauded several things she had discovered about Dean.

Up to this moment Marta had been enjoying adventure hugely. The past four weeks had been a gay tapestry of action with the scarlet thread of romance and intrigue coloring the pattern. Her sudden translation from the demure, commonplace, and slightly bored woman of business to the leading part in an intrigue to outwit the law and join Burchard, with the prospect of marriage, travel, and more adventure as the reward, was a welcome vacation from a life of routine—an unexpected gift. Of the ethics she thought not at all. She was too used to Burchard's spectacular operations to consider their ethical aspect.

The long dead and forgotten little town where she had landed did not disconcert her in the least. This was romance, and she enjoyed it. In the same spirit she took possession of Dean's home, confident of her welcome, and equally confident of herself should she possibly prove unwelcome.

What notion she had of frontier character she had probably formed from reading. She assumed that either the owner of this wide-open home would be the crude, somewhat incoherent heart of gold with rough exterior or, at the worst, the black-bearded villain of tradition whom she could manage with her ridiculous pistol.

In Dean's little library she found his own manuscripts, and reading them allayed all fear. From Dean's essays, the employment of his vast leisure, she had discovered a man whose one ideal was peace in absolute seclusion.

The man wrote delightfully of his solitary life, describing the long, gray winters of this wild coast, and its brief, lovely summers. He wrote with shrewd observation and humor of his dog Fang, painting a dog portrait that was masterly. He told whimsically of the dead town in which he lived alone, speculating on its brief, brilliant past.

The dunes, the flowers, shy, wild animals, and the everlasting drama of the elements he had translated into prose, which Marta, priding herself on shrewd judgment, uncovered with the delight of one who finds pure gold.

And through all that Dean had written ran one refrain, his pleasure in perfect isolation. The man was a philosopher and not uninteresting. He had known the world and the wilderness, and in the wilderness he had found content. He had reached definite conclusions: That man's happiness lies entirely within his own heart; that only in isolation is there perfect contentment; that humanity's weakness is its instinct to herd.

War and all its woes Dean would abolish by reversion to the primitive—each man for himself and by himself. Trade must be abolished; human intercourse annulled. Recognizing natural laws, he would limit civilization to the one family group, and he quaintly admitted that his own ideal was

the solitary life. And all this he believed and expressed without trace of rancor.

Naturally of such a man she had no fear.

Discovering his comparative youth, she had been shocked. But there was nothing about Dean's appearance at variance with his expressed ideal.

Not until this moment.

And now, assuredly, he showed both alarm and a menacing anger.

Dean gave no answer to her comment upon the shape of the cabin. She found other things to talk about, and saw with relief that his strange mood passed.

They returned to the cabin, where Marta took charge of the breakfast dishes. Dean she permitted to help in a humble capacity. She had superabundant energy and a real delight in housework. There was a novelty about it, and Marta Kree became very womanly. Possibly it was an interest in her approaching marriage that turned her thoughts to such duties. Evidently she enjoyed herself.

Dean found her finally in the middle of the large room, a rag in one hand and an eager light in her eye.

"What a really beautiful room," she began softly. "It's honest, not pretending to be something it isn't, and that's the best part of it. Floor, walls, roof, and furnishings, it's harmonious."

"You're the first person to see it. I'm glad you like it Miss Kree. I like it—"

"But it has a flaw—"

"Ah?"

"Yes, a bad flaw." She frowned impatiently. "Dust!"

"Isn't dust the privilege of a philosopher?"

"I should say it was the laboratory material of your philosophy. It is made of dust—not life."

"I'm sorry you can't approve my notion of living—"

"I think it is wicked!" Marta Kree's black eyes snapped. The color rose in her cheeks.

Her vehemence stirred Dean's curiosity. "Oh, come, Miss Kree! Not so bad as that!"

"Yes, wicked. You would destroy all civilization, all progress. You'd take away from us all the helpful things humanity has gained by cooperation. Take your own case. You were given talents. You can do things with your hands—and write things. You have many gifts. Is it right to keep them to yourself? Is it right and fair to let God's gifts rust in idleness!"

There was an answering sparkle in Dean's eyes. He began to enjoy his uninvited guest. "Is the diamond any less beautiful because it lies forgotten in the clay and not on velvet in a jeweler's show-case?" he retorted eagerly. "For the talents God has given me, I thank God. They bring employment to my brain and hands and give me happiness. Isn't that enough?"

"Admitting your ideas are right, should you not be willing, at least, to make others happier by telling them? Haven't you a sense of duty—"

"Ha! Then I'd be a reformer, not a philosopher, Miss Kree." Dean chuckled in triumph. He chuckled again as her lips formed the indignant comment: "Wicked." Then, generous in his triumph, he added: "But follow your own bent. If it makes you happier, why—dust."

"I shall. I'm going to indulge myself while I may. This place gets a thorough housecleaning."

"Then, if you'll excuse me and Fang for a time?" At the door Dean turned back with a new look on his face. "Oh," he said, and there was warning in his voice. "In your enthusiasm, Miss Kree, will you please be very careful of that big Navaho rug on the wall? I would not like that disturbed."

Marta promised, wondering at his earnestness.

Marta Kree cleaned house in high spirits. As she worked she sang softly, and with all her perfections it must be told that she could not "carry" an air. She had no memory for music, so that what she sang was rather tuneless and a little ridiculous, but somehow it endeared her to those who knew her.

Piece by piece, she moved Dean's homemade furniture, stopping often to admire

the simple good taste with which he had used materials at hand. The man showed the soul of an artist. Rugs she shook vigorously out of doors, books were given a Spartan buffeting. Finally everything within reach had been brightened, and she was happy as a little girl playing "house."

There remained only some objects placed out of reach. Where the sloping roof joined the cabin walls there was a ledge that served also as a sort of shelf. Various things had been stowed away in that snug harbor—antlers, snowshoes, a bundle of old clothing, a pair of heavy boots, a rucksack, pails and bundles, a pair of paddles. She was perfectly certain they needed attention, and ambitious to reach them.

The ledge was out of reach, and she had to drag one of Dean's home-made chairs against the wall. Balancing precariously on the broad arm of this furniture, she clung with her fingers to the ledge and looked about, wrinkling her nose at the sight of so much dust. She was perfectly sure there must be mice nesting along the rafters.

In her eagerness she overbalanced the chair. It turned over with a crash, and left her, clinging momentarily to the ledge before her fingers slipped and she went down, clawing at the wall as she fell.

Violent collision with the floor dazed her for a moment. Breathless, she found herself seated awkwardly, sore and shaken, and clutching firmly in one hand a corner of a rug, Dean's Navaho rug that had been fastened to the wall—the rug he had warned her about.

Most of the rug had torn away from its nails by her grasp. The wall behind it was exposed, and in that wall was a plank door.

The door was low, and it looked solid.

Marta Kree stared at it with wakening interest. The rug in her hand was proof enough Dean had not meant this door to be seen.

She struggled to her feet, conscious of several painful bruises, watching the door intently, as if it might open of its own volition and reveal—what?

And then she was aware that the outer door of the cabin had opened to admit its owner. Dean was staring at her, and the mingled fright and anger in his face was more shocking than violent profanity.

CHAPTER IV.

BLUEBEARD'S SECRET.

MARTA KREE'S first impulse was to explain. Swift upon its heels came pride, forbidding an explanation. The accident was obvious—and Dean had no business looking at her that way. She returned his glare challengingly.

Dean's first words were incongruous with his look. He merely said: "I knew it must happen," in a manner of a man resigned to a hard fate.

With the words his face cleared, and he added more gently, "I'm sorry you fell—and I hope you're not badly hurt!"

Marta limped to a chair without answering, avoiding the hand he stretched out to help her. Resolutely she kept her eyes off the door so curiously revealed. Finally she asked: "Why did you say that—that it must happen?"

Dean delayed answering to fill and light his pipe. When he spoke it was with a dull bitterness: "There's such a thing as fate. A man's destiny is marked out plain for him, like a sailing chart, and he can struggle a lifetime without altering one line or dot upon it. I've tried—fifteen years I've tried—and I failed. As soon as I saw you I knew I had failed. What brought you here? No fault of mine—"

"Nor of mine," she said tartly.

"No, nor of yours. A set of circumstances, ridiculous circumstances working together, thousands of miles across the continent, conspired to bring you to this room and to—that." He indicated the door in the wall, still half draped in the dangling rug.

"But this is nonsense!" Marta was brisk again, anxious to close a meaningless incident. "You talk mysteriously about fate and a—a torn rug. I'm sorry I was clumsy. What more can I apologize for?"

"You need not apologize. If it was fate brought you many thousand miles to this place I am just as ready to believe that fate brought about the accident that tore

down that rug—that exposed something which has been my exclusive secret for fifteen years—and I thought would die when I died. If I were a more suspicious person—"

"Oh! You would not dare—"

"I do dare," he answered levelly, meeting her indignation eye to eye. "I do dare, but I believe, though I cannot tell you how or why I believe, you are perfectly innocent in what you did. No, it was written so, and so it must happen. I thought I had beaten that game. I thought I had made myself independent of circumstance. By living alone I imagined I could remake my destiny as I pleased. Then you came—"

"And hope to go again, just as quickly."

"Yes, and the mischief is done. Let two people meet, and there starts a chain of circumstances that can go on through generations and ages until the whole history of the world is made over—"

"And all this about a—a rug—"

"About that door." Dean's eyes flashed. "There's no good ignoring that. The rug is a blind, as you can easily see—"

"Very well, rug or door, it's all one to me. I have no interest in it. I can forget it—and I do forget it, now."

Dean shook his head slowly, and sighed.

"You will have to know, now—"

"I want to know nothing!"

"And I intend to tell you everything. Why? Because that's the safer way. You say you'll forget. Miss Kree; that's talking nonsense. Knowing half a secret, you'll spend your lifetime wondering at the answer—your lifetime. That's human nature. No matter where you went or what else happened, there would be times when your mind would go back to a door, hidden in the wall of a cabin in the midst of nowhere, and your head would ache puzzling out its meaning. Some day you would tell the story to another. That's true, isn't it?"

Marta shook her head. Yet she knew it was true.

"Your absurd mystery makes it true, then," she argued defensively.

Dean acknowledged that. "And I could no more govern the face I showed you when I came in, than you could the fate that made you tear down that blind. So there you are!"

He rose, and tearing away the part of the rug that remained, pulled the hidden door wide.

"Come here, please," he bade her. "I'm going to tell you the whole thing."

"I don't want to know."

"You must know."

"*Must!*" She frowned back at him, expressing a contemptuous surprise.

"For my own safety," he explained. "They say a secret ceases to exist when two people know it. It depends on the people, Miss Kree. When you understand this door, I think you'll be better able to banish it from memory. Come."

Marta hesitated. "This is rather ridiculous—and quite unnecessary—"

"I can't agree with that. I've told you why—"

"And look here, Mr. Dean, if you insist on this I want something plainly understood between us first—"

"Well?"

"I have not tried to uncover your secret—"

"Oh, of course!"

"I came here with no ulterior motive. I am no spy—"

"I apologize for my suspicions. I'm sure of that."

"And I make absolutely no promise beforehand to keep any secrets. If you insist on telling me something, that is your affair. I shall be my own judge about silence." She gave him the ultimatum with a serious, beautiful dignity that delighted Dean.

"That's exactly why I want you to know it all," he agreed. "Let me be frank with you. If a man, a stranger as you are, had stumbled onto this thing, I think I'd have killed him on the spot. Not out of malice, simply from necessity. I would not like to kill a man, but I'd have done it. If it had been another woman—I—well, I'm not sure what I could have done. I'm glad it wasn't another woman. But you, I'm sure you'll do just as you say, judge the case on its merits, and stick to your decision. Would you mind handing me that lantern?"

He lighted the lantern, and ushered Marta through the low door. The light

picked out, slowly, the details of an irregular chamber.

At first glance the chamber seemed to be excavated from the sand. The floor was of beach sand, as also most of its walls. But there were timbers showing in the walls and roof—solid, heavily fashioned timbers that shored up the fluid sand and kept the space open. Here and there out of the sand protruded a broken end of planking, a twist of frayed rope, the corner of a metal object that looked like an old stove, a piece of sail cloth, the end of a mattress.

Dean held the lantern high while she looked. Except for one object the cellar-like room was empty. That was a stout wooden box, its corners bound in iron.

Marta glanced about her with an interest vastly heightened by Dean's mysterious manner. Then she looked at him, a question in her eyes.

Dean answered the question by opening the lid of the wooden box. It was not locked. He held the light so she could see plainly.

Not a very large box, say a foot and a half by two and a half long, and probably two feet deep. It was more than three-quarters filled with dull, yellow dust and lumps that varied in size, from the pea to the walnut.

Marta's eyes began to shine with excitement. There was a higher color in her cheeks. Without asking permission she plunged her hand into the pile and picked out a heavy, flat, dully shining lump.

"Oh!" she exclaimed softly. "Oh, beautiful!"

Dean watched her gloomily.

Her fingers caressed the velvety surface of the nugget. She tossed that back in favor of another—and tried still others, admiring their sheen, their odd shape, their solid, satisfactory weight.

She found a thrilling pleasure in stirring the finer dust—in sifting it through her fingers. For a few moments, so fascinating was this play, she forgot Dean.

By an effort she recovered her poise. She breathed too quickly to keep her voice as matter-of-fact as she wished. "There must be a—a fortune. Why, it must be worth—worth—"

"I can give you a rough estimate," said Dean harshly. "Up to the present it has cost the lives of threescore men. How many women and children have suffered—how many have died miserably because of it, I can't exactly say. Enough, you may be sure. You're right, it's worth a great deal. Measuring its cost by the agony it has brought, I'd be inclined to think it almost priceless."

His bitterness cooled her like an icy wind. She drew back, a little frightened.

"You don't—seem to care—much for it," she tried lightly.

"I detest it. The most useless, futile metal in the world. Too soft for any good purpose. You can make nothing from it—except tears, heartaches, violence and death. It's yellow, yes—yellow all through, and whomever it touches it stains with its yellowness. Greasy, rotten, wicked. It's cursed with the curse of Cain. Shall we be going out?"

He closed the door carefully behind them and hunting out a hammer and nails, replaced the Navaho rug against it. This task done in gloomy silence, he walked restlessly back and forth across the room while Marta waited an explanation. She was puzzled and decidedly uneasy.

"That stuff in there—" Dean began suddenly. "Miss Kree, if I were to take it all and dump it into the sea, what would you think about me?"

"Why, I'd think that you were—well—"

"Not right, eh? Brain upset by solitude? Insane?"

"Yes, I would."

"I knew it! You know, time and again I've been on the point of doing that very thing when that notion would stop me. I couldn't help it—I couldn't help thinking of what an outsider would think of me. And I've been just a little afraid that an outsider's judgment would be right. But let me tell you this"—his gray eyes flashed—"if that were all the gold in the world and it was in my power to sink it out there—so deep it could never be found—I'd do it in a minute. In a minute! I'd do it without one sigh of regret, knowing that I'd done more for humanity than any other one man that ever lived.

"But that isn't all the gold, not a spoonful of the total—scarcely a grain—and what's the use? Let it rust there, forgotten. Why dignify it with all this worry? As long as I live, at least, it shan't get out to work any more harm. That's the way I figure it out."

"Touched, perhaps, but not mad." That was Marta's judgment. She felt very sorry for him.

"That place you saw," he began, restlessly, "that's the inside of what was once a ship—a small schooner. It was wrecked, driven up on the shore here, buried. All the sand about here keeps on the move under the everlasting winds, and when I found it the hulk was scarcely showing. I built the cabin against it as a wind-break, to keep it concealed forever. At that time, though, I had a very different notion of values—yes, very different.

"Money—that's the curse that's on all of us, Miss Kree. I didn't think so in those days, though. I was brought up thinking money something to be had without effort—my divine right—and to be spent without thought. I learned plenty of ways of spending it, too, when I was a kid. The curse began working early in my case.

"I had a foster-father. He adopted me from an orphanage. His wife had died and her baby with her. He was impulsive, violent-tempered, vindictive—and yet not a bad sort in many ways. Not half bad. He adopted me for the sole purpose of having an heir, somebody to leave his money to. There had been a violent row with the rest of his family—over money, of course. He swore none of his kin would get a cent. Hence my adoption. I—nobody—was to have it all. Pure spitefulness, of course. Naturally, I learned all this much later.

"The old man had plenty. He brought me up in a way he must have considered handsome — a tutor, unlimited pocket money, great expectations. A rotten life for a kid—lonely, bad habits, no sense of values. I was the natural product of that sort of thing—utterly useless.

"At the height of it, while I was riding the wave, I got smitten with a fool girl who had a pile of her own. A nice, useless, yellow-haired girl that I mistook for the acme of all the virtues. Well, I was only twenty.

"The lights went out at the height of the party. The old man was suddenly ill, scared to death of dying. He sent for his family in death-bed repentance, made up the row, and managed to scrawl his name to a new will. That let me out. Rather rough, but it was his own money, and he had a perfect right to do it.

"He was decently generous at that. I got a thousand, and some good advice about making my own way."

Dean laughed shortly.

"Fine advice, telling a kid brought up that way, to get out and carve a career, eh?"

"I think that was brutal!"

Marta Kree's eyes sparkled indignation.

"Well," Dean considered, "a little rough, maybe—"

"What a spiteful old man he must have been!"

"I don't think he was really spiteful. Probably, too late, he realized what I needed. And, of course, he'd made up the other row, and felt his own kind had a better claim. No, he was the average sort—bad and good in streaks. And I was a fine young fool, crazy about a yellow-haired fluffy girl.

"I realized I would need another fortune if I was going to win her. To do her justice, she let me know that at the start. But she said she was willing to wait a year or so. Very generous she was about it, according to her own light. I don't suppose she had much more idea of how money is gotten than I had.

"In those days the papers were full of news about the Klondike. I couldn't think of any way to get rich quicker. So I said good-by to the girl, and started off. Can you imagine that? A fool kid, with a couple of suits of clothes in a suit-case, a railroad ticket, the change from a thousand dollars in his pocket, not even dead sure whether this Klondike was in the arctic or the tropics. I give you my word, Miss Kree, I traveled to Skagway wearing patent leather shoes, and a loud, checked paddock coat. That was my outfit! And yet there were thousands as bad as I was.

"It was in Skagway that I got my first

real notion of what I was up against, and it scared me. I had sense enough for that. So I hesitated, and while I hesitated I ran into a man I had known slightly, a man who had been in my foster-father's home several times. He was an old-timer, prospector and wanderer, and my foster-father had grubstaked him often.

"This man—his name was Ryan—had a queer yarn which he confided in me out of some mistaken sense of obligation—because he owed my foster-father a good deal of money. A gang of men, using a small schooner, had robbed several of the steamers bound south with returning adventurers and treasure. It was pure piracy—the old-fashioned, high seas sort, brought up to date. At one point along the Inside Passage the boats often anchored to wait slack tide, and here the schooner had reaped a harvest in a space of a few days, then sailed off with its loot.

"The schooner and men had disappeared. Nobody knew where—except Ryan. He never told me in what disreputable way he got the information. But it seems the schooner had been wrecked in a gale, driven high on the beach, and all hands drowned.

"Ryan's idea was to find that lost gold.

"A more experienced man would have hesitated. The story was a wild tale—even for those wild days. I swallowed it readily enough. We got what outfit we could and loaded our whaleboat. We had a general idea where the schooner had been beached—a very general one! We followed that wild-goose chase three months, cruising, combing the beaches, tracing every inlet and channel of all this passage. Then Ryan sickened and died—exposure and rotten grub did that. When I laid him in the ground I was scared—scared stiff. In all the world I'll bet there never was a lonelier, worse scared young cub than I was. Not in all the world—"

Dean had forgotten his audience, absorbed in that memory. Marta's soft exclamation of pity recalled him. He read the message in her eyes—read it, and smiled back gratefully.

"Thanks—it's decent of you, feeling that way.

"Yet I kept on looking. Maybe at first because I was so much afraid to go back as I was to keep on. Later, because I was still crazy about the girl, and bound to have my fortune.

"I found it, just where it is now. I wonder if you can imagine how I felt, Miss Kree, coming on it that way? I can't try to tell you—"

Dean sighed. "A man's only young and like that once!"

He walked to the window and stared out, his hands clasped behind his back. Marta Kree's eyes followed him, watching him with a warm sympathy. He began again suddenly, as if anxious to get the story over.

"I found it, all by myself. I did what I set out to do. In the months of trying and starving and fighting for it, I had grown into something more nearly fitting my age. It was a great day for me. The stuff was fairly mine. The gang that had looted it was careful to throw away all pokes and sacks, all trace of ownership. It was poured into that box, as you saw it just now, mixed inextricably, all identity lost. No sane man could ever hope to separate it again—restore it. Oh, that was a great day for me!

"I went back to Skagway with it, a conqueror returning in triumph—a bridegroom coming to claim his bride—and there I got the news out of an old newspaper the purser of the Humboldt handed me. The girl had been married six months."

There was a long silence then. Finally, Dean laughed, tolerantly, good-humored.

Marta started, unable to credit her ears.

"Oh, I outlived all that bitterness, years back," he explained. "But I never forgot my lesson. I brought that damned stuff back here again and put it away safe—in there. It won't cost any more lives, or any more unhappiness if I can help it. Living here, thinking about it all through the years, I've learned some things I'd never have found anywhere else. I've learned the secret of content—and that's worth all the gold that ever came out of the earth. That stuff in there—it's dirt, trash, rubbish. I can't eat it; I can't make anything of it; I don't need it nor want it. But it's mine, Miss Kree. I earned it, earned the right to do what I please with it. And I please to keep it where it will do no more harm.

It has cost enough blood and sweat and anguish. I shall see that it does no more mischief. Do you understand now why I ask you to keep my secret?"

Marta nodded slowly. "But I'm not sure that you—you are right—I'm not certain—"

"But I am sane. You don't doubt that?"

"No, I don't doubt that."

"And I have the right to think as I please?"

"There's no harm in what you think. Only—"

"Well?"

"Are you sure it is best for you—to think that way? Are you sure you are happy?"

"Dead sure." Dean smiled.

"I do understand, Mr. Dean." She rose and came close to him. He was surprised, touched, to find her hands in his. In her glance he read a wealth of sympathy that was more startling than any event in his adventurous, lonely life. Marta's lips opened, but she did not speak. The siren of a steam vessel cut speech short.

"The yacht," said Dean. "She's been in sight the last quarter hour. Awkward if she'd come sooner, eh?"

With a cry Marta was out of the door and running toward the beach. Dean followed her more slowly. He remembered then, she had given him no promise of secrecy. But he did not feel the lack of her spoken word. A secret was safe with such a woman, surely.

CHAPTER V.

BURCHARD.

THE yacht was a smart vessel, large enough for comfort, but not overwhelmingly important in that wide scope of sand and sea and sky, with rugged islands hazily silhouetted in the drizzle that filled the air. She was painted white, with a buff stack. As her speed slackened to a drift a tender dropped into the water with trained alacrity and Dean could see men entering it.

Marta Kree had gone to the water's edge. She was waving her handkerchief, and somebody from the tender waved back at her. Dean had no difficulty in identifying the man as Burchard, her late employer, the fellow she was going to marry.

He had but a vague notion of Burchard from Marta's references. He did not believe he cared for closer acquaintance. Marta seemed to consider her future husband in a rather impersonal light. If she had enthusiasms for him she concealed them well.

But Dean was more concerned just then with the profanation of his solitude. He resented the yacht and the men who would soon walk on his beach, staring about them, asking questions, sowing the seeds of he knew not what complications.

He did not wish to speak with any of them—nor see them. Yet he felt he must meet them. He could not very well sulk in solitude. But he lingered in the background, uneasy.

The white-painted tender was rowed in briskly. He heard the preliminary exchange of greetings across the water; saw some one—Burchard again, of course—leap overside and splash through shallow water to seize Marta Kree's hands. Her figure melted into his, and Dean looked away, liking Burchard all the less for his easy familiarity with the woman.

Three other men climbed from the boat, and stood staring. Sighing at the necessity, Dean advanced slowly. Marta was calling him by name.

"George," she said to the tall fellow close beside her, "this is Mr. Dean, who has been a very kind, considerate host to me while I waited. Mr. Dean, Mr. Burchard."

There was no ignoring Burchard's briskly extended hand nor its hearty pressure.

"Dean, I am indebted to you. I surely am. Mighty good of you to help us out, mighty good."

Burchard's voice was pleasant. Though he spoke alertly there was a trace of drawl, a suggestion of cultured ease and just a little condescension that Dean did not like a bit.

"The pleasure was unexpected," he was replying, "but a pleasure, just the same."

Then they took stock of each other.

Dean found Burchard his equal in height, a little slighter in build and a little softer in condition, but well set up. His dress suggested the sportsman; a Norfolk jacket of

rough tweed, knickerbockers, high Cordovan leather boots, a silk shirt with a soft linen collar and a gay cravat; a soft cloth hat.

He might have been anywhere between thirty-five and forty-five, dark-skinned, with shrewd, dark eyes, and a very brief dark mustache. Well-defined brows slanting upward at their outer corners gave him an inquiring look. He had a firm, square chin, but Dean disliked his mouth—too full lips, and a little slack.

Then he became aware of another man, standing near by, apart from the pair who had rowed, and evidently by his uniform coat and cap of a different social rank. He was a squat figure, short, and inclined to a paunch, but broad of shoulder and deep of chest. His eyes were a frosty blue, very much interested in everything.

As for his face and general appearance, it gave Dean an inclination to smile—Napoleon the First all over again, a little less imposing, a little less spruce, considerably older than his portraits. Napoleon slightly gone to seed—that expressed the man whom Burchard introduced as Captain Blye, sailing master of the Falcon. He greeted Dean in a sharp, Yankee twang.

"Been delayed by fog and trouble in the engine-room," Burchard was explaining. "Cylinder head leaking, so Blye tells me. We'll get away this afternoon, eh, captain? They'll have it repacked."

"Ought to," said Blye.

"That's important, you know, Blye. Don't want to linger around here."

"Know it."

"Got all the help they need in the engine-room? You're rushing the job?"

"Am."

"As if Captain Blye was anything but efficiency plus!" Marta exclaimed, with a smile for the sailing master.

"Thanks."

Dean could not help but smile. Blye's brief replies popped out without a twitch of facial muscles. He was a wooden Indian—except for his busy eyes of frosty blue.

The little group lingered uncertainly. "I have a steamer trunk at Mr. Dean's," said Marta. "One of the man can manage it easily—"

"Harry!" Blye beckoned a man from the tender. "Now, Miss?"

"If you don't mind," said Marta, "I'd like Mr. Burchard to see how comfortably I've passed the waiting. Won't you invite us in, Mr. Dean?"

"Certainly," Dean agreed. He wished they were all far out at sea and forgotten.

Burchard's eyes widened at the comfortable interior of the cabin, and he spoke with enthusiastic approval. Marta was a voluble guide, extolling the pleasant convenience of Dean's home. Dean followed, smiling politely and feeling rather in the way. Blye's eyes were prying everywhere, but he said nothing.

"You've done yourself well—very well, indeed," Burchard declared heartily. "Ranching, I suppose?"

"No. Except what I need for the table—"

"Prospecting?"

"No."

"Ah. Sportsman, perhaps?"

Dean started to shake his head.

"Mr. Dean enjoys living in solitude," Marta explained. "Do you blame him, George? Such a pleasant life, no worries, no business cares, no neighbors to annoy!"

"Gad, I can agree with you, Dean! Most of us are too damn busy doing things that don't count. Got some nice things here, that Navaho rug on the wall, for instance. Wouldn't consider selling that, I suppose?"

"No."

Burchard passed his hand across the rug, exclaimed its weave with the air of a connoisseur. "A good one," he announced. "I used to know a little about them, in an amateurish way."

Dean, watching Burchard, was conscious of Marta's sharp glance on them both.

"Look, George," she exclaimed suddenly, "this is Fang. Isn't he a dear!"

The Airedale submitted to her caress with a gentleman's composure. Burchard he recognized with an inquisitive sniff, but moved quickly from under his hand. At Blye he lifted a black lip, disclosing ugly, white teeth.

"He's not accustomed to people," Dean apologised. "Fang! Outside!"

"Well," said Burchard, suggestively, "this has been a pleasure, Dean. Given me some good ideas for a place of my own I hope to build some day along the Maine coast. Now—"

"Yes, I suppose we'd better go," Marta agreed.

"Harry," Blye snapped, "a hand with this box—"

"Wait a bit, captain. That's the wrong one." Dean intercepted Blye, who had in his arms a leather trunk of curious design, and would have walked off with it.

"Why, no, Captain Blye!" Marta laughed. "Did you think that was mine? Mine's this new one, just plain wood and tin. I never owned such a quaint and lovely thing as that in my life—"

"Guessed wrong," said Blye, his face wooden. "This one, Harry."

"They don't make them like that these days," Burchard commented, examining the leather trunk.

"Not in the last century, I suppose," Dean agreed. "That's traveled a lot, but it won't wear out in my lifetime—"

"Yes, a real antique. Handsomely carved, too. Heirloom?"

"No, just a find. Picked it up."

At the door Marta and Burchard paused. Marta extended her hand. "I have so much to thank you for," she said earnestly. "Words are not much use—they don't seem to say all that I mean; all that I feel. You have been kind—more than kind—you see, I don't know how to say it! But—" She pressed his hand warmly, and her eyes met his in a long look: "I think we shall always be friends—very good friends—"

"A—pleasure," Dean said flatly. "That is—I mean, you have given me so much more than I could offer. Thank you, and good-by."

Burchard added his own gratitude, then. Again Dean shook his hand, and liked him no better.

They turned away, Marta looking back with a farewell smile and a wave of the hand. Dean remembered he had forgotten congratulations on their coming marriage. He had forgotten all about it.

He turned within doors. He sought a pipe and began to fill it. In the middle of that simple act he paused, looking about the cabin in reverie. It seemed very empty.

Truth was, it had been a very exciting morning. After the long years of solitude, accustomed as he was to the even flow of time, finding his pleasure and interest in microscopic attention to impersonal matters, these last few hours had fled with a dazzle of action that left him bewildered. They had brought an emotional strain, wakening long, quiet memories, that tired him.

He felt that he would need many days and weeks to digest the history of this short time. He was glad to be alone, able to think again—yet for the first time he felt the absence of human companionship.

The cabin did look empty!

Such a little time ago Marta Kree had sat opposite him at that table, telling her unusual story. From that chair she had watched him when he returned her confidence with his own history. Now she had gone and left no trace, except some wild flowers in a bowl. Yet there was a trace, too, like a vague perfume. Keenly sensitive by long solitude, he could still feel her personality in the empty room.

The yacht was still in the bay. He might yet be in time to catch a last glimpse of her, but he did not care for that. He did not wish her back. He welcomed the return of solitude and the chance it gave him to review his new gallery of portraits, and catalogue them after due analysis.

From the day's encounters how many new threads the fates would have to spin! When people met it was always so. Thoughts were born, impulses created, and no man could tell where their influence would stop. What new pattern would come of it all?

Finally, from habit, he tapped his pipe bowl as one frees it of ash, and smiled to discover he had not yet filled it.

CHAPTER VI.

CAPTAIN BLYE.

MARTA, Burchard, and Captain Blye sat at lunch in the Falcon's bijou saloon. A white-coated Japanese boy, humorously christened Weejee, waited table.

"Funny chap, this Dean," Burchard observed. "Not very anxious to talk about his business, eh?"

"Why should he be?" Instinctively Marta lined herself with the defense. "He doesn't know us from Adam and Eve."

"Suppose not. Still, a little curiosity is natural enough. Didn't you feel any? Come, now, Marta!"

"A little, I suppose—"

"A little? Naturally. You don't find such a man living alone in a place like that every day. It's not as if he were a common, beach-combing hermit. Now, is it? Didn't you get any answer to it?"

"Well, he seems very contented and happy—"

"Humph!"

"And he's something of a philosopher."

"Aha!"

"I—I read some of his ideas. You see, I was alone there for three days. And, of course, I was interested—intruding that way, and wondering what sort of welcome I'd receive—"

"Plucky girl! Marta, you're a shining wonder. And here was I worrying my head off. As if I couldn't trust you to manage anybody. Well, so he's a philosopher?"

"From what he wrote I gathered he prefers to be let alone—left to live his own life. He believes that the way to avoid trouble is to avoid people."

Burchard smiled shrewdly. "It's not a bad way. Especially if one were doing something, ah— Been there quite a time, you said?"

"Really, George! If you're taking a census you might go ashore and ask him. Yes, quite a few years—"

"How many?"

So unexpected was table conversation from Captain Blye that both started. He waited an answer with his habitual wooden Indian face.

"Why—why, fifteen, I think he said."

"Thanks." Blye's attention went back to his plate. Burchard raised his eyebrows at Marta in a pantomime of humorous consternation at Blye's startling performance. Blye kept on eating, expressionless, industrious, silent.

They talked of other things until the captain folded his napkin with meticulous care and rose with a bob of the head that might have been intended as a bow and an excuse for leaving. But at the companionway he turned back suddenly.

"Burchard, see you later?"

He jerked his thumb upward, and Burchard guessed he meant the little chart house.

"Certainly," he agreed. "Within a half hour, captain."

"Now, what in the world's got into him?" Burchard wondered. "Breaking into a regular rash of conversation. Did you ever? Marta, unless my eyes are failing me, I detected distinct traces of intelligence in his face just then. I could almost say excitement."

"Maybe it's the engines," Marta suggested. Then, with sudden change of manner: "George, it's good to see you. I—I began to wonder if you would ever come—"

"Marta! My dear." Burchard shifted his seat beside hers. "I've a thousand things to say to you, Marta. Know where we're bound for?"

"How could I?"

"Honolulu first, to Honolulu for our honeymoon. Eh, Marta!"

"And we start at once?"

"What, such a hurry!"

"But, George, we oughtn't to delay here. Is it—safe?"

"No, it isn't," Burchard answered soberly. "But it's only an hour or two more. Then we sail, out to the Orient. To new adventures, new opportunities. Seriously, it can't be any too soon. Not only our marriage, my dear, but—well, the salmon thing hit me hard. I'm flat broke, Marta. Got to get busy—"

"George! Ruined—"

"Well, a thousand or so in my pocket, that's the size of it. And the yacht, of course. Never mind. Lots of new chances. Everywhere, anywhere. Money? I can always find money."

Marta sighed. "Money's rather a dreadful thing, isn't it? I wish we didn't need it. Didn't have to make more, I mean. That means somebody will have to lose what he has."

"Tut. Why worry about 'somebody'? Let him worry. We'll get along. And now, Marta, excuse me a minute. Whatever's happened to that old scoundrel Blye certainly excited him. I'll find out—and come back to you. Got a million things to say, dear—a million questions to ask."

"I'll be waiting to answer them," Marta promised.

It was several hours later when Marta opened her stateroom door to Burchard's knocking. She had been unpacking, improving her toilet, doing the hundred and one things to a wardrobe that women find to do.

"Why, we're still at anchor," she exclaimed, recalled from day dreaming by his presence.

"Unhappily, we are. May be for some little time. That confounded engine—"

"Serious, George?"

"It can be fixed. Matter of a few hours." Burchard looked to her unusually animated. His color was higher and his eyes sparkled. She wondered if he had been drinking, decided he had not, and wondered some more.

"What d'you say we go ashore and explore a bit?" he proposed. "There's such a lot to talk about. And we won't have another chance to stretch our legs on land for a long time."

Dean had stayed indoors. After laying aside his pipe as related he sank into an easy chair and remained there for long hours, Fang sleeping curled up at his feet. Dean often sat that way, especially when he had a problem to think out.

He was vaguely aware that the yacht had not yet left, but so far as he was concerned it had sailed when Marta Kree passed the door sill, looking back at him with a wave of the hand. The new pictures in his mental portrait gallery were varied and supremely interesting. The revelations he had been surprised into called up many old pictures, almost forgotten. He found life a highly interesting pattern, like a picture puzzle that was never solved. He imagined he had put the thing together finally, only to discover, so unexpectedly, all these new parts demanding their place in the scheme.

Fang's uneasy rousing warned him of visitors before he heard their steps and their knock at his door. He opened to Marta Kree and Burchard.

There was a disappointing sense of anticlimax in their reappearance. It is disconcerting to say a last good-by and meet the missing one unexpectedly an hour later. That sort of experience spoils the gilt of romance.

Marta had a fine color in her brown cheeks. She was wearing a smart, blue, tailored suit, with short skirt and high walking boots. He forgot his selfish disappointment in frank admiration of her beauty.

"Back again," she smiled. "The yacht's delayed by engine trouble. We'll be here a few hours more, and I—Mr. Burchard and I thought of a bully idea. Won't you come aboard and take dinner with us? It would be good fun!"

"Come along, Dean, like a good chap," Burchard urged, with rare cordiality. "You know we shan't have company again for a good many weeks. Eh?"

Dean's inclination to refuse, born of caution and long habit, broke under the warmth of Marta's smile. For Burchard he would have enjoyed refusing to cross even the room. But Marta was irresistible.

"Give me a quarter of an hour to freshen up, will you? I'll be delighted."

CHAPTER VII.

FANG.

MARTA slipped her hand under Dean's arm as they left the cabin and Burchard went on ahead. Dean startled at her touch.

"I'm glad I saw you again," she confessed. "I didn't feel as if I had half said good-by to you this noon. Good-byes are hard things to say, aren't they? I've been wishing all afternoon I could have another chance."

Dean was made ashamed of his reluctance in coming with them. He blushed for his dislike of Burchard; for his vague suspicions of Marta. She offered her friendship so frankly.

"Good-byes are difficult," he agreed

warmly. "They should only be written. I've had a lot to think about, myself—I began to miss you. Isn't that a fine confession for a confirmed hermit!"

"I'm glad you missed me. I'd hate to be forgotten—before even I had left!" She laughed happily.

"Among other things I forgot to give you —and Mr. Burchard—was my best wishes for your happiness together. I do wish you luck—all the luck in the world. You deserve to be very happy—"

"I think we will. George is a—decent sort. Game, too. You know, he's ruined?"

"As bad as that!"

"Yes, the salmon thing left us flat. But he doesn't mind. Nor for a minute! I never saw a man so little staggered. One would think he had an unfailing recipe for getting money. It's—almost uncanny."

Dean noticed she looked rather thoughtful.

The Falcon's tender had been rowed to the beach by two men and was waiting for them. A plume of steam drifted idly from the yacht's safety vent, and as they drew alongside they could hear voices and the clink of tools from the engine-room.

Darkness was closing in, and a boisterous little wind blowing as they went below.

Marta excused herself to dress for dinner, declaring with a happy laugh she was going to make this "a regular party." Burchard entertained his guest with a shrewd instinct for things that would interest him, and Dean found himself making a generous effort to like his host. He did not succeed very well.

It was "a regular party."

Weejee laid the board with dainty fresh linen and arranged a centerpiece of flowers Marta had brought, with much hissing through his teeth and clucks of artistic temperament. There was more silver than Dean had seen in many years, and much shining glass. Then Marta appeared again, and her appearance brought both men to their feet, staring.

From the little steamer trunk, which seemed as inexhaustible as Aladdin's lamp, she had unpacked an evening dress that laid bare her creamy shoulders and breast, and her round, smooth arms. The stuff was golden in hue and embroidered with gold thread. It made of the young woman a young goddess, and the knowledge of that heightened her color and the sparkle of her eyes—beauty feeding on its own flames.

"Oh, here, this is unfair," Burchard protested. "I should wear a dinner coat."

"Worse than unfair," Dean cried. "I haven't seen a dinner coat since I was old enough to vote."

"I don't care a bit. I told you I wanted a party—and I'm going to feel like one if I like!"

Weejee, with assistance in the galley, had built a course dinner from the Falcon's canned stuff and the supplies of the refrigerator. Dean marveled openly at the fare, and ate with relish, thinking of other dinners, long ago. Burchard's wine he refused, and the host was the only one to taste it.

When the little table was cleared again and Weejee gone, the two men smoked and the three of them talked. Dean had no notion of time. Doors of memory, long closed, were wide again. He heard of the world and all the frivolous things that had once seemed so important. With surprising lack of jarring he found himself suddenly a part of that world and talking readily and eagerly of places, events and persons thousands of miles away, and as far from his own existence as the moon from the earth. He was hungry for information, ridiculously flattered to find a common language with these two. Whether the evening was late or early he had no notion.

When Weejee came with imperturbable face and beckoned Burchard out, whispering in his ear, Dean was glad. He wanted Marta to himself.

His eyes dwelt greedily on the perfection of her young body. Her frank interest in him was a wine far more potent than any Burchard kept. He was glad to forget Burchard; glad to forget Burchard had a claim to this woman. He was glad to forget everything, contented to drift for this brief time of happiness, intoxicated by the beauty and nearness of a rare, golden girl.

It was Marta who brought him back to reality with a terrible suddenness. "Do you know," he had said, a little unsteadily, carried away by impulse, "Burchard's the

luckiest fellow alive. I—I envy him—you. God, I do envy him!"

Marta laughed musically, though her eyes were frightened. "So that's my hermit of this morning! Oh, Dean, Frazier Dean, be careful. You're slipping. The gay old world will get you yet!"

Dean's brown face whitened slowly and his eyes lost their dancing light. His mouth pressed into a grim, hard line, and he rose suddenly.

"Good-night," he said abruptly. "And —good-by!"

He turned quickly toward the companionway and disappeared without one backward glance.

Marta, sobered by his expression, frightened, stared after him blankly. Then calling his name, she rose and moved to follow him. At the door she halted, undecided. Her cheeks were burning red, and she looked close to tears.

She turned into the saloon slowly, her fingers tearing at her crumpled lace handkerchief.

Without any warning she sank down beside the table and buried her head in her arms. Her shoulders shook painfully.

Dean looked very grim as he went on deck. The color had not yet returned to his cheeks, and his eyes glowed somberly. Burchard was nowhere about, and he did not want to see him. He went directly to the rail and stared down. The tender was bobbing alongside the short Jacob's ladder, and a sailor sat in it, fending it off the yacht's painter with an oar.

Dean dropped overside as unexpected as a meteor.

Before the fellow in the boat had time to speak, Dean had cast loose the painter.

"Put me ashore," he said briefly, and his voice made the words more threat than order.

The tender moved across the half-mile of water toward the beach as if it were racing.

Once the oarsman hesitated when a hail came from the yacht. Burchard was shouting Dean's name, shouting it with a frightened emphasis.

"Keep right on," said Dean quietly, and the oars dipped again.

He sprang out on the sand, and the tender turned about, dancing back toward the yacht against the swells and the headwind. Dean walked slowly up the beach. His head drooped, and his hands were clenched, hanging limp at his side. He breathed like a man who had run a hard mile.

The cabin was very still. Flying particles of sand tapped on its panes and the wind murmured down the chimney, but these were the normal sounds, so long familiar they were forgotten. It welcomed him like a sanctuary.

In the dark he went directly to his big chair, wondering that he stumbled over so many tangled rugs and small objects foreign to the floor. He sat motionless, staring before him at the blackness, and a long time passed. Once he groaned like a man in bitter torment.

Another might have cried out against the fate that had brought all this unhappiness; or even reproached Marta Kree, who had plainly done all in her power to trap his attention and his desire. Dean accepted the fact grimly, accepting his own share of the blame; aware that his instinct had warned him against an interest in her.

Through the years he had feared but one thing—the coming of strangers. That had been a superstitious fear, the notion that the yellow metal hidden in his cabin would some day exert its strange magnetic force and draw into his life some roving adventurer who must be dealt with by violence. He had not foreseen the coming of a woman who could breathe into flame passions he had quenched—who would have the power to touch him and vanish, and by her touch waken such a longing and loneliness as he had never before known.

More terrible than he had dreamed it, Fate had stretched forth a commanding hand and brought his world of peace and contentment crashing into chaos where he wandered alone, without a light to guide him, conscious only of a great hurt.

Not even his old habit of sitting quiet while his keen mind reasoned things out and adjusted life held good now. He rose in a torment of impatience and began to move about, scarcely conscious of any intention.

That brought him back to reality with a

rough suddenness. He was aware that his feet were tangled in a rug. The oddness of it startled him into forgetfulness of the scene on the Falcon.

Alert of a sudden, keen to know the answer, he ceased to kick with his feet, and fumbled for a match.

The stick flared into light, and he held it high.

What he saw about him was confusion.

Chairs had been overturned, books strewn. The bowl of flowers that had stood on his table lay broken on the floor, the blossoms scattered. The rug lay in a heap, his Navaho rug, torn from the wall. The door it had hidden was closed, he saw that quickly.

Then by the flare he discovered another thing, a dark sprinkling on the floor and tapestry. There was a pool of it about his feet, and even before he bent to lower to make sure, he guessed what it was.

With other matches he continued the search, breathing hard.

The blood was scattered wide. A trail of it led along the floor, out of the cabin door. He followed along the beach sand and within fifteen feet of his home he came upon its source, the carcass of his dog Fang.

Fang was dead, ripped open as if by knife stabs.

Fang was dead, the cabin in a chaotic upheaval. There had been a struggle, that was plain.

Of the object of that struggle there was no shadow of uncertainty. Somebody had discovered his secret. Somebody had come to loot his treasure.

CHAPTER VIII.

SOMETHING TO FIGHT FOR.

DEAN went back into the cabin. Even in the midst of shock he found time to give a grateful tribute to Fang. The dog had laid down its life for him, protecting his secret, and the fight must have been a hard one. He realized that another sorrow had been added to his burden. Never would he forget this silent chum who had shared his loneliness.

He went directly to the hidden door, snatched it open, and peered within by the light of a match. His gold was there, undisturbed.

He got his lantern and went back to the queer chamber he had excavated from the buried hull. With the door closed to conceal the light, he sat down and began to plan.

The gold was safe for the present. No satisfaction in that. Whoever wanted it so badly would come again, with reinforcements. It puzzled him to find the treasure undisturbed. He could only explain it on the theory that Fang's slayer was a scout and had come alone. The dog had attacked him, possibly injured him so severely he was driven off. It would be almost impossible, anyway, for one man to move so heavy a package as this box of dust and nuggets.

He had little difficulty guessing who it was had fought there in the cabin against his dog. Blye, the sailing-master, had been absent from dinner. He remembered Burchard making some excuse for him. Nor had he seen Blye at all while on the Falcon. Blye was an active, powerful brute. From the first he set him down as a bad man to deal with. Probably Blye did Burchard's dirty work.

Of course, Burchard was behind it. There was no surprise about that. But what did hurt was the thought of Marta Kree doing the bidding of these dangerous gentlemen.

That hurt, and it hurt hard—a pain close to maddening him.

She had played their game!

Who but Marta could have told Burchard of the treasure? Marta herself had begged him to come aboard the Falcon for dinner—while Blye and Burchard arranged to transfer his gold, of course!

Marta deliberately had played to hold his attention while they were alone there in the saloon.

For that matter it was not improbable that the entire program had been carefully planned, beginning with Marta's first appearance in the cabin. A clever crook like Burchard would think of that.

These thoughts made him physically ill. They brought out a cold sweat on his hands

and face. He shook miserably. For Marta he felt a humiliation and a shame that scorched him.

Well, what to do? They would be back soon, knowing that he had left the Falcon and must have discovered their plans. He tried to force himself to plan the future.

But he could only think of the past, of that crowded day—and Marta Kree. The shame of it, this woman with her gift of beauty, personality, brains; this woman who might have been so lovely a thing, deliberately linked with leering double-dealing and evil!

He knew his time of waiting must be short. But he could not force coherent thought. His shocked brain wandered.

When he distinguished, by an ear uncannily alert to small and strange noises, footfalls whispering along the beach, he was still without a plan. A moment later there came a sharp rap, hurriedly repeated, against the outer door. Dean rose and, lantern in hand, came from his hiding.

He carried the lantern.

That it made him an easy target for any marksman in the dark, he realized. But he was indifferent.

If they wanted to shoot, let them. He ceased to care anything about the next moment.

As he crossed the cabin the knocking was repeated again. The windows were uncurtained and they must be able to see his light. Yet no shots came.

He pulled the door wide, holding the lantern breast high, carelessly defiant of whatever waited out there.

The light fell on the white face of Marta Kree. Nobody else was visible.

"Oh," said Dean slowly. "Well—come in?"

Marta started at the words, hesitated in silence, finally followed him into the caibn.

Dean set the lantern on the table and waited. He was aware she was staring at him, but he kept his eyes turned away. It was odd, but his was the part to feel her weight of shame.

Burchard's voice, bawling Dean's name into the night, had roused Marta to momentary attention. She was annoyed at Burchard. Of all things in life she least desired to see Frazier Dean again.

His abrupt leave-taking had wakened her to her own position. She was engaged to marry, almost as good as married, to Burchard. With a burning shame she remembered the last minutes she and Dean had been together. As utterly as Dean had done she had forgotten herself in the dangerour excitement of those few moments.

She realized now that her brief, happy quarter hour with Dean had burned a scar in memory that would never quite heal.

Angry and alarmed, she rose hurriedly and ran on deck to check Burchard's shouting.

She saw that Blye was with Burchard, argusing with him, and Burchard already had ceased to bawl Dean's name. By the light from the open chart-house door she noticed that one of Bly's hands was muffled in white bandages, and there was another fantastic bandage plastered down along his cheek and neck. Absorbed as she was in other thoughts, there was time to wonder what trouble the sailing-master was in.

"Shut up, Blye," Burchard said sharply. "Here's Marta."

They turned on her uneasily.

"George, must you behave like that?" Marta began irritably. "Dean's gone home—let him go. What's it matter if he was rude?"

"Eh? No—no, you're right, it doesn't matter, Marta. No, it doesn't matter, eh, Blye?

"You'll get pneumonia, Marta, up here in that dress," he added with a frown. "Go below—please."

"But Captain Blye? Why, you've been hurt!" Marta noticed now that Blye's face looked yellow-white. "You've been badly hurt—I'm sorry—"

"Bit me," said Blye.

"Bit you! Something bit you—"

"Dog."

"Now, now, Marta," Burchard urged. "Really—in that dress. This wind's cold. Blye's all right. Just a little accident. I'll tell you later. If you please, allow me?"

Burchard seized her by the arm. "Back in a jiffy," he added, to Blye.

"Wait."

"In a moment, Blye—"

"Idea. Got to work fast—"

"Well—all right."

Blye spoke in a low tone that Marta did not catch, but she know both men were discussing her. Burchard seemed to object, then to reconsider.

Marta took matters in her own hand. "George, what is it? Something's happened. I've a right to know, I think—"

"Now, Marta, later—"

From Blye: "Better do it."

Burchard hesitated, uneasy.

"She can fix him," Blye prompted.

"George, you must tell me—"

"All right," Burchard decided suddenly. "Come into the chart-house, out of this wind. Come on, Blye."

"Make it short," Blye insisted, when they were sheltered from the wind. "Losing too much time. He'll get away."

"Look here, Marta," Burchard began. "You know all my business. I always trust you—"

"Of course, George!"

"You know I'm flat broke. Wiped out? Well, there's a fortune for us right there on that beach. We're going to get it. This fellow Dean—know what he's got?"

"How should I?"

"A boxful of dust and nuggets, that's all!"

"I don't believe it," Marta's denial was instinctive, born of a desire to shield Dean. She knew it was futile before the words left her lips.

"I do," Burchard nodded vigorously. "*Blye found it.* A fortune in gold-dust!"

Blye nodded confirmation, his hand caressing his bandaged neck.

His lips formed the word: "Dog."

"Well, what of it, then? It's his, I suppose?"

"No more than ours, if we can get it. And we're going to get it—"

"Robbery! I had a notion you were a gentleman!"

"Robbery nothing. Treasure hunt, that's all. It's not Dean's, you know. Stolen. Looted out of a wreck. Anybody's that gets his hands on it. Plain business, that's all. I knew there was something funny about that fellow; and Blye—Blye got the real clue and worked it out. Fifty-fifty between us. Blye did the detective work."

Blye explained at unusual length. "Leather trunk. Calls it a—what's-its-name—heirloom. Heirloom my eye. *That's my trunk.* Had it, man and boy. Loaned it to man, back in—yes, 1901. He was in on scheme to grab this stuff, see? So was I. I missed meeting gang. Klondike days, travel hard. Got left. Friend sailed with gang. Trunk must come from wreck. When I found trunk again I *smelled a rat.* Gang got lost. Gold lost."

"You see?" Burchard nodded triumphantly. "Plain treasure hunt." His face darkened. "Now, there's the devil to pay. If you hadn't let that damned Dean get ashore—"

"I let him?"

"Never mind that. He's ashore. We've got to work quick, and, Marta, we don't want to hurt *anybody,* d'you understand? No violence—"

"May have to," Blye added darkly.

Marta's face paled. She felt herself trembling. But she gave Burchard a scornful glance that stung him to justification.

"Nonsense, my dear girl. I'm no thug, regardless of what you say. You, yourself, have laughed over deals a whole lot worse than this, if you stop to reason them out that way. But we haven't all night to argue. Bly went ashore to locate the stuff while Dean was here at dinner. He found it—but he also found that damned dog of Dean's. Otherwise the stuff would be aboard, we'd be at sea—the engines are all right, that was just a blind—and you and I wouldn't need to worry about money any longer. Now, Dean's slipped ashore. He'll find by the looks of the cabin what we're up to, and we must work fast. *We don't want to hurt Dean.* Get that straight. If you don't want to see Dean hurt you will help us—"

"Oh! I'll help?"

"If you feel any obligation to Dean—and you seem to—you'll help. Blye and I are going ashore with a couple of men from the crew—men we can depend on. There will be plenty of us to handle Dean. If you want to prevent a fight—bloodshed—go

with us. Dean knows you. Go to his cabin alone. Tell him we just discovered that somebody in the crew tried to rob his place. Make it plausible enough to hold his attention; long enough to give us time to get into the cabin and overpower him. Understand?"

"I—think—I do." Marta said it slowly, staring curiously at Burchard.

"Well, don't look that way about it! It's nothing so bad. Easy to do—"

"Kid's job," said Blye.

"And, mind you, you're saving Dean's life for him. Now you understand it all. Time's short. Get your men, Blye."

Blye left hurriedly.

"Good girl, Marta!" Burchard applauded, laying his hand on her bare arm. "Good old sport. You always stood by me—thick and thin—eh?"

"That's so—I always have." Marta seemed to consider this in the light of a *discovery*.

"All right. Get a cloak. And quickly, dear."

Between Dean and Marta the silence had drawn out miserably. It was Dean who spoke at last. "Your friends out there?" he suggested. "Aren't they coming in?"

"My friends! Why I—they—"

"Yes. Let's have 'em all in?"

"Oh!" She exclaimed it tearfully. "Oh, you—don't you understand?"

"Why, I think so. Let's ask—"

"No, no! Dean! They are out there, Blye, Burchard, three others. Armed men. They're—dangerous—desperate. They are coming here to—to rob you, Dean!"

"Why, yes, of course. So they are." Dean spoke without emotion. "So they are," he repeated. "That's plain enough. Well, let's have them in—"

"Dean, they are coming here to steal the gold—your gold! They mean—violence. I warn you. That's why I came, to warn you—"

"Yes, yes. Very kind of you. Yes, I understand, Miss Kree. Burchard needs the money—of course. Heard about my little cache, and wants it. Admirably simple and—businesslike. Call him in—"

"I tell you they are too many for us!" Marta seized Dean's arm and shook it vigorously. She had a terrible fear that Dean was not quite sane. "They'll kill you—"

"Oh, no. No, they won't do that—"

"But they will! Dean, listen—"

"I know what you are trying to tell me. Certainly. But there won't be any fighting, Miss Kree. I give you my word. No violence. Call them in. Burchard is welcome to the gold."

Dean spoke gently. He paid no attention to the stare of horrified surprise that answered his declaration. Fumbling a little for the proper words, he went on with a paternal kindliness:

"Yes, he can have it. I don't want it. Never did. Foolish thing, trying to keep it cooped up like that. But, you understand, I was trying to protect others from it. I—I didn't realize it couldn't be done. The devil is in it—and you can't keep the devil quiet, can you? In a way I'll be glad to see it go—and it may do some good. Who knows? Burchard needs it, you say—and I think Burchard might make you—very happy. There are good points to Burchard—lots of them. Give him enough money, and you'll both—" He completed the sentence with a vague gesture, like a benediction.

Marta understood him now. His acceptance of the situation—a false situation of his own deduction—overwhelmed her. At another time she would have cried. But now there was something more pressing to be done. She seized his wrist in a grip that hurt. She pulled Dean closer to her, where she could force him to meet her gaze. Her black eyes stared up into his.

"You think I want that gold!"

"Well—" Dean shrugged.

"You think I'm with Burchard—in—this?"

"You're going to marry him."

"*You think I—told—Burchard!*"

Dean hesitated a fraction of a second. Then he nodded soberly.

"Oh—you cad!"

Dean kept silence.

Marta's voice was husky with anger. "You apologize," she whispered. "Take that back. You heard me, Dean. You—will apologize to me—now!"

Over Dean's face there came a gradual change. His eyes slowly lighted. In his heart little embers of hope began to glow. There was no denying her imperious look. His lips opened, and he spoke hoarsely: "I —I apologise. I—I do not believe—that, Marta!"

She swept on breathlessly, still clutching his wrist, trembling in her eagerness:

"And I'm not with Burchard. You understand? My eyes are open to Burchard. I saw him to-night—for the first time—as he really is. I—had hoped for Burchard. I had hoped to respect him—and love him. I can never do that now—never in all eternity. I want you to understand that, too, Frazier Dean."

"Marta!"

"No. No matter what happens, I'm done with him. And, Dean—if you let Burchard take your gold—"

"*Let him!*" Dean's voice rose in a volume that was startling contrasted to his deadly monotone of the past few minutes. "Let him take it!" He laughed suddenly and with a savage exultation.

"Before Burchard gets anything of mine he's going to have the fight of his life—he and Blye and all of them. He'll get it over my dead body. I'm going to fight!"

"Splendid!"

"Yes, splendid. The world's splendid. Life is splendid. To fight is splendid—for I have something to fight for!"

"And somebody to fight beside you," Marta added joyfully.

CHAPTER IX.

SPLENDID LIVING.

"AND somebody to fight beside you," Marta had said.

Dean answered with a hasty frown. "Here, that won't do—that sort of thing. This—well, it isn't going to be a—lady's fight, you know—"

"I'm no lady," Marta smiled whimsically, her brilliant gaze on Dean's face. "I'm just a woman, Dean—quite capable of throwing things, when I'm angry. And—I want to fight—beside you."

"Can't be done. Not here—this time. Now, you sneak out of here, off into the dark—"

"Dean!"

"Keep away until—well, until you see how things are going—"

Marta shook her head.

"You think I'd do that? Leave you—one against five! A fine opinion—"

"My dear—young lady!" Dean seized her firmly by the arm. "Come, now," he said soothingly. "Why—why you're not *dressed* for fighting. A low-cut gown, silk slippers. Come—"

But Marta struggled angrily. There were tears in her eyes, tears of anger and vexation. "You—dare to make fun of me—" she began.

"Dean!"

Burchard stood in the doorway. He held a pistol leveled at Dean. Behind him, dimly visible, were three other men, the men Blye had chosen from his crew—men he could trust.

Dean whirled about, then stood very still, on his face a queer look of mingled embarrassment and surprise. "Oh—hello, Burchard!"

Burchard permitted himself just a shadow of a smile. Dean did seem a little ridiculous, turned to stone by the nose of a pistol.

"Sorry," said Burchard briefly. "Don't you think you'd better put your hands up?"

"Seems a bit melodramatic, but—"

Dean raised his arms slowly until they stretched high above his head.

"That's safer," Burchard nodded. "I suppose you know why we're here?"

"Why, yes—I suppose so—"

"We'll get it over as quickly—and painlessly as possible. Sorry to make all this fuss about it, but you will have to keep your hands in the air—and I warn you I'm a good shot and not in the least afraid to shoot, if I have to."

Burchard moved in slowly from the door, the pistol trained steadily on its mark.

Dean's face had not lost its queer mingling of shamefaced surprise. Marta watched the two men, aghast. The fear that Dean was a physical coward flooded her mind, and her cheeks turned alternately red and white.

Burchard advanced, looking well pleased.

And Dean, without the slightest change of expression, launched himself, head low, squarely at him.

Dean went into action with one swift, complete movement, like a trained acrobat diving from a springboard. He met Burchard head on, with a force of a battering ram, and Burchard went down with a crash.

The pistol exploded with Burchard's fall, making a terrifying roar in the cabin.

Burchard and Dean were locked in a desperate embrace. The floor shook beneath the impact of their bodies. A thud told of one skull meeting the planks.

They rolled over and over, shoes hammering, crashing into furniture, panting, grunting, snarling like a pair of dogs.

Through the window leaped a bulky figure—Blye. Grotesquely bandaged, stooped low, and moving with the quick grace of a cat, the sailing-master made a strange, murderous picture. He dodged about the fighters, a knife in his hand.

And the three who had hesitated in the doorway at this moment lunged in together.

All this Marta had seen happen with a clarity and detail that made time stand still. Probably less than a minute had passed. Then she saw no more.

Without any notion how it happened she found a chair swinging in her raised hands. The wrap slipped from her, laying bare her soft, white shoulders, and rounded arms.

The heavy chair flew crashing into the faces of the three sailors. Her hands snatched up a solid wooden stool. The hard wood, sharp-cornered, met Blye's skull with a soft, sickening *tunk!*

Blye gasped and crumpled up.

The flying chair had gone low, tangling the three sailors in a cursing knot.

They were up again, fast enough. One heavy boot sent the chair crashing into the wall. Another leaped his struggling comrade. Then they hesitated, facing a woman, at a disadvantage before her sex.

"Get that girl. Grab her. Damn you all, *do* something!" Burchard had Dean flat. He panted commands over his shoulder at the staring three.

A tow-haired fellow with a great, drooping blond mustache took him seriously. He charged Marta.

The wooden stool caught him on the arm and his loud bellow told his hurt. He struggled back through his charging companion, holding his arm with the uninjured hand, mouth hanging open foolishly, rocking on his flat feet.

The stool rose again, describing an arc of death before the girl. Two men were dodging busily, bombarding each other with orders to "*Mix in—rush her!*"

Burchard had two strong hands about Dean's throat and Dean ceased to struggle with a terrible suddenness. He went limp. Burchard hesitated, shifted his knee tentatively. Dean might have been dead.

Burchard turned his head to watch the other fight, relaxing his body, shifting his weight.

The man beneath him doubled like a steel spring, rose, and sent him off his balance. He collided with the solid wall and the shock sent a dozen loose objects crashing down from the shelf under the eaves. Before Burchard knew it Dean grappled him about the waist and swung him from his feet.

Dean rose to his full height, heaving Burchard upward in his arms. Dean's face was discolored and bleeding freely. His teeth were bared and the gray eyes burned like red coals. He was a magnificent figure of battle in that lurid moment, his legs braced, swinging Burchard wide, ready to hurl him bodily.

Nor was Marta in the least ladylike now.

The straps of her corsage had broken and one shoulder and side lay bare to the waist. Her black hair flew in disorder, and her mouth was a thin, murderous line. Her eyes, dilated abnormally, held a catlike glare.

"Dean!"

Her scream made Dean hesitate for the flicker of an eyelash. Something shining whispered across the room and pinned Dean's arm against the plank wall.

Blye was on his knees, crouched against the heavy table, his arm stretched straight, fingers extended as they had released the singing knife, the frosty blue eyes shining like twin diamonds and his jaw and mouth twisted askew.

Dean cut short Blye's triumphant: "Hah!" He twitched his arm free of the

planking, sending the knife tinkling to the floor. The half-conscious burden of his arms he sent crashing into Blye's face.

Their two bodies entangled with a terrible clatter, and the table behind them went over, taking the lantern with it. A feeble sputter of flame, one brilliant flash of exploding kerosene—then blackness.

In the darkness a thud of fists on flesh, the drumming of heavy shoes; labored breathing, a curse, and then a shrill scream of pain, inhuman and unearthly.

"Marta!" Dean was close beside her, gasping for air.

"Splendid!" she panted in answer.

"Not hurt?"—

"Not a bit. You?"

"Safe — and happy. This is — living. Living, eh? But I thought you screamed—"

"The man with the broken arm. All out now—I—think—"

All but Blye. The sailing-master was a fighting marvel. Whatever his age—and Blye had seen more than the normal lifetime and ungodly wickedness—he fought as well as three men in the first years of daredevil youth.

Guided by Dean's voice, Blye launched a killing blow in the dark. His granite fist caught Dean's shoulder, and Dean swayed. Then he was gone from Marta's side and she heard the two of them at it, striking, leaping, dodging. At last they seemed to collide fair and locked arms and legs.

A stack of dishes went down with a crash. A book-case fell. Something wooden broke asunder with a great snapping, but the struggle went on interrupted.

Marta, hearing all, seeing nothing, huddled in the dark. Most awful of all was the coming of silence, broken once by a groan, then complete. She tried to force her dry lips to speak Dean's name, but she could not even whisper.

She wished she could pray—or even scream.

Then, when she had lived beyond the mortal span, a voice, a bit breathless, but calm, almost ruminative: "Now, where did —I—put those—matches? Got to have—light."

"Oh, Dean, Dean!"

"Yes, all right—I—guess. Arm bleeding—feeling rather foolish. Think you can find—lamp?"

She stumbled hastily toward Dean's kitchen, shuddering aside as the toe of her slipper touched a man's hand, lying limp underfoot. Her own hands were almost useless to her, they shook so. It was a marvel she ever got the wick to burn. But she held the lamp high at last and in the midst of chaos, the only upright, normal thing in that wreck of a room, its rays found Dean.

She went straight to Dean, clinging to him and burying her face against his shoulder. The hand that held the smoking lamp swept it in erratic circles until Dean gently relieved her of it and finally found a place to set it safely.

"I think," said Dean, surveying his home, "we'd better — clean house — again. This carrion—"

He touched the limp Burchard with the toe of his boot. Burchard stirred faintly. Struck by a new thought, Dean hastened to Blye and passed an anxious hand over the sailing-master's heart. Blye had crumpled into a corner, half erect, like a very limp sack of meal. For a moment Dean's face looked haggard—then he smiled, a rather crooked smile, for one eye was swelling badly.

"Glad he's—all right. I'd hate to—kill —anybody. Wait! Got an idea." He started for the door, Marta following anxiously.

"You out there," Dean shouted. "I see you, and I've got a gun on you. Come back here, *pronto*. Yes, I mean business."

Three battered, bruised, and uneasy sailors came from the shadows at his call.

"Take these two aboard the Falcon," Dean directed. "You, with the hurt arm, I'll excuse you. Go to the tender and wait."

The men obeyed him with a clumsy alacrity. They turned scared eyes on his bloody face and the pistol he had produced from its holster. They were even more afraid of the white-faced girl, busily pining up a tattered, golden evening gown and trying to right the disorder of her hair.

When Blye and Burchard had been lugged away, Dean laughed quietly. "I'm paid in full for fifteen years' idleness," he said. "Yes, and I've had enough for fif-

teen years to come. Now, we're going to travel—"

"But your arm!"

"Nothing serious, just in the flesh. Let you bandage it if you don't mind. Then we'd better get busy. You'll have to come with me, you know. Naturally."

Marta asked no questions; no whys nor whithers.

She bandaged Dean's arm and began to help him with his brief preparations. A bit at a time she helped him transfer his cache of dust and nuggets to the whaleboat. When he stooped his shoulder to launch it, she lent her own efforts, working close beside him. Muffled in the wrap he gave her, she scrambled in and sat strangely quiet and acquiescent when finally the able craft went dancing into the blackness.

CHAPTER X.

RESURRECTION DAY.

IN the darkness, Marta close beside him as he steered, Dean laughed softly.

"A day!" he exclaimed, wondering. "Just a day since I came home and found you. Funny thing, how long a day can be—longer than fifteen years. I have lived to-day!"

"Yes, Dean."

"I don't think—as I see it now—that I did live before. Not for fifteen years. I think I was—a little—afraid of living. Afraid to take a chance. You know, Marta Kree, that's the greatest mistake, a man's biggest folly—to fear living. It's the greatest adventure in the world—life is. If we face it, with a grin—and ready to risk its hazards we get all the joy there is in the world. We may get licked—but we have lived—"

"Yes, Dean."

He went on slowly, engrossed in his discoveries. "I—well, I've been dead. Dead a long time. Fifteen years. And I was born again, twenty-four hours ago—like—like a resurrection. I'm glad of that—glad to be alive—a part of the world. I don't know just how to make it plain—"

"But it is plain!" Marta stirred energetically. "I know what you mean, because—well, I was born again—to-day. I think something happened to me—as well as to you.

"You see, I tried to think it out, too. Marriage to Burchard, considered in that impersonal way, looked like the safest, surest move. Comfort, excitement, moving about, and yet the promise of somebody else to do the worrying for me—somebody to pay the bills and take the kicks. I reasoned it out—and now I know you can't always reason out a lifetime—you can't plan it—that way—"

Marta said no more, and Dean steered on through the dark, curiously happy and yet curiously frightened by her nearness. Sometimes he almost dared to hope—and again was convinced of the futility of such hope.

Dean roused Marta to a cold, drizzling morning. They seemed alone on a gray sea until his arm pointed to a distant blur of smoke and the tiny form of a white hull.

"Passenger boat, bound for Seattle," Dean explained. "We're in their track. They'll pick us up within an hour. Then—"

Marta's hands were clasped tightly before her, and she seemed to be waiting.

"Oh, yes," Dean seemed reminded of something. "That gold, there. I want—that is, I intend you shall have it. All of it—I meant it for you. Only reason I stayed to fight. It's all right, isn't it?"

"If you feel that way about it. After all, it's only—gold. But, Dean, there's more than that to settle between us—"

"Eh?"

"There's more than that you'll have to give me. Do as you please with the gold. But give me, Dean, can't you see, I want—"

"Oh!" said Dean, staggered by his discovery. "Marta, do you care—for me—that way? The way that I—love you!"

The first officer of the Queen, who had been watching the whaleboat through the glass, turned, puzzled, to the captain.

"Damned if I can make it out," he growled. "Damned if I can! He's showing a signal, all right; wants us to stop. But it looks to me more like a damn honeymoon than a shipwreck!"

(The End.)

The Butt of Neptune's Jest

by George Mariano

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

A STRAIN of inherited weakness in his nature, otherwise courageous physically, resulted in Mate Dan Corwin's sinking of the steamer Castonia on Death Reef. Assured by Captain Davids that he was forever barred from the bridge of any ship, Dan, seeking nepenthe in the South American town of Ancud, was bilked of almost all his wages by a woman called Panama Liz, finally, however, accepting a berth as master of the Ciudad de Lima, from his old friend, Blake. But, once on the bridge, the old indecision gripped him; in a fog they narrowly missed a schooner, from which bellowed the hoarse voice of Davids in a raucous sneer at Dan's bad seamanship.

Crushed, he gave over the command of the vessel, and from that moment went down and down, becoming finally a beachcomber at Limanau, where, however, the sight of a girl and the sound of her voice as she reproved her recreant fiancé brought him up with a round turn. She had called the man a "quitter" because he was giving up his berth as mate aboard the City of Altoona, her father's ship. Then, miraculously, Dan found himself offered a billet as mate by Captain Hope, and going aboard, was thunderstruck to meet again—Panama Liz, this time masquerading under the *alias* of "Mrs. Bartington."

What would the skipper's daughter think of him! But that night, after she had told him of the trouble her father had had with his mates, when her own words disabused his mind of any suspicion that she connected him in any disreputable fashion with the woman, the skipper was rowed out to the ship—drunk.

"Ahoy—daddy!" called the girl, and laughed in eager anticipation.

The joyous mood dispelled completely whatever doubts his own better information had aroused as to her perfect truthfulness as she had talked about the skipper's strange demeanor. She did not know—and he could not keep her from finding out.

CHAPTER XI (Continued).

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

"THE fool!" Dan raged inwardly, as he thought of that last drink he had just seen taken. "The wretched, damned fool!" He would have rejoiced greatly at an opportunity to get the captain into some quiet, roomy place and give him fistic treatment for what ailed him.

"Daddy! Ahoy!" the girl now teased for a response, peering down at the dim outline of the boat in the shadow, as it swung alongside the grated platform at the ladder's bottom.

And then she got her response. The captain had given no order for the shipping of the oars, but he now spoke a quick word about something to the sailors. Dan was surprised that he could speak at all. He was due for another surprise—

"Why—Marion—is that you?" The reply to her hail was a trifle belated. But, if it had any of drunken thickness in its tone, Dan could not perceive it, for all his ears were ready for nothing else.

The girl started to run down the two flights of steps to the deck. Dan followed. He had not been a sailor for these years without getting acquainted with the various phases of alcoholism. The steady voice of the captain had hardly relieved him much. Those who kept their voices usually were the ones to lose their legs.

This story began in The Argosy for April 3.

The girl got down and across to the head of the ladder—ran out on its top platform. Dan could not bring himself to show that he saw what he was sure she would not see. He stood back on the deck.

Again the captain's voice reached him, as he talked with his daughter, from somewhere up the steps of the ladder.

"You naughty little girl. It's nearly six bells. I ought to punish you severely." He was teasing as he came.

How could the man do it? Had Dan been right at all about the swaying, limp thing he had thought he saw in the stern of the boat? He waited for the rest, fascinated with almost incredulous astonishment.

"I stayed up to see that no wicked robbers killed my daddy on the way back to his ship," the girl pleaded in the same make-believe naughty-child part she had been playing with Dan.

"I oughtn't to give you this," still scolded her father, playfully. "But I guess there isn't so much of it but that its lacks will punish you. If you'd gone to bed like a good girl, it might have been a pearl necklace."

He had got to the top of the ladder. He could stand. He dared to trust his fingers with the string and wrappings of a tiny package. He held up such a string of beads as Indians make the western world over.

"The only thing I could find. I was awfully busy, anyhow," he apologized. For the first time, Dan thought he detected a little wavering of the voice. The skipper's hand reached the rail and held it to steady him.

"They're lovely," the daughter assured her fond parent.

"Oh, but I'm tired," the captain murmured. And Dan's fears arose again, lest this apparently enormous effort at self-control should break before it had been carried through.

"Oh, good evening, Mr.—" The skipper had just caught sight of Dan. That young seaman was glad the greeting called on him for his name. He was in the condition of one who has just discovered that a ghost is only a bit of white cloth on a tree, after calling on all his reserve will to get past the ghost. He could hardly have made any answer demanding more thought than the remembering of his own name.

"Corwin, sir," he stammered.

"Ah, yes—Cor-bin—" The man *was* drunk. He was on the verge of collapse from his tremendous will-strain to keep back the fog of brain and nerve and muscle. Conscious that he was betraying himself, he flashed a quick glance at the girl, and met a trace of sudden suspicion in her eyes. He seemed to stiffen again—

"I hope, Mr. Corson, you're finding the ship—quite comfortable," he said without quite enough effort to show to one less suspicious than Dan.

"Yes, sir—quite," Dan replied, with really more effort at naturalness than the captain was making.

"I—I wonder if you'd be good enough to make—the round of the deck for the night—I—I've had a rather hard day, and —these hot—places—are very trying. You may report, if you see anything—that needs my attention."

Captain Hope had not done that so well. His daughter was showing again her traces of alarm.

"You're not well, father," she cried, as he clutched once more at the rail.

But he got himself in hand again. He reached up and patted her cheek. "Only a little tired, dear—good night," he murmured, easily; but Dan noted that he was careful about his breath and that he failed to avail himself of the upturn of her face which must have expected a paternal kiss. "Run along to bed, now—like a good girl," he bade, and started to follow her across the deck.

"Good night, Mr. Corwin," she called over his shoulders.

"Goo-good night." Dan thought her father was going to fall. But a clutch at the corner of the passage entrance saved him. In another moment the door had closed behind him, and Miss Hope had gone up and across the passage and into her room. Dan drew a long breath of relief, and started the round of the ship.

He noted nothing of any significance save that the hatches were all battened down, which indicated that the loading of one had been completed, and that another would

have to be opened for further load in the morning, if more were coming. The very bow of the boat he avoided. He had glimpsed a black-garbed figure there which attracted him about as little as if it had shown horns and hoofs and a spear-tipped tail. Panama Liz was smoking a quieting cigarette before retiring, it seemed.

Dan had nothing to report, but there was still the matter of his formal signing on the ship's roll to attend to. He knocked at the door he had seen the captain enter.

"Come in." The voice still held an encouraging steadiness. Dan entered the room. The captain, still fully dressed, was sitting on the middle of his bed. Dan thought he had just raised his head from the task of unlacing his shoes. The man's eyes stared heavily a moment at the intruder. Then—

"You!" burst thickly from the captain's lips, the voice turning harsh and ugly as it dragged the single syllable. "What in—hell — d'*you* wanta — come — thish time night, an—

"Oh—g'wan to hell—out—"

It died away. It had been accompanied by the drunken man's sagging lapse to a posture half lying across the bed, his still booted feet dangling to the floor, his head shoved onto his breast by the wall behind.

Dan hesitated a moment. Then he shifted the wretched bulk to a proper position and unlaced and removed the boots. He got only mutterings, intelligible enough as ugly curses, for his pains. He blew out the lamp, went out, closed the door behind him.

"Wish I could lock it on the inside," he growled to himself. "But—of all the men to act sober with a paralyzing drunk aboard! Some captain, Dan Corwin. And—

"No, he'll never keep alive to see her wedding. Anyhow—don't be thinking too far ahead. But say—

"I forgot all about being scared on the bridge. I—I wonder—"

In the next forty seconds, Dan made the two flights of stairs three steps at a jump! Then he stood on the bridge—walked the breadth of it—its length—

He came down with a smile on his face. What of a little detail like a drunken skipper? Lots of mates have to sail lots of ships without any real help from lots of skippers.

At the head of the lower stairs, the smile died suddenly. Once more a feminine form stood at a stair-bottom, poised as if halted from ascending, by the sound of his descent. But this one was arrayed in black. Dan had no need of the moonlight falling full upon it to enable him to recognize the upturned face of Panama Liz.

CHAPTER XII.

RESPONSIBILITY.

DAN stood stock still, his mind wavering on the verge of a hasty retreat and, if need be, resort to an undignified game of chase-the-fox around and around the chart and wheel-house. With a considerable sinking of the courage he had felt a moment before, he realized that this could avail him nothing in the long run. If Panama Liz wanted to see him, to speak to him—she would see him and speak to him so surely as he remained aboard the City of Altoona. And she did not quite put him out of mind to stay.

"Ah, Danny—" she called, as if she had just seen him, instead of having stood full half a minute waiting for him to speak first. "I was just looking for you," she added, much in the extremely intimate tone she had adopted at the dinner-table.

Dan came down. At the table he had made some effort to be civil to her. There was no reason for any play-acting now.

"Well—what do you want?" he asked her sharply, as he got half-way down the steps.

"Just to talk to you," she murmured sweetly. But he got the notion that some of her tone was meant for any possible eavesdropper. "Don't you want to talk to me?"

"Not very seriously." Dan suddenly resolved to settle things then and there with Panama Liz. "I'd rather do any talking with you through *an abogado de prosecusión*, or whatever they call him, before *un magistrado* than anywhere else."

The woman laughed. "Your Spanish has improved a little faster than your sense;

but both are still atrocious, Danny," she told him, with a cool mirth that was hardly calculated to communicate its coolness to him. "It was really because I was afraid about your sense that I wanted to have a word with you this evening. I'll admit you didn't talk much to other people when I last saw you, or anything to call loquacious with me, even. But that doesn't quite assure me that you'd never talk to anybody.

"And—I wanted to advise you not to—not about me. Just for the sake of argument we'll grant that you are in a position to prove I stuck you for over a hundred good bones and took another hundred away from you, so that a calm half-breed *juez* and a red-breed jury would all agree that I ought to be supported a year or so by the government in a stone-walled pen. That would be very unpleasant for me, Danny—I'll grant that, too. And you're so harsh and unforgiving that you wouldn't care if it was unpleasant for me. I'll grant that, also, Danny.

"But, of course, you couldn't expect me to go without saying a word. And—it's all a question of how unpleasant it would be for you. Naturally, if you made much of a case, I'd have to fall back on the rights of a wife in her husband's income or possessions. And I have the very best of proof that you have recognized me right in a public place and in writing, as your true and lawful wife."

"Damn you!" Dan snarled in fury.

"Oh, the devil did that long ago," she laughed. "I'm merely trying to keep you from damning yourself. But—do I make the point clear that it will be as well for you not to start anything?"

"I never was fool enough to intend starting anything," Dan growled. Her point was impressing him more and more. "But there's one thing I want you to do—and that is to keep out of my way. If you think, because you made a holy show of me once, you can keep right on—well, try it. Just you remember, Panama Liz, that the more people think I'm the kind to associate with your kind, the less reason I'll have to care whether you show that page out of your damned posadera's register or not. You've got your hand in this game; but it isn't good enough to take everything. So, don't try to overplay it."

"Oh," she chuckled calmly, "so you do know I've got it. I wasn't going to say so just now. But — well — probably it's taught you already that Panama Liz isn't overlooking any bets in the game at that. My hand's a little better than I thought it was, myself. I didn't realize how particular you are about a pretty, spotless little reputation. Mine's so far gone it never worries me any more, and I sometimes forget about other people's.

"Good night, Danny. I'm awfully glad to have had this little chat with you."

"Go to the devil," he snapped, turning on his heel. And then he recalled that he had been to confession that afternoon, and that he'd never talked that way to a woman before, no matter how bad she was. And it all helped to make his wrath the harder to bear and the hotter.

Temperament is just another name for mere nerves. Dan Corwin's past months had not been such as to give him physical or mental calm and poise. Once started into the glooms, Dan found plenty of shadows to prevent things from becoming too bright.

From the ugly possibilities in Panama's Liz's presence on the ship, it was easy to turn, without any straining shift of humor at all, to the ugly possibilities of the skipper's habits. There was then plenty of gloom to darken up all the thoughts he might have indulged as to the skipper's daughter, and to turn the image she was fixing in his heart as dark with gloom as Panama Liz's mourning weeds and all the other things on this ship.

He was a fool for falling in love with such a girl. He was a yet bigger fool to imagine he could help his cause with her by staying on her father's ship. She didn't like mates who disobeyed her father's orders. From what he could see of her father, a mate would have to disobey about half the orders he got, and the man would lay blame, whether for obedience or disobedience, with the indifference of ignorance as to whether he had ordered or not. The mate of the ship was foreordained to the disfavor of its skipper's daughter.

And, though he was more angry at than afraid of Panama Liz for the present, especially in view of the way Miss Hope had taken the woman's actions this evening, Panama Liz might become an additional menace to his standing in the girl's eyes, even supposing for an instant that he could navigate the shoals the captain was going to create in the course of any love affair.

All told, Dan, comfortable without, in a real bed for the first time in more than half a year, and within better fed than in much longer than that, spent a more restless night than any of those he had passed in the squalor of the wretched shack on the beach. There is at least one consolation to the man at the bottom of the depths of human despair or degradation—a consolation one must forego to rise at all. At the bottom one does not need to worry over the peril of falling into anything worse. Dan paid well for his step back up the first rung toward decent human living.

Morning found him neither rested nor cheered. He hadn't been able to make up his mind to leave the ship or to stay aboard her, or to decide which action made him more wretched to think about it. He was in humor to get angry over trifles and to jump the traces entirely at any real provocation. And Captain Hope's ship was no place for that sort of humor—in any one but the skipper himself.

Early as he had risen because the bed had grown intolerable to his restlessness, it appeared that others had risen earlier. A lumbersome sailing lighter was plodding from shore with two but slightly smaller ones in tow, as Dan looked about the waist deck for the steward to give him an early cup of coffee.

An almost unconscious curiosity caused him to peer through the port passage of the after deck-house, merely to note which of the hatches might be making ready for the coming load. He had glanced forward as he came from his door and seen that the forward hatches were battened shut.

Now he saw, with astonishment that quite aroused him, that the same was true of the two after hatches, and that nobody was doing anything to open them. He forgot all about his coffee. This was a situation that demanded instant attention. He had not intended to assume any command in any way until he had been signed on the roll; but, if this were a duty awaiting his action on it, he would waste no time on mere ceremony. Loading delays are precious waste to a ship, hardly less expensive than the delays she may experience through storm or accident at sea.

"Is Mr. Edwards anywhere about?" he asked the boy who appeared at this juncture.

"Here I am," came in the second mate's thin, but rather guttural voice. Dan turned to see the second mate emerging from the saloon door, the toothpick in his mouth indicative of a finished breakfast.

"Why," Dan asked, with due caution not to appear to assume any dictation over the other's field of action—"I haven't had any orders of any sort yet. I was wondering whether you knew what I'm expected to do with this load."

"Just about what I was wondering with regard to you, sir," said the second mate in reply. "Damn' if I know which hatch it's to go in. I'd have taken the chance it would be all right with you, and got it opened, if I'd known."

Dan did not take even the time to exclaim his surprise. "I'll see the captain," he announced, heading toward the starboard passage. It was a pleasanter thing to announce than to contemplate. From Dan's last sight of Captain Hope, the prospects were not for any manifestations of joy on the skipper's part at being awakened. But —it had to be done.

"Ex—excuse me—sir!" Dan whirled to face the boy, plucking at his sleeve, quite obviously more terrified at the possible reception his action might meet than Dan felt as to the reception ahead for himself.

"Well—what is it?" he demanded impatiently.

"The captain's orders are he's not to be disturbed for nothink at all," hurriedly responded the youthful steward.

"Well—but—" Dan was talking to himself. He would hardly ask advice of a cabin-boy.

"But that's what he said, sir," pleaded the boy.

"And, if you'll pardon my saying it, it's one order that's danged well to obey around this ship, sir," put in Edwards. Then, answering Dan's further query before it had been uttered, he added:

"This is just one of the usual situations, Mr. Corwin. You can just take your choice between following your own judgment or letting things wait until he sobers up enough to say what he wants. Of course it ain't for me to advise you. I can tell you, though, that you'll be damned if you do and damned if you don't. He'll raise the devil either way—say you're overstepping your authority if you do anything, and you've done it wrong, anyhow; and want to know why in 'ell you ain't done anything if you don't."

Few people's judgments are so readily swayed by sentiment as are those of the Celt. Dan had formed an instinctive dislike for Mr. Edwards. He would act reasonably, to the extent of being perfectly polite to the third in command, unless some overt act on the other's part should touch his inward antipathy into a flame of open wrath.

But, meanwhile, he would quite unconsciously tend toward an opposite view to almost any the second mate should express. Incidentally, his first suspicion was still alive, that the man would like to scare him off the ship, if possible, to replace him. Edwards's mournful view of the present situation was about the thing best calculated to give Dan a momentarily more cheerful one than he had taken all night.

He scratched his head in perplexity, eyed the approaching lighters, made a wry face, and his decision.

"Being as it's as bad for me one way as the other, I reckon we'll do the best we can by the ship. Can you tell me just what she's got in her hold already, and where it's put?"

"Yes—I can do that." Edwards betrayed that he'd rather have heard the other decision, and that cheered Dan the more, so that he indulged mild humor over conditions.

"It does seem as if the skipper might be a little more considerate about choosing his time for getting drunk," he remarked, with a grimace. Underneath was just enough resentment at the captain's indifference to make him entirely indifferent to the fact that he was standing within three feet of a presumably open window leading into the captain's quarters. The cogitations of his sleepless night had not left him with much concern as to whether he were asked to sign on formally or to leave the ship hurriedly, certainly so far as the skipper was concerned.

Which failed utterly to enable him to take the next turn of fate with unconcern. He was still facing athwartships, his eyes toward the shore and the lighters, his back to the passage leading along the starboard side through the deck-house, the sun on his face. It was not until he saw the startled look in Mr. Edward's eyes as the second mate's hand went to his cap, that Dan became at all aware of the approach of the girl behind him. He turned and faced—eyes aflame and cheeks burning and lips parted in a gasp of amazed indignation.

He was too disconcerted to speak, could only finger his cap awkwardly. It was a moment before the girl got control of herself to say with biting scorn in every syllable:

"I hope you gentlemen will not worry over my having accidentally overheard Mr. Corwin's remark. I should never be guilty of insulting my father by reporting to him that any one had dared to insinuate anything concerning him so maliciously and contemptibly false."

She swept haughtily into the saloon door.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SKIPPER WAKES.

DAN stood still a full minute, blinking at the black hole the door made in the sparkling white of the deck-house's paint. Surprised anger—the anger that is almost physical and common to all sentient life, the impulse that prompts to strike back without regard to the reasons for the blow received—this was his first emotion. The surprise gave place to bitter disappointment.

Soon as he could think, he reflected that this was just what he had expected of re-

maining aboard the ship. He had hardly dreamed it could come so soon. The awakening took away the last remnants of the dreams which had flitted through his brain ever since he had taken his sudden resolve to "come back." More than he had admitted, more than he admitted now—those dreams had been woven around a girl rather than a ship. Now—

Well—he was through with this ship.

He had managed to build up quite an estate of air castles above this vessel. They had not stood long, but they had been impressively vivid. And they were hard to give up. But they were gone.

The minute of bitterness was not over before he was hesitating only as to method for informing Captain Hope that his engagement with the ship was finished; that, whether he would or would not, the skipper must take a rather badly secured note for the advance of the twenty dollars given yesterday.

The immediate conditions counselled the leaving of a brief written statement. Dan was not in humor for counsel, but for impulse. He was on the point of starting for the captain's door and the interview in which, regardless of the skipper's sadly morning-after feelings, he should be kept awake long enough to hear just what Dan felt about most everything—when Edwards recalled the fact that they had been in conversation by a grunted:

"Oh, hell — that's some more of it!" Obviously this referred to the words just spoken by Miss Hope. "It's a sweet ship to try to sail on," the second mate added sourly.

Dan turned—wondering just how much the second mate had read of the states of his mind. He suspected that man's motives in all he said. He was suspicious now that Edwards read somehow exactly the sentiments he was suffering; that he had given away the foolishly sudden adoration of his heart for the girl, that the man next in command was even gloating secretly over all the discomfiture he felt.

At all events he must take away some of Edwards's satisfaction about it. Edwards might still guess; he shouldn't have full proof then and there.

"Come on," Dan spoke quickly— "tell me about the load. What's this that's coming? And—what's aboard?"

He could almost certainly trust the second mate to give him the truth as to these details. Edwards would gain nothing by telling a lie which might be revealed by the lifting of the first hatch. Dan led the way forward.

"What's here?" he asked, pointing at the hatch.

In four or five minutes Dan had scrawled the figures of the load, the approximate weight of coal in bunkers, the draft, and the net and gross tonnage of the ship. Swiftly he computed. He had always prided himself on his arithmetic, he had added to it a considerable study of the problems of ship-loading, he had brushed these up to approximate scientific accuracy during the week of loading of the Ciudad de Lima. It was still quite fresh in his mind.

A glance at the pendulum confirmed his computations. He blew his whistle to call the crew on deck as the natives on the lighters were throwing their lines aboard.

"Back to the Number Three hatch," he called to the captain of the first lighter, as direction for the fastening of his boats alongside.

The mates of a ship do not have command of each other, except when in actual command of the ship. But Mr. Edwards shifted the responsibility for even the opening of the hatch by inquiring deferentially:

"Shall I get it open, sir?"

"If you will," Dan responded crisply. He himself began to direct the uncovering of the donkey engine on the after-deck.

"How much more of this is coming?" Dan asked of the captain of the sailing lighter. He was told that there would be another three lighters aboard on the morrow. That fact would not disturb his ideas as to the proper stowage. The only risk might pertain to future loads at ports farther down the coast; but these he would have to leave to averages, since he had no means of finding out what was coming. He considered that fairly safe.

The loading begun, and he himself having seen through the after passage that Miss Hope had gone back to her room, Dan

hurried to the saloon and soothed with two cups of coffee, the ache that was beginning in his head. There had been too little left of him physically for meeting the nervous strains of these past few hours, not to mention the actual exertions far beyond any he had troubled to put forth during his stay on the beach.

Aside from the usual growth of a headache, the morning provided nothing unusual for Dan. It gave some opportunity to study the crew. Nationally, these were Scandinavians, than whom few men could make a more desirable complement of sailors. But there was a certain slowness of obedience about them which seemed to Dan hardly accounted for by the native stolidity of the men.

That was quite natural. They were above the average intelligence of ordinary sailors. The frequent changes of mates was bound to have impressed them with a certain amount of disrespect for the presumably very temporary holder of the position.

Most of Dan's apprenticeship had been spent under good commanders who understood the value of self-control in controlling others. Dan diagnosed the condition of the ship's discipline as one which might be kept in hand without too much difficulty, but might run to a state of sullenness on the crew's part and even to mutiny if it were not handled carefully.

He was at great pains to maintain that even crispness of voice which is the real trick of all discipline. The pains were real at times. His headache and general nervous condition had him grinding his teeth over and over again to keep from losing voice and temper together.

Only once, however, did he come near an open clash with one of the men. This was a heavy, unusually swarthy Swede. Perhaps Dan's ire was not so much at his failure to obey promptly as the fact that his delay was caused by his stopping to finish some remark to the second mate, with whom he seemed to be on rather more familiar terms than usually exist between seamen and officers.

Out of deference to the other officer, Dan would have called on another man to assist the one who was arranging the sling around three casks for hoisting; but no other was at hand at the moment.

It seemed to Dan that the sailor had glanced covertly in his direction as he laughingly passed whatever words he said. Dan had been standing on the opposite side of the wide hatch when he gave his order. He got around it so quickly that the big, dark seaman braced himself involuntarily for a blow.

But Dan intended no blow. In his condition the results of a fight could have been but his finish, unarmed as he was. There was, however, no sign of fear to be seen in his eyes. His voice was a shade softer than usual and a tone or two lower, as he simply said:

"I guess you did not understand me. You will give a hand there."

"Oh — aye, sir," the fellow responded, after a battle entirely fought out on a basis of ability to meet eye with eye. Dan's eyes turned sharply on Edwards, whose speech with men under Dan's orders was quite as much a breach of discipline as the Swede's slowness.

"I beg pardon, Mr. Corwin," hastily apologized the second mate. "I didn't know you were calling him."

"I thought you didn't," Dan returned coolly. Edwards hastily left that part of the ship. Dan saw no more of him until the ringing of the dinner-bell, when he came to allow his superior opportunity to eat at the first table.

That was a privilege Dan would willingly have foregone. He had his place of the evening before, between Panama Liz and the Ordway couple. The former of these either had taken his advice about leaving him alone, or was not in conversational humor. The missionary couple seemed to have formed their opinion of him by the episode of the previous night, and were uncommunicative. Miss Hope did not acknowledge his entrance by a look or nod.

The first, second, and third engineers were all there. It seemed they had been ashore yesterday afternoon and evening. They introduced themselves, and might have been ready enough to strike up a real acquaintance with the new officer had they not sat so far down toward the end of the

table that conversation was an effort. The captain's chair at the head was still vacant.

Dan had hurried through his eating, and started for the door of the saloon, glad to get away from it, when his exit was blocked by the appearance of two obviously Spanish gentlemen, who asked him if the captain was inside. Along with his only fairish Spanish, Dan had managed to pick up the knack of that courtesy which seems to an American a little overdone, but is current as "*costumbre del paiz*" in all Latin countries. He explained with profound regret that he did not think the captain could possibly be seen, and added an invitaion to the gentlemen to accept the ship's hospitality to the extent of a meal.

"But no," they replied—"though with much thanks and very sorrow of soul to decline so hospitable an invitation, their business was of such pressure that they must hasten back to the city and—what was the matter with the captain?

"He suffers with so severe a headache that he is confined to his bed, scarcely able to speak for pain," Dan told them dolefully. "The sun of yesterday ashore and the extreme exertion of his business there have almost overcome him entirely. But be assured that I am at your service to what extent my inferior capacity will allow."

"Your capacity is undoubtedly equal to your courtesy," they assured in return; "but this is a matter of official importance and under orders of secrecy to all save the captain of the ship himself."

It was of utmost haste, they went on, and, much as they regretted it, they feared the importance was so great, and possibly, the reward for the captain himself, that the worst of headaches or anything short of mortal illness must not prevent an immediate interview.

Somewhere during this recital, the cabin-boy vanished from the room. The words were getting Dan to the point where he felt desperately puzzled as to what he should do, when he got one of those surprises only Captain Hope seemed capable of administering. It was the sight of the skipper himself, looking a trifle haggard, but quite steady on his feet, as he advanced and, with a bow and in a voice as courteous as it had sounded when Dan first heard it, bade the Spanish gentlemen follow him into his room.

Dan inwardly described his own condition as flabbergasted. Had the captain sobered up entirely, or was this another exhibition of his marvelous ability to hide his condition when he wished enough to do so? And —would the next thing on his own program be the sort of general row over what he had done that Edwards had predicted? Also—should he go right ahead, or wait now to find out whether the proceeding met the skipper's approbation?

He was still pondering these problems, when he heard Miss Hope's voice just behind him:

"Mr. Corwin!" He turned and saw that she seemed to wish him to follow her. She led to the rail a little out of the hearing of the Ordways, who had stopped to look over the lighters. There she seemed to hesitate as to how to begin what she had wished to say.

"Mr. Corwin," she finally faltered—"I want to thank you for—" she broke off with fresh embarrassment.

"For what, pray?" he asked.

"For lying, I guess," she uttered, with a laugh catching a little in her throat, but hardly getting to her eyes—"for trying to keep those two gentlemen from finding out what you believed was my father's condition. I am sure you believed what you were saying this morning, though it was a little more than I could hear and keep my temper.

"Of course, you haven't come to know my father. I understand that men of the sea might not even regard the thing you virtually accused him of very seriously. If you knew him as I do, you would, of course, realize that he was quite incapable of any vice, least of all so vulgar a vice as drunkenness.

"To one who, like you, has barely met him, I don't doubt these periods of voluntary confinement in his room might lead to the easy supposition you voiced. It is much harder for me to forgive Mr. Edwards for assenting to anything of the sort, or not definitely correcting it.

"The true explanation of them is something I have been unwilling to believe, my-

self, but of which I have now become convinced. My father's health is failing seriously and rapidly, I am afraid. I know he's afraid to tell me or let me see him in the spells which are the only possible accounting for his stays in his room—afraid to alarm me.

"And now—I want you to help me persuade him to see a doctor at once, if you know of a competent one in Limanau. It is not going to be so easy, since he won't admit that anything ails him. But he has confessed to extreme weariness — too extreme weariness. And—I'm going to base my plea on that. What doctor did you have in your illness?"

Dan did some rapid thinking. He was convinced that the girl believed exactly what she said. It was not for him to attempt to disabuse her mind of an error like that.

The most immediate problem, however, was an answer to her question about a Limanau *medico*. Of these he knew absolutely nothing. With the people of the town he had had only very limited dealings, the exchanges of fish or mollusks or wood for other food. The German fellow-beach-comber had died unattended. Unattended, likewise, had been the birth of the latest offspring of the Yorkshireman.

And he had explained his appearance by a sickness which must have been quite recent to have left the marks upon him he showed; and had acknowledged sufficent stay in the place to have familiarized himself with its character. A ship's mate taken sick on a voyage is hardly apt to be left in port so stranded as to have to recover or die without any medical attention.

The needed bolstering lie came readily enough to his mind. He could give any opinion as to the doctors in Limanau—a very poor one would save him the other difficulty which might attend efforts to get a drunkard who won't admit any ailment to see a doctor. He hesitated an instant, to figure a little as to whether this particular untruth held any possible snares to involve him further—looked up, and saw that she was eying him earnestly, her face a plea for his help.

A funny thing happened to Dan just then. The lie choked in his throat. He couldn't lie and look into those big, deep-gray, just now almost childishly trusting eyes—not in his own behalf.

But what happened next puzzled him afterward even more than this odd disability. He was telling what surprised him quite as much as it must have surprised the girl—the very discreditable truth.

CHAPTER XIV.

A BARGAIN.

"MISS HOPE—I have not been sick in Limanau. I have never been what could rightly be called sick in my life. I have been—well, I heard you call the mate that just left a quitter over there on the beach yesterday morning. It was the one word I caught of what you were saying. And it fitted me so perfectly I thought you meant it for me.

"That was why I looked at you so funny as you came past me down the beach. I—"

"Past *you?*" the girl interrupted him. "I didn't see—"

"You saw a wretched, dirty, unkempt beach-comber—and that was me."

She stared at him hard.

"I can't believe—why, you couldn't—" She was quite at a loss to identify him or to believe his words. "Oh, why did you tell me?" she then cried. "I see it now—your eyes. But—"

"God knows why I'm telling you—I guess it's because you look so honest it's hard to lie to you," Dan responded, growing regretful at his truthfulness as he saw its effect upon her.

"But—how could you be—that?" she finally urged.

"I lost a ship," he answered. Those words were apt in themselves to explain almost anything to the daughter of a ship's captain. "It wasn't my ship, but I was on the bridge—and it was mostly my fault that she hit and sank. And—I guess I lost my nerve with the ship. Anyhow, inside a couple of weeks I was put in command of a little one of my own, by an old friend. And, I spent two hours of night-watch on the bridge.

"Nothing happened worth mentioning. Only, I was scared. I didn't fight it out—I quit. I turned the ship over to the owner, who was aboard, and landed at the first port. I never intended to go to sea again.

"I thought I was unfortunate, that everything and everybody was against me. I'd tried to do the wrong thing, and wasn't fit for anything else. I drifted up the coast—and landed over there. And I lived there, as the rest of them live there.

"And then I heard you call—I thought it was me—a quitter. And I saw the way you looked at a quitter. And—I got into the best clothes I had and hunted up your father to ask him for a berth in the fo'c's'le. He was the most courteous skipper I'd ever met. He was kindness itself. He advanced me money and told me to come on out here as his mate."

"And then"—the girl flashed back at him with a sudden return touch of the morning's scorn—"you were ready to believe he was a drunkard!"

Dan smiled with a ready excuse. He could lie in another's behalf.

"It was all so near too good to be true that I couldn't quite believe a man in his sober senses could have taken such a wreck as me the way he did," he said.

She let it go at that. Her father needed a mate very badly. She did not fully trust Mr. Edwards, or regard him as sufficiently competent for the amount of responsibility a mate had to take, with her father in his present condition.

Why, then, could she trust a confessed failure like Dan Corwin? She did not so much as raise the question. Somehow she felt that he would succeed. Nothing appeals more to the heart of a woman than the idea that she has helped a man upward. Once given that idea, it is very hard to convince her the man isn't going upward indefinitely.

"I'm sure I sha'n't ever have to call you a quitter," she said impulsively.

"You won't," Dan replied, carried away with the look in her eyes. "I'll stick."

"Shake hands on it," she invited.

Suddenly her face crimsoned with the realization that the handshake was lasting too long.

"I'm keeping you from your work—and Mr. Edwards from his dinner," she reminded.

Dan was hardly conscious of touching the deck as he went aft to the busy scene around the hatch that was loading. Fifteen minutes before he had been just waiting the chance to leave the ship after proving to Edwards that it was no disappointment in a too impetuous love that sent him away. Now he would never leave it.

"Gosh a'mighty!" the second mate exclaimed at sight of him—"what kind of eats have they got to-day? Hope they make me feel like you look."

"Hope they make you look like I feel," Dan laughed back at him.

It seemed to him things were going more smoothly now. Perhaps that was mere imagination. Perhaps he did not mind so much the hesitating obedience. Anyhow, the load from the three lighters was nearly all stowed. Plenty of time for getting it in before night, no matter how slowly it was done.

The speeding up was not all in the seeming. Dan had caught the feeling for work—and it is very infectious. By half after two the last cask was lowered into the hold and stowed. The men from the lighters were picking up their cast-off coats and other belongings they had left about.

Should he order the hatch set on without battening for the night, or, should he ask the captain to come and inspect the job now that it seemed there was possibility of getting some expression of will from the man? Dan peered through the after passage toward the captain's room.

The captain was just coming down across the midship's deck. Edwards walked beside him, but turned off before entering the passage. Dan got a sort of unpleasant "hunch" that the second mate had stopped because he had caught sight of his next superior through that tunnel-passage, and wished not to seem to have anything to do with what was coming.

It required nothing vague enough to call a hunch to see that what was coming would probably be anything but pleasant. Under the spell of Miss Hope's anxious voice, he had been almost inclined to doubt the evi-

dence he had for a different diagnosis of her father's malady. But, if the man who was walking unsteadily though hastily toward Dan now was not drunk, Dan had never seen a drunken man—and such sights are hardly for sailors to escape.

Worse than this, there were no signs of that genial, overpolite mellowness which had first roused Dan's suspicions about the skipper. This was the sort of intoxication in which a man is ugly, unreasonable, fighting-angry over the slightest real or fancied affront or grievance. No average-sized man with any experience is ever afraid of the ugliest of drunks unarmed, for alcohol is a will-weakener whose strongest emotions may be dominated by any other sober and fearless will.

But the usually fine features of the skipper were distorted with something so near alcoholic mania that Dan had to summon all his own reserve of will to keep down the feeling and the weakness of genuine fear.

The man's rapid, though uncertain gait brought him so near the edge of the open hatch that Dan suffered a spasm of fear lest he topple into the hold. Hope made a momentary pretense of studying the space below, then lifted a pair of staring eyes to Dan—

"Who told you to do this?" he snapped.

Dan realized the importance of keeping himself steady. "Nobody," he replied, taking pains to prevent even a blink of his eyes as he held them upon the bloodshot orbs of the captain.

"Then, what in the devil did you do it for?"

"Because it was the best thing to do, sir." Dan spoke with all the positiveness he could muster.

"Who said it was the best thing to do?" blustered the captain. It was plain that he was a little taken aback by Corwin's coolness.

"I figured that out from Mr. Edwards's information as to the rest of the load," Dan informed him.

"Figured it out!" snorted Hope. "Who in hell told you to figure about it? What right had you to figure?"

"The right of necessity, sir," Dan retorted. "I understand it as the duty of a mate to assume control of things in case of the captain's disability."

"Disability! What do you mean by that, Mr. Corbin, or whatever your name is? What do you mean by disability?" The skipper's voice was raised to the highest pitch of its capacity. He advanced a step upon Dan, as if preparing to strike.

"My name is Corwin, sir," Dan corrected him with affected calm. "By disability I meant exactly disability, sir."

"Who said I was disabled?" snarled Hope.

"Perhaps it was my disability to obtain any orders, sir." Dan spoke with the forced calm barely off the edge of irony. "Of course, now that you are prepared to give them, I am ready to accept any orders you wish to issue."

"You'd better be—you! And here are your orders! Get that stuff out of there and into the Number Four hatch between now and seven o'clock to-morrow morning. That's one order. The next one is to remember that I'm the skipper of this ship, and that I issue the orders. Any —— —— —— mate that thinks he's running my ship is likely to berth in the forepeak with bracelets on his arms."

It made Dan white to keep from laying hands on the man. For a moment he was choked with rage. His fists clenched involuntarily; his teeth ground together. But a captain of a ship is a captain, and Dan knew it. He got himself under control before he spoke—before he could speak—

"Excuse me, sir, Captain Hope—I think you misunderstood me. I said I was ready to take your orders, sir, not your abuse. You may recall that I have not yet signed on this ship. Unless you understand perfectly the distinction, in dealing with me, between orders and abuse, I shall go ashore on one of those lighters and stay there."

"You go to hell!" bellowed the skipper, turning on his heel and heading back to his quarters.

Dan could take his choice as to whether that meant some place ashore or the spot a few feet from where he stood, which would be his natural position for overseeing the wretched job the captain had just assigned him. As a matter of fact, the bluster in the

act of retreat was an much a confession of defeat as is the name-calling a small boy indulges from his own front door after a run to reach it.

But Dan was too angry even to contemplate the ordering of the men to undo all the day's work. He simply strode toward his room, without an intention in the world but to get his belongings and himself ashore with all speed. Flinging his few possessions into a bag was the work a moment. He hurried out and started toward the after-quarter again, to reach the ladder set up for the lighters' crews, before they should have cast off entirely.

"Going ashore, Mr. Corwin?"

Dan halted. He could not evade giving some answer, much as the sound of the girl's voice made him wish to do so

"Yes, Miss Hope," he told her, without attempting to meet her eyes.

The girl came toward him from the opposite rail, at which she had been standing.

"You'll be back for dinner?" she asked. There was no hiding the overanxiety the mere sight of his departure with a bag aroused.

"I—I don't think so," Dan responded once more, with an unsuccessful attempt this time to meet her gaze.

"I was in hopes you would help me talk to father about a doctor this evening," she now spoke up.

"Why—why—" He knew she was searching him. He flushed, trying to face her as she faced him.

"Miss Hope," he suddenly blurted, with a certain note of miserable defiance in his voice, "I'm not coming back at all."

Wretched as it made him, he thought he was prepared to defend himself against an accusation that he was showing himself another of the quitters who had been her father's mates—gently, if possible, and without any mention of the real cause of her father's utter inability to keep any mate; but prepared, if she would not have excuses, to tell her the whole truth and let her take it as she might. His anger at her father was too deep to brook any more real unfairness, even from her.

But he was not at all prepared for the sound that came from her lips—a little, inarticulate "O-oh!" more like a gasp of pain than an accusation, and a thousandfold more accusing because it did not accuse. It broke in a half sob, then came again: "Oh—oh—Dan!"

He hadn't even known that she had ever heard of his first name.

CHAPTER XV.

HER VIEW.

THE conversation with the new mate had wrought in Marion Hope's breast a flutter all out of proportion, it seemed, to its emotional possibilities. Her first impulse was to run to her father, to tell him that he had at last got the right man, a man who understood his business and his place, a man ready to stick.

The Spanish gentlemen in her father's room prevented her carrying out any such rather premature recommendation of his last acquired officer. She went on to her room.

Her feelings seemed too big for the little stateroom. A vague wonder halted her, as she started out of it again—a wonder as to what all these emotions signified. She paused and looked in the glass over the bureau, as if to discover there something new in herself and hitherto unsuspected.

She surely was not in love with this sad-looking skeleton of a man new risen from degradation rather sorrier than death. These feelings were nothing like those she had always entertained toward Bob Harvey, whom she had somehow considered her lover ever since they had gone to high school together.

But, really, it was a wonderful thing to hear that man tell her that she had been the instrument of his return to man's estate. She could think of nothing else in her life of which she felt that it could be so completely worth while. She could think of nothing else ahead quite so worth while as giving him all the further help he might need in making his self-restoration complete. No stone she could turn must be left in his way to prevent his making good.

And here was fresh reason for taking seriously and acting promptly about her

father's condition. This was a worry never very far from her mind these days. And that her father, in some of his peculiar moods of late, might say and do things to make young Corwin's upward climb hard was undeniable. Especially might this be the case in the first few days or weeks, before the new man had opportunity to acquaint himself with the really splendid man her father normally was.

She believed she knew her father as few daughters of seamen ever can. Though this was her first voyage with him on one of his ships, she had the memory of all his stays in American ports as practically devoted to her. This had been due, undoubtedly, to the fact that she had never known her mother, who, she had learned, had died in giving her birth.

She had had the best care a maiden sister of her father's could let her share with her paralyzed grandfather. But, as if not satisfied that this was enough, her father had made every home-coming a round of picnics at every place he could imagine a child finding pleasure. Had he been at home more, he must have spoiled her utterly. As it was, she had grown up to regard him as the embodiment of about all human and masculine perfections.

His final extravagance in her behalf had come during the previous year which he had spent on land. He had sent her to an expensive finishing school for young ladies. Marion had hardly enjoyed it or profited by it. She did not belong with girls who could not do up their own hair. The only time when she felt as if she should try to adopt some of their foreign-governess-taught mannerisms was at the commencement. Her father seemed to possess a bearing of almost courtly dignity which set him above rather than below the mere millionaires. But she had been delighted when he promised to take her on this voyage instead of returning her to school.

The long trip had begun at the end of a summer spent in a quiet and almost too select seashore resort. Here, for the first, had come to her notice her father's habit of sudden absences from things when she least expected him to go away. Then she had accepted his explanation of sudden turns in businesses in which he had some slight financial interest. Only after she discovered that he would disappear as unexpectedly from the deck of the ship and shut himself up tight in his room without regard to the needs of the real business in hand did she begin to doubt about those summer absences.

But drunkenness was about the last explanation she would accept for them. Her bringing up, in a small town, with small-town upper-middle-class people, had been almost exactly that best calculated to make her count drunkenness not merely a vice, but the kind of vice of which no really decent person could conceivably be guilty, a vice by its very nature confined to slums and coarse people. Even the statement that an acquaintance had "taken to drink" never conveyed to her mind that he had besotted himself with rum. She thought it meant, rather, that he was possibly injuring his health in efforts to stimulate nerves broken down with work or worry.

Dan was the first person whom she had forgiven for the insinuation that her father was a drunkard. When she had taken time to reason that he had barely met her father before, she saw that he could not know better than he spoke. But for any one who really knew him to accuse Captain Hope of drunkenness was a thing to drive her to loyal fury.

She had not regretted the departure of the first two mates. Anything they got that drove them to leave the ship they deserved for their perfidious judgment of their captain's ailment. She hardly regretted Bob Harvey's quitting, so much as her own blunder in imagining she loved one who could have quit as he had, with the accusation of her father as his excuse.

But her father was certainly sick, and certainly getting much worse all the time. She thought of her grandfather's paralysis, though this did not seem like any paralysis of which she had heard. Obviously it was, however, in some degree, a nervous affliction of some kind.

She hoped she could get this new and seemingly—at least to her feelings about him—capable mate into a talk with the

skipper this very evening, and that there might yet be found in Limanau a doctor who could prescribe something to relieve the malady a little before it should occasion anything to discourage Corwin's efforts at self-restoration.

Most of these reflections had been indulged on the bridge to which she had repaired as the roomiest place for her feelings and thinking. It was just as she was settling down to plan what her own arguments with her father should be, that she saw him start with Mr. Edwards toward the after part of the ship. Her father's gait wrought fresh alarm. Surely it indicated lack of perfect muscular control.

And then came the sounds of the quarrel—for such she made it to be. Almost every ugly word of her father's reached her ears. She could hear none of Dan's replies.

She was disappointed. As inconceivable as drunkenness on her father's part was the idea that he could be wholly unfair to an inferior officer under his command. The new mate must have been guilty of some of the insubordination over which her father raved with the exaggerated irritation of illness.

Why was it that they all disobeyed her father? Was it that they belonged to a class of born underdlings who suffer a seeming disability to stand really courteous or considerate treatment; that her father's very manners and breeding gave them only the impression of weakness? Hadn't Corwin, who had seemed to her better than any but Bob Harvey, expressed his notion that some kindnesses seemed too great to come from a sober skipper?

She preferred, too, to believe that, in the manner her parent was now adopting, there was a deliberate attempt to correct the wrong impression before it got beyond correcting, to show that he could be as hard as he generally appeared soft. She could hardly believe that her dad could use quite all the rough language she overheard without a completely artificial effort made for effect.

And—wasn't it having its effect? Somehow she had got the impression that the new mate was of Irish temperament a trifle overvolatile. That he stood and took such upbraiding in such a voice without offering physical violence might argue merely for long training in sea discipline, but seemed rather to point to the attainment of a new and more respectful attitude toward a man who could talk as her father was talking.

But, if that were the mere result of discipline, the new mate would surely take the remaining course for getting free of further like treatment. This would end his stay on the ship. A man who had been through what he had admitted a couple of hours ago would hardly hesitate to add a desertion to what must be already a rather unfortunate-looking record. And, she could not bear to think of the new mate's going. Hadn't he just promised her not to quit, after telling her he was here because he could not suffer her opinion of a quitter?

And her father was carrying the thing too far. He had not had time to gain any understanding of this new man, such as she felt she had gained instinctively. She suddenly rose and ran down the stairs from the bridge. She had caught the horrible oaths of her father's last bluster. She had always avoided these scenes before, but now—

What would she do? She hardly knew. It seemed hardly possible that her father would continue to act in this manner with her in sight. He never had before.

That he would be angry at her for coming into sight at such a time might hurt; but she would have to bear the hurt. In a way she felt herself Dan Corwin's protector. She had little doubt that his whole future career, his life, his very soul, depended upon the carrying out of the brave effort he was making to rehabilitate himself. She must not let him fail.

Yet at the top of the second stairs she halted. Again her father's voice was roaring up and down the deck and into her ears, another vilely vulgar curse as little in keeping with the very nature of the father she knew as drunkenness itself. What if he should turn and speak thus to her?

What if all this were not artificial, but the actual outpouring of a rage of which only a half deranged mind could be ca-

pable? What if she saw him—something dreadfully different from what she had always seen him before, something that made men think he was a drunkard?

Then she realized that the last coarse phrase had been the end of the interview, and her father was coming away. Her sudden fear drove her back from the little platform at the stairs' head, around to the forward side of the cabin. There, for a minute or two, she battled with the notion that she had doubted her father, battled with more doubts.

But she must not let the mate misunderstand. She must explain to him. Above all else she must prevent his taking any rash action. He must be told, convinced, that this was not the real skipper with whom he would have most to do; that the bluster must be overlooked as the mere manifestation of a sick man's peevishness.

She hurried down and through the after deckhouse passage. She looked with almost wild anxiety about the deck, where the only work being done by a score of husky men was that of assisting the lighter's crew to make ready for departure. Two of them were engaged at the untying of a single line from one of the big cleats. The rest seemed enjoying a furtive jest the nature of which was all too easy to guess.

She ran to the rail and searched the decks of the clumsy lighters. Young Corwin was not on any of the three—she saw that with some relief.

But, where was he? Her father had just ordered the shifting of the cargo he had stowed to-day. He was not here to attend to it. Nor had he turned the work over, as might have been for a moment, to Mr. Edwards. The second mate was not in sight.

As she ran forward again without encountering any sign of the man she sought, a sudden sense of defeat, of helplessness, caught her and held her a moment. She did not want to meet the mate with tears in her eyes and a sob in her voice. She steadied herself with a look across the wide expanse of sea to starboard. She thought she had inherited a love for that apparently infinite vastness which seldom failed to calm her.

Then she heard his steps coming from the forward passage on the other side. She hesitated as to how she was to call him, to begin the conversation with him. And then she saw that he had his grip.

Not to herself, and much less to him, was she ready to admit that her worst fears were realized, that he, too, was quitting. She could hardly blame him after what she had heard. But—she wanted him to show even better than she dared hope. She put her hasty queries as if she took for granted that he but planned a shore-leave; though the impossibility of that in face of her father's orders struck her with fresh hopelessness as she spoke.

Her heart sank as he evaded in his replies and avoided meeting her eyes. And then, as he finally blurted the unhappy truth, she could not control her disappointment.

She did not realize that she was calling him by his given name. It was a part of the unaccountable interest she had felt in the man's combination of courageous spirit with an apparently almost wrecked physique, that the name had stuck to her thought from the moment she heard the dubious woman across the table hail him as "Danny."

But the sight of him departing and defeated—the realization that he was going out of her life as suddenly as he had come into it, and going out to leave a memory of disappointment, of confession that he lacked something of what she had hoped he was—brought another realization which sent her suddenly limp with astonishment turned to grief by the circumstances in which it had come. Something—something bigger and deeper than even Bob Harvey had ever inspired in her—had come with the appearance of this strange man onto her father's ship.

CHAPTER XVI.

MUTINY.

THERE are several treatments for a woman in tears. Men there are with bone hearts or hearts hardened almost to the point of ossification, who can get the

angrier when their wives open the eye sluices, and can even assume the courage to growl the harder or even to resort to vulgar profanity. A very few strong men can beat their wives for such resort to argument otherwise unanswerable. A few more can put on hats and coats and slam the door very loud as they depart from the vale of tears.

But these methods apply only to wives, and, even at that, are only to be undertaken by men who have proven to themselves that they are strong far above their brothers, or are firmly fortified by ample stimulation. For most wives, and for all other women, there is only one plan of action in usage.

As a general rule, no matter how you feel about it, take the fearful one in your arms and assuage her grief by such caresses as your relation to her may permit, and by promising anything likely to cheer the patient up.

Dan swept the midship's deck with his eye. Inasmuch as, at that time of day, it was the sunniest, most breezeless portion of the ship, it was quite deserted for the moment. He gave one hesitant look into her swimming eyes—and was lost.

In spite of her slip in calling his first name, he was tremendously delicate about it, quite frightened at his own boldness, as he slid a trembling arm half around her waist and drew her shyly toward the middle of the after deckhouse's front, where the coal-hatch provided a seat and the wall shut off the sun's rays and any prying glances of the sailors standing about the after deck.

Dan's experience along such lines was absolutely nil. He patted her shoulder as gently as his sailor hand could do it. He could think of nothing in the world to say but: "There—there, now—now, don't cry—there—there."

There was nothing strikingly original about his use of this formula. We suspect that Adam soothed Eve with the same bit of eloquence in whatever language was universal before the Babel affair. It is trite from long usage, and it would look absurdly monotonous if any attempt were made to print it as it is usually repeated. But it generally produces the results if continued faithfully.

The girl's somewhat hysterical sobbing grew less and less violent; she dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief, and finally got them into condition to look up with, and managed a sort of smile. Then she pulled herself the rest of the way together with a jerk, as it flashed upon her that her tears had got her into a position a long way in advance of that normally covered by a proper courtship in a lot more time than they had known each other.

"How silly of me!" she exclaimed, still with a little of the sob in her voice. "I didn't know I could be so stupid. But—but—oh, I wanted you to stick to the ship. And—"

"But," Dan argued, instantly on the defensive, "how can I stick to the ship, if your father doesn't want me? I told him—"

"Oh, you can't understand," she spoke sorrowfully, seeing the hopelessness of the thing, even as he saw it—"I can't blame you—as I did the others. They knew he wasn't well—knew he said things he didn't mean. He doesn't want you to leave. Oh, if I'd only had the doctor when we were in Frisco! But he didn't seem so bad, until we got down here in tropical waters. He wasn't any worse there, before—not down through the Indian Ocean and the other side of the Pacific.

"He did stay in his room sometimes, then—sometimes when he would surely have been out if he was well. But now—if I thought I could get him to give up the ship and start straight for home, I'd do it. I don't know what's to become of us. I—I thought you'd be able to handle the ship and all, even without him. But—"

"But it's a lot harder with him than it would be without him," Dan put in. "What do those squareheads out there think of me now? How can I handle them after they've heard the captain talk as he did? Don't you see?"

Slowly she got up. She held out her hand toward him, a brave attempt at a smile on her face.

"Yes, I see. It was too much to ask of you. I—I was foolish to hope as I did.

Good-by, Mr. Corwin. I trust that you—oh, good-by!"

She turned hastily away. She was going—going into her cabin and out of his sight—out of his life. She was going in tears. He could not bear it. He hurried after her, caught her arm, drew her about.

"Marion — wait!" he bade her. "Wait!" he repeated again, unable to form into words the thought that was welling up within him, until: "What did you hope? Tell me what you hoped—and—so help me God—I'll do it. I can't go this way—and leave you—this way. Oh—tell me—"

The words weren't the ones he might have thought of. They tumbled forth as she sought to free herself from his detaining hand. Again she was sobbing. She gave up resistance, let him hold her, plead with her: "Tell me—what it was you hoped. Tell me—"

"I had no right to hope it," she managed to say finally. "I guess no man can stay as mate on—my father's ship—with him the way he is."

"You hoped I would stay?" The words were wrung from a rack of all sorts of emotions. The mere thought that she wanted him to stay was one to have set him tremulous with happiness. The thought of what his stay might mean of wretched failure for him—failure again in his effort to regain the position which he had learned was the only one for him; failure to save the ship, perhaps; failure to keep his self-respect or the respect of those under him; failure even to keep her regard—was one to set him trembling with fear.

Mentally he was fully convinced that the only way to sail that ship would be with the captain in irons. All the reasons he had for wishing to sail it now were such as to make such action impossible.

She did not answer—did not dare to answer. Of course she did not realize what her father's ways were doing to discipline aboard, did not comprehend his worse than incompetence. She still thought a mate could manage, if he were man enough—if he were the man she wanted yet to believe Dan Corwin was. Yet she could not bid him stay.

"You want me to stay?" he put his query again, in a voice that insisted on an answer.

"I—I can't bear to have you leave." She gave the only answer she could. She hardly spoke from the newly discovered sentiment for him. Rather it was from the despair with which she viewed the outlook for further sailing, for her father, for the ship—with the one man gone about whom she had built too strong a confidence.

"Well—I'll stay." Dan did not make the promise lightly. None would have guessed by his tone that he felt any gladness about it. He was glad that the girl should wish him to stay with her. But that was the end of the joyful side of things, and it left that side all short and out of proportion to the other.

God knew what would become of such a promise. That the best of men in his place could do the task before him successfully—even near enough successfully to save their own careers—seemed next to impossible. The one consolation lay in the tokens that the girl loved him, and that he would be seeing her through to the end. He took it as foredoomed that the end would be bitter.

But she was glad. Even as she saw the awful seriousness of his face as he made the promise she felt herself swept up and carried away with a joy too big for words. He was going to stick, after all. He was going to prove all her hopes in him. He was the man she believed he was.

And her look swept Dan from his moorings. Before he knew what he was doing he had her in his arms. He was pressing his lips to her forehead—

"God! God!" he was gasping. Nor was the exclamation even lacking in reverence. The emotion within seemed too big for anything less than the infinite. "God! But I love you! I—I guess I'd sail a burning ship to hell for you!"

They started apart. Both stared in the same direction—from which a chuckle in a coarse voice had come. Both caught a glimpse of a hastily drawn back black veil in the forward passage on the opposite side of the ship.

"It's that Mrs. Bartington!" Marion's

cheeks were aflame with the embarrassment of the situation. Her voice bespoke her loathing of the woman who had drawn back.

"It's—" Dan had started to call the wretched hag by the name he had learned from the drunken second mate of the ill-fated Castonia. He cut it short. The very vulgarity of such a name for a woman made it unfit for the ears of a good girl.

Their spell of emotion was broken. They stared at each other a moment—both a little amazed at themselves, at the wonderful knowledge of love, a little fearful lest they had been too forward.

"I must go and—" She could think of no excuse to offer. But she must go. She went toward the passage.

When she was out of sight Dan stood a minute or two, his eyes turned toward the shore, where stood the wretched shacks of the beach-combers, shorter by one than they had been but a little over twenty-four hours ago.

He had gone through a lot for twenty-four hours. He was far from sure that he had got much nearer the goal of success and happiness than he had been the day before the eventful yesterday when first he had seen the girl with whose lot and life his own had become so quickly bound up.

But he suddenly perceived one thing. Whether he succeeded or failed, whether he were ever happy again or not—he was a different and a bigger man than the poor wreck who had lived in the shack now battered to the crude driftwood of which it had been made.

Perhaps these new circumstances would defeat him. Perhaps they would defeat any man. They would not defeat the man these hours had made him without a fight the man he had been could not even have begun.

He turned then and went through the after passage. The first bitter struggle must be that of making himself obey the unreasoning order of his superior. Halfway through he paused, struck with a fresh idea.

According to the information Mr. Edward had furnished him, the No. 4 hatch was already completely loaded. It had been that fact and the fact that the cargo aboard it ran light for its bulk which had gone into his calculations to cause him to put the heavier casks into the one next it.

Though he had not measured himself, or got a look at the markings on the bow and stern of the ship, he had thought there was the barely perceptible forward tilt of the deck to confirm Edwards's information.

But it might be wrong. If the No. 4 compartment was not full, the putting of this cargo into No. 3 was error enough to make any skipper furious.

Dan ground his teeth. He suspected Edwards the more since the man had come out of the captain's room as Hope came to deliver his tirade of abuse. If the second mate had fooled him—well, there are ways of passing abuse along down the line. Just now Dan was not preparing any speeches to compare with the one he had had to hear. He was clenching his fists.

But Dan was not to gain immediate knowledge as to the exact extent of the second mate's honesty or dishonesty for a while. He scented trouble the instant his eyes ran around the little knots of idle seamen sitting or sprawling on the edge of the open hatch or the cover of the closed one behind it. They looked as if they were setting themselves for some preconcerted action at sight of him.

The big blond boatswain was facing him, sitting on the hatch that had to be opened for the transfer of the load into it. His eyes dropped before Dan uttered the command:

"Get that hatch open!"

The boatswain got to his feet, came slowly forward toward Dan.

"I said, get that hatch open." Dan halted the man's advance with the same quieter tone with which he had made stiffer every command he had had to repeat through the day. But this time the trick of voice did not bring the result.

"They ban tired," stolidly asserted the nautical equivalent of a foreman.

There was a brief silence. Dan and the big Scandinavian eyed each other without a blink in either pair of eyes.

In a way Dan understood. The men had seen his authority overridden by the one

superior authority they recognized. The extra work for them was due either to his blunder or the captain's sheer folly. It made little difference which.

He understood, but did not sympathize. No ship's officer ever sympathizes with men refusing to obey his orders.

There are but two courses open for any officer whose men refuse to obey. He can get off the ship or fight. Dan was too much an officer even to recall that he had just promised the best little girl in the world to stay. He needed no such promise to keep him for the moment. Captain Hope could not have driven him off the ship at the point of a bayonet. He did not even consider the fact that, of the score of men before him, there was hardly one who could not have killed two such men as the past year had made him.

He did wish he had a first-class automatic pistol. But there was an ax at his feet, left there carelessly, after the wedges had been knocked from the bars of the No. 3 hatch. Truth to tell, Dan's feet were there because he had seen the ax and considered its possibilities.

He stooped and picked it up so quickly that the boatswain leaped back a little. But there was little real cowardice in the crowd of husky seamen. In an instant they were all on their feet. The next instant they were rushing at Dan.

He had not time even to aim a blow with the heavy ax. He struck—struck hard enough to kill, and with little fear of doing it. It was his life or theirs, anyhow, and their lives in jeopardy from the moment they had taken his.

But the ax overshot the shoulder of the man who caught the blow of the helve, and he went down under the crash. And the handle snapped when it hit him. The splintered club left in Dan's hand was no weapon with which to face the now thoroughly infuriated sailors.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Rope's Length

by Wallace M. Sloane

HERMAN CARLSTACH often congratulated himself that the freedom of his actions was not circumscribed by family ties. Pickpockets, shoplifters, clerks and cashiers—little men dealing in little things for little stakes, might indulge in such expensive luxuries. But in big crime, as well as in big business, a little sentiment is often a dangerous thing.

To the world Carlstach was paying teller in the Hibernian National Bank. Carlstach alone knew himself for what he was: the cleverest crook that ever darkened a bank's doors. But as yet he had never swerved an inch from the beaten paths of rectitude. Honesty, with him, was the only policy. Other men's dollars—other men's thousands of dollars were as safe in his hands as in government bonds. But let the time and the occasion conspire to throw a sum that was really worth while in his hands, and the world would lose a bank teller and acquire some experience and a mystery.

The trouble was not so much in stepping away with the money: time after time he

could have left with the price of a king's ransom—as kings go nowadays—in his yellow traveling bag. His only difficulty was in escaping undetected and living forever after on the fruits of his cleverness. No one knew better than Carlstach that the game of outwitting justice was as difficult as it was ancient. He indulged in no delusions on the stupidity of the police, and what with telegraphs, wireless, extradition treaties, and the added element of chance, the points were nine to one in favor of the law.

Carlstach had a new move. It would take time and caution and infinite patience—two, or three, or maybe five years. He was in no hurry. If one's livelihood depends on grafting trifling sums, he may sometimes have to act on immature plans, or even without plans. Carlstach's living, however, was assured by his salary, and the stake against which he was playing his liberty was not trifling. He could afford to wait.

Nature had been kind in fitting him to his part. Carisford—or such part of Carisford's hundred thousand population as knew him—knew him to be a "nice, but rather unsocial fellow, though a German." What they did not know was that in his native village of Wurtenheim, Saxony, he was considered a prodigy in acting parts. However, in business as well as in cards, a good hand loses its value if shown in the wrong place in the game, and so in Carisford his talent was never known.

One afternoon he stepped out of his cage to the cigar and drink stand in the foyer of the building. The white aproned attendant mixed him a drink, saying casually:

"Saw your double in here last night, Carlstach. Thought it was you when he first came in."

"Did? Didn't shake you for a loan, I suppose, Jake?"

"No," said Jake, "but he looked like he needed it. Seedy, nutty kind of fellow—lives down on the river. Said he didn't know you. He had to tell all about his business—writing some kind of a book. After he talked two minutes I saw that he didn't look so much like you, after all."

"What did he—how did he look?"

"Tall fellow, nearly your height, but thinner, I'd say. Baggy clothes and dirty. When I told him there's a bank teller here looks like him, he lighted up and asked a hundred questions. Said he was coming round to see you."

Carlstach treated the incident with levity.

"Better watch him, Jake," he laughed. "I warn you now that I won't stand for his debts through any mistake in identity."

Thus was John Sibert introduced to Carisford and the world. Thereafter at irregular intervals Carlstach heard of him from various sources. His remarkable resemblance to the teller was noted by everyone, especially on first sight. After he had talked awhile, every one averred, the resemblance was not so marked. To all his new acquaintances he told the same story, which inevitably found its way back to Carlstach.

Still the paying teller refused to take his double seriously.

"Look out," he would laugh, in reply to these stories, "and don't let him touch you up. I'll not pay his debts."

The Hibernian National Bank had few clients down the river: the scattered denizens of that section, who were mostly fishermen and lumber jacks, had other uses for their money. But it had a few, and they were led to tell more about the mysterious Sibert. From their accounts he lived in a houseboat and was writing a book on "The Psychology of Crime." Sometimes he would write all night; sometimes, for days and nights at a time. Again he would disappear for days and hunt up material for his work.

"I'd like to see him," said Carlstach, becoming interested.

"He'd like to see you too—I heard him say so. But he doesn't like to be bothered with other people much. He's an unsocial crank till he gets started on some of his cranky ideas."

The following week Carlstach's wishes were almost fulfilled. Almost. Sibert called to see him at the bank, but it happened that the teller was out. The visitor paused a minute and glanced into the office of the president.

"Hullo! Not back already?" said the

president, and then he saw his mistake. He recognized the man as Carlstach's double, of whom he had heard so much recently. He was mildly curious.

"I was looking for Mr. Carlston."

"Carlstach," corrected the president. "Mr. Carlstach's not in town. He left to see a sick aunt yesterday. I had a wire from him last night that she was dead and he was staying for the funeral."

The visitor entered and introduced himself. The president acknowledged the introduction, but without going to the trouble of reciprocating with his own name and business. And while John Sibert talked his "theories" and the "psychological aspects of crime," the president sat summing him up. His remarkable resemblance to Carlstach gradually faded: after all, the president thought, the resemblance between the two men was largely superficial.

Sibert was stooped, shambling, inefficient. His skin was overcast with a pallid, unhealthy hue, contrasting keenly with the teller's fresh, clear complexion; and behind his double-lensed glasses glowed the sunken eyes of a fanatic. And he talked with an aspirate wheeze, as if his vocal chords were paralyzed.

"Say," he broke off, "where's the president? I want to see him."

"I'm the president," said that dignitary. "What can I do for you?"

"You the president? Well, it seems that with all this money—thousands of dollars—you'd need a detective in the building."

"Millions," the president corrected him. "We have eight millions here, but we already have a detective. Sorry."

"Not that I need the money," pursued Sibert—"now. My folks sent me money from England till the war started, and I have enough for several months yet. My tastes are simple."

"Sorry, but we have a detective." The president rose and opened the wicket gate, signifying that the interview was at an end.

Sibert left, but he did not take his dismissal as final. Twice again (both times in the evening) he accosted the president on the street and sought to discuss his theories on the psychology of crime. The banker saw no reason to reverse his original opinion that the man was a harmless but annoying crank. It was evident also that he had not given up his hope of becoming the bank's detective. He even visited the detective, McKenna, after banking hours and asked to be made his assistant.

"We know where you live; if we need you, we'll call you," said McKenna.

From all these sources Carlstach heard of the man whom people at first sight mistook for himself. He met the whole thing as a great hoax and was inclined to believe (he said laughingly) that he was being made the butt of a practical joke for the amusement of the fellows. However, when the president, cashier, and detective of the bank, and other reputable citizens, vouched for the existence of Sibert, he dropped his levity. There must be something to it after all.

A few days later he rushed into the bank with the news:

"I've seen him. Met him on the street going to my rooms. He's a nut, a triple-dyed old fool, and the next fellow that says I look like him, I'll cave his face in. Understand?"

"Carl's right," said the cashier. "After you get acquainted with him and hear him talk, you see the difference. If you could see them together, I bet there'd hardly be any resemblance at all."

But they were never seen together, and for a very cogent reason. Carlstach was Sibert. Carlstach and Sibert were one and the same man.

II.

It was late in the afternoon and Carlstach in his apartment was preparing for his evening constitutional. Sometimes he made it a walk; sometimes, a ride. But never did he hold to a beaten path. He would thread the crowded streets at times; again he would speed over the boulevard or walk leisurely through the suburbs. He had no family, no intimate friends, and no regular place for eating. He might remain away a day or a week, and his absence would hardly be noted.

On this particular afternoon he took a zigzag course through town, and twilight

found him in the questionable east end of Carisford, sparsely settled by negroes. Four blocks to the north lay the river. He turned as if to return home, but walked down a steep declivity to the river bank. There in the semi-darkness he reversed his coat, crumpled his hat and, with a few deft touches known only to an artist in make-up, affected a transformation in his appearance.

A little more than a mile down the river was the houseboat. All the way it was dark and he ran little danger of being detected. This was perhaps the least frequented of any of the eight or ten ways which he used in going to and from his retreat.

Twenty minutes later he let himself into the houseboat, where he lighted a candle and started a fire in the cookstove. The house was scantily furnished with a bed, a dresser with a broken mirror, a table, writing paper, and a great number of books. He was careful to see that the house was comfortably if not elegantly furnished and that it was plentifully stocked with reading matter, for he expected some day to make it his permanent home, at least for several months.

While the stove heated he changed clothes and added the finishing touches to his toilet. His greatest strength was in assuming a character other than his own, which he did with such intensity that he almost forgot his own identity and lived in the life of the character he was trying to portray. But next to that was his genius for make-up. What preparation he used is not known, but his complexion assumed a pale, sickly cast, and his eyes became sunken and animated like a madman's. Herman Carlstach, banker, emerged into John Sibert, student of crime.

After a repast of bacon, eggs and black coffee (the larder was well filled) he drew out his manuscript on "The Psychology of Crime." He was really interested in writing, and had actually written six chapters. But to-night he wrote nothing. A great plan was moving, half formed, in his inner consciousness.

He did not immediately set himself to working it out. Great inspirations are not forced, but are born full grown in a happy mind—the day dreams of genius. Accordingly he let himself revel in the joys of a creator.

For he was a creator—not a creator of characters in fiction or drama, but a creator, like God, of a living man, whom people heard and saw and felt with their corporeal senses. He had created John Sibert exactly as he would kill Herman Carlstach. But others would never know that the soul of Carlstach still lived in the body of Sibert.

And he had made Sibert real; he had personality, tastes, habits of his own. Except for a superficial physical resemblance, he was as widely separated from Carlstach as one man could be from another. Carlstach had seen to that. Carlstach—when he went to church—attended the First Congregational; Sibert went every other Sunday to the All-Souls' Mission.

He had actually made Sibert appear at the bank while he was absent from the city with an alibi as good as the telegraph company can produce. That was a happy thought. He really went to a distant part of the State to the bedside of a fictitious aunt and wired the president of her death. Then he boarded a fast train for home and four hours later was walking the streets of Carisford as John Sibert. The next morning he called on the president.

Out of this incident in the joint life of Carlstach and Sibert grew Carlstach's next move. He would introduce Sibert to the police and thus further establish him as a separate identity. The following week he would take his annual vacation, and with his knowledge of the police courts, it would not be difficult to put the thing across.

After a few minutes of perfecting his plans, John Sibert, stooped, sallow, and with sunken eyes burning with the fires of fanaticism, ambled off to the city to wheeze into unwilling ears his theories on crime.

Carlstach was to begin his vacation Monday morning at Mountainboro, forty-five miles north of Carisford. If the fishing was good, the cashier promised to join him early in the week.

Early Monday morning Carlstach left in his roadster, and before noon registered at the Mountainboro Inn. It was early in the

season, but the place was already swarming with sportsmen. He strolled out to take a look at the mountain streams. Later in the afternoon he returned to the inn and inquired if one could have any luck fishing at night. The affable clerk answered in the affirmative.

"Guess I'll try it to-night, then," said Carlstach.

He went out and sent a telegram to the cashier:

Fishing to-night. Will write my luck to-morrow.

At the post-office he posted a letter to the same address, purporting to tell of his experiences the previous night. He was informed that the mail for Carisford had already gone and that his letter would not be postmarked and sent away till morning, which suited his purposes excellently. Then, with his car replenished with gasoline and oil, he started toward the mountains. But once outside the village, he headed directly south.

Four hours later John Sibert was taken up in Carisford for public drunkenness. He was indignant and loquacious. He put up a cash bond, but insisted that that was unnecessary, as nothing short of steel bars could keep him out of court the following morning. He had important disclosures to make—startling disclosures. If they would send for the president and cashier of the Hibernian National Bank, they would find that he was of good character. But wait till morning, and the town would wake up to a sensation in its criminal circles!

The morning papers played up his arrest with a humorous story. His promised sensation might have been only drunken gibberish, but several Carisford citizens elected to be present. Carisford was not so large or so old that it was calloused with sensation, and it could not be denied that a wave of petty crime, mysterious in origin, was sweeping the city.

Arraigned for trial, the culprit turned from the judge and addressed the spectators dramatically:

"I have made an epoch-making discovery: the origin and the cause of crime. It is a disease—a disease of the mind, as typhus and cancer are diseases of the body. It is—"

"Order! Silence!" commanded the court.

"—caused by a germ—a germ in the brain which I have discovered, precisely as fevers and diphtheria are caused by germs in the body. It is—"

"Ten dollars and costs," snapped the judge. "And officer, has the prisoner any visible means of support?"

The officer knew of none, but a boat-owner present volunteered information that the prisoner had a fish-monger's license. Sibert, evidently a man of pride, denied the allegation bitterly. He was no fisher or fish peddler; he was a gentleman with a private income investigating along unusual lines of science and philosophy. An examination of the city's books, however, disclosed the humiliating fact that the prisoner *did* have such a license. Carlstach had seen to that. It would never do to have Sibert suspected of preying on the city for subsistence.

"Ten dollars and costs," repeated the judge. "And I'd advise you to study fish more and crime less. There's more money in fish."

"Ten dollars?" cried the prisoner, and then laughed as if at a huge joke. "Why, judge, can't you see—haven't any of you gentlemen caught on yet? Don't you know who I am? I—I'm"—dramatically—"I'm Herman Carlstach."

"Your Honor," explained the arresting officer, "this nut has been told that he looks like Mr. Carlstach of the—of one of the banks."

"But I am—don't you see?" he cried, and attempted to straighten up and change his voice from a weak wheeze to Carlstach's easy, natural baritone.

The cashier of the Hibernian National, Mr. Hood, who had started on his two weeks' leave of absence that morning, was present. Like many others, he was curious about Sibert's sensational disclosures. When he heard the paying teller's name brought into the affair, he rose and addressed the judge:

"I know both these men, Carlstach and Sibert. To my certain knowledge, Carlstach is now at Mountainboro, forty-five

miles distant. I had a telegram from him last night, and I have just now received a letter that he mailed this morning. I'm to join him to-night."

So the trial came to an end, as happy a farce as one might hope to see on a mid-winter's night. John Sibert, still declaring angrily that he was Carlstach and expatiating broadly on his germ theory of crime, left the room. An hour later he crept back to his car.

The roads were good, and the car was geared for speed. So when the cashier arrived at Mountainboro in the evening, Carlstach was coming out of the woods with a string of fish—fish that he had bought of a native fisherman.

The cashier had a funny yarn to tell about Carlstach's double, Sibert, getting drunk in order to pull off his sensational germ theory of crime in public, and finally declaring that he was Herman Carlstach himself.

"The old scoundrel!" burst out Carlstach.

"Don't worry, Carl; he didn't find any disciples. The old fool even tried to talk like you, but he couldn't get above that throaty whisper of his. He's a harmless old crank."

Still Carlstach delayed executing his great plan. The time was not yet ripe. Sibert must not only be accepted as a separate identity; he must become in his small way an integral part of the city's life. In time he would be regarded in a matter of course way; men would know him as a harmless crank. They would have no more interest in his coming or going, and would remember him only when they saw him. Then—

If Carlstach ever sought to soothe his conscience over the deed that he would some day commit, he did it by reflecting on his physical condition. With the slightest exposure he was subject to coughs and colds, and he told himself that he would ultimately have to seek a high, dry climate. Sometimes he feared that his voice was failing, and Sibert's constant throaty whisper kept his throat strained and inflamed.

But his conscience needed little soothing, and he reveled in the joys of another actor, a master strategist, and a creator. A little more time and patience and caution—there must be no loose threads.

III.

THE time was ripe. It was two years since John Sibert's modest debut in Carisford, and in his humble stratum of society he held a place as substantial as Carlstach occupied in his own circles. It was known that the well-groomed, practical teller knew the shabby, crochety fisherman. Occasionally he spoke of seeing Sibert on the streets or at his apartments. With these chance meetings sufficiently emphasized, he could reasonably hope that good men with treacherous memories would recall seeing them on the street together.

One dismal February morning Carlstach arrived at the bank and went about his duties as usual. But to Carlstach it was no ordinary day. He did not expect ever to enter the bank's doors again as an employee. As Sibert, he would continue his infrequent visits; he might even, at some future time, deposit small sums of the stolen money.

He thrilled at the thought. Crook he was—as big a crook as ever breathed prison air, but he was also an artist with a creative joy in his work. He would rest in safety under the very noses of the bloodhounds of the law; he would even join in the pursuit. It was something to be able to drop life at will and yet live on as another man. Perhaps, he told himself, he had made a mistake in not going on the stage: he might have become the greatest actor of all time.

At noon he went out to lunch, but in reality he spent his half hour shopping. Toward the middle of the afternoon a delivery boy from a down-town department store appeared at the bank with a box for Mr. Carlstach.

"What do you mean? I told them to send it to my apartment," Carlstach said irritably.

The boy said that he was working under orders, and that he had been instructed to deliver the parcel at the bank.

"Aw, it's not the kid's fault," cut in the teller from the cage next to Carlstach's.

"Very well; hand it here," said Carlstach.

"Shirts," he explained briefly to his fellow teller. He untied the box, which might have held a dozen shirts, but which in reality held only one. He held it up for the inspection of his coworker, carelessly dropping the box to the floor.

"A dozen of that?" laughed the other teller. "You're going strong for colors in your old age."

Carlstach chuckled, carelessly laid the shirt down on a vacant place on his counter, and went on with his work. It was almost time for closing. The tin box, in which he carried money to and from the vault, was at his side. But only the silver and gold and a few bills of the smaller denominations found their way into that receptacle. The remainder, by a sleight-of-hand that would have done credit to a world-renowned magician, went to the shirt box at Carlstach's feet.

His next move was pure inspiration. He had nothing to gain by it and everything to lose, but he could not resist the impulse to add a master stroke of magic—a little joke for the amusement of those whom he would leave behind. He retrieved the shirt from the counter as if to replace it in its box, but, selecting his moment, he chucked it in the tin box at his side.

Then he carried the tin box to his safe in the vault and twirled the knob. A few minutes later the great safe was locked with a time lock and would not open till morning. When it opened he could fancy the wild consternation that would reign in that unhallowed temple of Mammon, and the gaudy, many-colored shirt would only add to their chagrin. In the meanwhile, the absconder, to all intents and purposes, would lie in the river—a corpse.

He left the bank with the other teller. He was in a jocular mood. When his companion happened to jostle the shirt box, he said with mock reproval:

"Don't do that; there's big money in that box."

"What you fixing to do, Carl—marry?"

"Lord, no! Not making enough money for that. I bought these because they were cheap, and I needed the box."

Down the crowded sidewalk they walked side by side, like schoolboys out of school. Carlstach quickly looked over his shoulder and said:

"I thought I felt some one looking at the back of my head. Don't look just now, but old Sibert has been following us. He's turning aside now."

After a minute his companion also turned.

"Yes," he said, "I just caught a glimpse of him—or somebody looking like him—stepping into a store."

Which is another illusion that is not difficult to work on a crowded street—if one chooses his man and the psychological moment.

At midnight Carlstach drove to a secluded spot in the bend of the river about a mile below the houseboat. He was acquainted with the locality—a lonely place fringed with willows and canebrakes and rank weeds, and safely distant from the lights of the city. In warm weather it was sometimes frequented by "bootleggers" and gamblers, and sudden and mysterious deaths had been known to stalk in its shadows.

Now, however, Carlstach had no apprehension that anyone was there. Bankers may disregard the elements on occasion, but gamblers and hucksters of contraband whisky do not frequent open spaces when the mercury is hovering around eighteen degrees below freezing. Still, to make assurance double sure, he cut off his motor and stealthily explored the little wilderness. All was quiet; he was alone.

With a bundle from the car, he went into the thicket and dressed as Sibert. He was dressed in conventional custom-made blue serge not unlike that worn by hundreds of other young men in the city, but his blue serge would soon be reduced to ashes. He was taking no chances. It was no comfortable undertaking. He shivered, and his teeth chattered with cold, but he changed raiment to the last vestige.

"I'll be having another d— cold after this," he thought.

Then he started his car and stood aloof while it plunged into the river. It did not entirely disappear; the top showed above the water, but so much the better. On this

point he could reason with the police and foresee their conclusions. The absconder had tried unsuccessfully to hide his car before his attempt to cross the river. If he was successful in crossing, it was evidently his intention to escape on the 2:20 train from Sansford.

"So far, so good," he concluded. "And now we'll prove that I didn't get across."

He stepped into one of the boats and towed the other with him into the stream. There he overturned it and threw his hat, which would readily be recognized as his own, into the river. It was followed by his card case and bill book, from which, however, he first extracted the remaining currency. Next went the shirt box, now empty. It might also be found, and it would be supposed that its late contents were scattered in the waters. With Herman Carlstach dead, and the stolen treasures swallowed by the river, the search would come to an end.

It was 2:30 in the morning when he reached the houseboat. There be burned his clothes and threw the ashes in the river. The hundred and eight thousand dollars, carelessly tied into two bundles with newspaper covers, were wrapped up in an old fishing net and thrown into a corner of the room.

The day's work, for which he had planned two years, was done. He congratulated himself that it was done well. He might suffer the consequences of the night's exposure—he was subject to colds, anyway—but he had plenty of leisure and money for a vacation. After the interest in the absconder had faded, he would hie himself off to the mountains.

He slept late that day and woke with a headache and a racking cough. The bank had been open two hours, and detectives were long since on the job. Carlstach pictured to himself the excitement of the police, the flashing of his description over the wires, and the vigilance of officers in other cities.

He stepped out onto the narrow porch-deck. The keen wind cut into his lungs like a knife, and set him to coughing again. A fisherman drifting past with the current hailed him:

"Heard the news? Your double, that bank fellow, skipped out last night with the boodle—a half million dollars. Crossed the river a mile below here about two o'clock—they found where he tried to hide his automobile in the water. Must have caught a freight out of Sansford."

"A-ah!" exclaimed Carlstach.

"Yep, but they'll catch him. Too many telegraphs and telephones and police in the land to get away with anything like that. But—say, what's the matter with you—you look sick?"

"I am sick," said Carlstach, coughing convulsively. He hastened back to his room. He had not such a cold for years.

IV

How long he remained in bed he could not tell: it might have been minutes or weeks. As a matter of fact, it was less than one hundred hours. He awoke in pain and was conscious of long bad dreams in which he had babbled constantly and wandered over much of the earth's surface. By his side sat an old man whom he correctly guessed to be a physician.

Carlstach tried to rise, but he had no strength.

"What does this mean—how did it happen, doctor?"

"Pneumonia. One of your neighbors saw you stumble in and fall on the bed," said the doctor. "You'll be all right in a few days."

He rose and reached for his hat.

"I'll be back this afternoon. I'll send some one over to sit with you till I return."

The door was hardly closed behind the physician when the sick man came from his bed. His legs would not bear his weight and he sank to the floor. Still he went on. It might mean all that his life was worth, but he crawled, like an infant, inch by inch, to the fishing net in the corner. It was still there, every dollar of the hundred and eight thousand. Rewrapping the packages in the net, he pulled himself back to bed.

Then he was faced by another worry; he might have talked in his delirium and revealed his true identity. He would have given much to know what he had said. But here, at least, he had no cause for worry.

He *had* talked constantly, but he had talked only of his germ theory of crime. Subconsciously he had guarded his tongue in his delirium.

The neighbor came and sat with him till the doctor returned. By way of keeping up conversation he chatted about the news of the city.

"Gang's been playing poker and selling whisky down at the bend. Regular organized crime, like you read of in novels. Had three whisky barrels buried, and pumped it up like water out of a well. But they won't any more—not till the leaders get out of the chain-gang.

"And," he went on, "they've had news from Carlstach—more news than they know what to do with. He's been caught in Cleveland, Memphis, Pittsburgh and Mexico, and seen in twenty other cities. Dugan thinks— But doc told me not to talk too much."

"Go on," said Carlstach.

"Dugan thinks that maybe he was drowned—or maybe it was all a blind. But they've found an overturned boat and his hat and the shirt box that held the money. It may be a blind, as Dugan says, but they're going to dredge the river for him to-morrow."

"It's a blind—a crook's trick," said Carlstach disgustedly.

The next morning he dragged himself to the door. A mile distant, where the river turned to make its famous "bend," he could distinguish men and boats engaged in a peculiar and hopeless quest. They were fishing for his body.

He recovered slowly and his throat continued to give him pain. Occasionally the fishermen and lumberjacks along the river dropped in to see him. He was not pleased with much company, but he could not refuse them admittance. Besides, they brought newspapers and told the latest theories about the absconding teller.

From habit and precaution he continued to "make up" for the character of Sibert, but his sickness had rendered that precaution no longer necessary. His face was drawn and sallow; his eyes were sunken and feverish; his shoulders sagging and stooped. Looking into the cracked mirror on the worm-eaten dresser, he could almost believe that he really was John Sibert.

By all the rules of specific gravity, his body, if it lay in the river, should have long ago risen to the surface. Dugan had always pooh-poohed at the tell-tale flotsam, and the papers joined him in the theory that it was all a blind. And then late one afternoon the unexpected happened. In excavating and blasting out a foundation for the Walnut Street bridge, the corpse of a man was propelled to the surface.

A passing lumber jack brought the news to Carlstach.

Of course the thing was a coincidence, but to Carlstach, what a coincidence! Unidentified men will sometimes drown or get slugged and thrown in the river, and there the matter usually ends. But—while the coincidence was not so improbable—for the river to offer up a cadaver now could only be construed as a gift from the gods. With Carlstach dead and recognized, the pursuit would end.

"Did they recognize him?" asked Carlstach.

"Sure. He was in bad shape, but the bank people recognized him from his blue-serge clothes. They'd already found his card case and bill book, you know. But—"

"Go on—go on!" Carlstach said irritably.

"But he didn't drown."

"Didn't drown—how?"

"He was killed before he struck the water. His face and head was all beat in, which made it so hard to recognize him, and he was weighted down. The dynamite jarred him loose from his weights. Doc Seaver said he was dead before he ever struck the water."

"He didn't drown?" gasped Carlstach.

He turned and went back into the house-boat with a foreboding of evil. He hadn't thought of that contingency. The detectives would hardly think that a man making a successful getaway with more than a hundred thousand dollars would get in the way of a pile driver, weight himself down, and leap into the river. The police would begin an investigation, and no good ever comes of investigations—not to the enemies of justice.

He walked the room with nervous, uneven paces. Once he paused to look at his money, which he rewrapped in the fishing net and moved to another corner of the room. Carefully he went over the minutest details of his life from his first appearance in Carisford. He had never been suspected; he had even failed on one occasion to make the police believe that he was Carlstach.

"By God!" he whispered hoarsely, striking the table with the side of his clenched hand, "I *am* safe!"

The words were hardly out of his mouth when Dugan, followed by two officers in uniform, entered the room. All the men had guns. Dugan's, especially, was noticeable.

"Hands up, Sibert."

Carlstach's hand went up.

"What—what's the meaning of this, officer?"

"You're arrested for the murder of Herman Carlstach on the night of February eleventh. We've got the goods on you, Sibert, and you'd as well come clean and deliver the swag."

"The—murder of—Carlstach?"

"Sure. But I can't tell anything about it that you don't already know." He slipped the handcuffs on Carlstach's wrists and turned to the officers:

"Well, boys, turn over the place. It's hidden somewhere here."

The boys carried out instructions. They ripped the mattresses, searched the stove, tore down the book racks, pulled out drawers, pried into cans, coffee pots and flour sacks, and pried off the ceiling in places, looking for the *cached* money. Twice they moved the fishing net to pry up the planks underneath. Meantime Dugan's tongue was never still.

"You'd as well to come across, Sibert; it might go easier with you. We know all about it. Carlstach was getting away with the loot and was going to get a freight out of Sansford. Not being a riverman, he hired you to row him across. You guessed what he had in the shirt box—it was a shirt box, wasn't it?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Carlstach.

"You don't? Well, it *was* a shirt box, and *you killed Carlstach for the money!* He wasn't drowned—he was clubbed to death, weighted down, and thrown in the river. You were seen placing two boats there the evening before, and three men will swear that you rowed in that morning at two thirty. *And the tracks down on the river bank are your tracks!*"

"In my theory on the cause of crime," wheezed the prisoner, "I—"

"Cut out the nut talk," growled Dugan. "You didn't follow Carlstach and that other bank fellow on the afternoon Carlstach made his get a way, either, did you? Of course not. But the other teller got a glimpse of you turning aside into a department store. You heard Carlstach joking about the money in the box, and you guessed it wasn't all a joke. What's your theory about that?"

"I don't understand, officer."

"All right; come on."

The prisoner held back and signified his wish to take something with him.

"A fishing net? What you want with that?"

"I'm going to prove my innocence, and I want this net repaired. It will save me an extra trip to town."

"Poor nut!" commiserated Dugan. "You may die in the bughouse or you may go by the way of T.B., as your coughing seems to promise. But it's my opinoin that you'll die with a rope around your neck."

Nevertheless Dugan was human, and the prisoner was permitted to take his net. It would be taken from him at the jail.

As they approached the Hibernian National Bank the prisoner asked to be taken in to see the president. He had an important revelation to make. Carlstach was no fool, and since his arrest his mind had been preternaturally busy. As the case stood, the evidence that he had done murder was conclusive. It takes no wise man to select the lesser of two evils.

They went directly to the office of the president.

"Mr. President," said Dugan, "I have here the gay bird that flopped Carlstach. We've got enough proof on him to hang him a dozen times over, but he's cached the

coin. He'll belch it all up before we get through with him. At present I'm humoring him on the nut game. You see, he's going to seine for trout in the bathtub down at the jail."

The cashier and McKenna, the detective, hearing of Dugan's find came into the office. Now was Carlstach's chance. He realized that the game was up, and, to misquote from the poet, "Better twenty years of prison than a minute in the noose."

First he spread out the net and littered the president's desk with great rolls of currency. Then:

"Gentlemen—" he began, and paused to clear his throat. "Gentlemen—" he resumed, but did little better. His hair rose on end and a cold sweat diffused his face. The cold had permanently ruined his throat. He tried to speak naturally, but his voice came out in a hoarse, throaty whisper—the voice of Sibert. But he went on:

"Gentlemen, there's the money. But I couldn't have killed Carstach, because I am Carlstach."

"Aw, hell! With that voice?" laughed Dugan. "You tried to pull that off once before when it was only a matter of ten dollars, and now it's a matter of your neck."

"But I tell you, I *am*," he whispered hoarsely. "If you'll give me a sheet of paper, I'll show you my signature."

He wrote his name twice, but he was shaky and weak.

"That's not exactly it," he apologized. "I've been sick and nervous. But you see, it's my hand. I can explain all this till you will understand. I've been living this life —these two lives—two years. The man you found in the river wasn't I—Carlstach —at all. He's some stranger that the river gang lured down there to buy whisky or play cards and murdered for his money Can't—can't you see?"

"Another of your theories on crime," Dugan laughed ironically.

"Maybe there wasn't any resemblance between the corpse and me." Carlstach argued desperately. "You thought I was in the river—you found the hat and box I threw there—and so when he comes up, you take it for granted— Why, there are hundreds of men wear clothes like that."

"Save your theories for your book," Dugan grunted.

"But I tell you I am Ca—"

The president was becoming tired of the scene.

"This is a very good imitation," he pronounced Carlstach's writing, "but I'd say it wasn't genuine. Any clever penman might do it with a little practise. I will say further that I knew Carlstach and I know Mr. Sibert, and the idea that they are the same man is, to me, preposterous. I have frequently talked with Sibert here or on the street when Carlstach was at the bank or out of town. Further, he applied to me for a position as bank detective, and he couldn't have been detective and teller at the same time.

"Of course, with the return of our stolen money, our interest in the matter ceases, but I can't give any credence to *Dr. Jekyll* and *Mr. Hyde* stories outside of fiction. Our cashier here, Mr. Hood, also knew him."

"I was in court," said the cashier, "when this man was arraigned for drunken- away in the country. I know that. I'll swear to that."

McKenna also testified. He was honest in his belief that Sibert had once applied to him for a position as assistant detective while Carlstach was in his cage less than forty feet away. Men might have been found who would honestly swear to the best of their memories that they had seen Sibert and Carlstach together.

"Enough," said Dugan. "Come on." And he twisted the steel cuff on the prisoner's arms as a signal for motion.

"But I tell you, I am Carlstach—*I am Carlstach!*" the prisoner cried hoarsely.

They went out. And then it occurred to Carlstach that he had done his work only too well. He would never be believed, and bit by bit he had destroyed the evidence that might have saved him. Beyond a reasonable doubt, in the eyes of any ordinary jury, he had killed and robbed the absconding teller.

He shuddered, but it was not a shudder of cold. He shuddered at the thought that he would very probably hang for his own murder.

The Trail Horde

by Charles Alden Seltzer

Author of "Riddle Gawne," "Bear Hand," "Square Deal Sanderson," etc.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

NEMESIS.

WHEN Red King struck the river trail he was traveling as strongly as when he began his long race. The miles that had stretched between him and the destination at which his rider aimed had been mere play for him. By the time he reached the river trail he was warmed to his work, and his giant, spurning stride carried him along in the shade of the fringing trees at a speed that made the wind whine and moan in Lawler's ears.

But Lawler did not offer to check Red King's speed. The big horse was traveling at a pace that was all too slow for Lawler, now in the clutch of that passion which for many months had been smoldering within him. He was leaning a little forward in the saddle, riding the red horse as he had ridden few times; and then only in sport.

In Lawler's eyes was still that intense light that had been in them when he had been watching Shorty as the latter had been relating what had happened during the night and the morning.

And yet Lawler betrayed no sign of excitement. His face was pale, and his lips were stiff and white; but his muscles were tense, steady, and his brain clear.

He knew what to expect from Antrim. If Antrim expected him to come to his cabin, Antrim would be ready for him. He might expect craft and cunning from the outlaw—an ambuscade, a trap—anything but the cold, sheer courage that would be required for him to face an enemy upon equal terms.

And so as Lawler rode he kept an alert eye upon the coverts and the shelters, upon the huge rocks that littered the sides of the trail, upon the big trees that Red King flashed past.

Nothing happened. And Red King thundered down the trail where it doubled half a mile from the Dickman cabin, and swept out upon the level that surrounded the place, his speed unslackened, his rider still urging him on.

Lawler had forgotten Shorty. A mile behind him the giant's horse labored, making better time on the level river trail than he had made over the plains. But Lawler did not even think of Shorty. His brain was upon the work that was before him, his thoughts were definitely centered upon Antrim and the Circle L men that Antrim and his men had killed. It was concentration of a sinister character that had seized Lawler, and in it was a single purpose, a single determination—to kill Antrim.

He saw the cabin as he crossed the level—a patch of bare, sandy earth surrounding it; and the other buildings, with no sign of life near them. His gaze swept the corral, and he saw no horse in it. As he guided Red King toward the cabin he peered vainly for sight of Antrim's horse.

Not a living thing was in sight. The buildings were silent, seemingly deserted. And the atmosphere of the place seemed to be pregnant with a lurking threat, a hint of hidden danger.

He grinned as he plunged Red King to the door of the cabin—a grin which meant that he expected Antrim would be waiting for him, but which expressed his contempt of ambuscades and traps.

As he slipped from Red King he drew his pistol and lunged forward, bringing up

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against the cabin door and sending it crashing inward, against the wall.

He halted just inside the door, his pistol rigid in his right hand, which was pressed tightly to his side; for directly in front of him, standing, his arms folded over his chest, was Antrim, a huge, venomous grin on his face.

"Well, you got here, Lawler," he said huskily. "You come a runnin' didn't you? Well, I had your cattle run off, an' I burned your buildin's. What are you aimin' to do about it?"

Lawler did not move. He might have killed Antrim, for the man's weapon was in the holster at his hip—Lawler could see the stock sticking above the leather. He had expected Antrim would be in the cabin when he opened the door; he anticipated that the outlaw would shoot on sight, and he had been prepared to do the same.

But there was something in the outlaw's manner, in the cold, measured tone of his voice, in his nonchalant disregard of the pistol in Lawler's hand that brought a swift suspicion into Lawler's mind. It was a presentiment that the outlaw was not alone in the cabin; that he had carefully laid his plans, and that they did not include a gun fight in which he would have to face Lawler upon equal terms.

Lawler did not look around. He kept his gaze unwaveringly upon the outlaw, knowing that if other men were in the cabin with him they were waiting for Antrim to give the word to shoot him. Otherwise, they would have shot him down when he had burst into the cabin.

"Not sayin' anything, eh?" jeered Antrim. "Well, come a shootin'. You bust in here, seein' red, with a gun in your hand; an' then stand there, like you was wonderin' if you was welcome."

He peered close at Lawler, his eyes narrowing with suspicion, and then, finally, with savage amusement.

"I reckon I ketch on," he sneered. "You know there's some one here with me, an' that they've got you covered. I know you, an' I knowed you'd come rushin' in here, just like you did, killin' mad. Bah! Did you think I'd give you a chance, you short-horned maverick!

"There's Selden behind that curtain, there—back of the cupboard. An' Krell watchin' you from the door of that room, on the side. They've got you between them, an' if you bat on eyewinker they'll down you. I'm goin' to gas to you—I'm goin' to tell you what I think of you for ropin' me an' draggin' be back to Willets, to show to the damned yaps on the station platform. An' after that I'm goin' to hog-tie you, an'—ah!"

Antrim's exclamation was a mere gasp. It escaped his lips as Lawler jumped backward, landing outside the door, overbalanced, trying to stand upright while he snapped a shot at Antrim.

Antrim, however, had reached for his gun. It came out before Lawler could steady himself, and Lawler saw it. Lawler saw the weapon belch smoke and fire as it cleared Antrim's hip; he felt a shock as the bullet struck him; felt still another sear his flesh near the arm as he let his own pistol off. He saw the outlaw plunge forward and fall prone, his arms outstretched.

From inside the cabin came the sounds of steps—Antrim's confederates, Lawler supposed. He heard them approach the door and he leaped, swaying a little, toward the corner of the cabin nearest him. He had reached it, had just dodged behind it, when Selden and Krell rushed out. At the same instant Shorty thundered up, slipped out of the saddle and ran toward Lawler, drawing his guns.

Shorty had approached the cabin from the rear, having cut across the space behind the bunk-houses when he heard the shooting. He could not be seen by Selden and Krell as they plunged out of the door, but he had seen Lawler when the latter dodged behind the corner of the cabin, and as he ran toward Lawler he drew his guns.

As yet Shorty had seen no one but Lawler. He supposed Antrim and Lawler had exchanged shots and he knew Lawler had been hit—his swaying as he came around the corner of the cabin proved it. Knowing something of the terrible rage that had seized the man, he suspected Lawler had burst into the cabin, recklessly exposing himself to Antrim's fire.

And as Shorty ran toward the spot where

Lawler was standing, he expected to see Antrim follow, to complete his work.

Within a dozen feet of Lawler he halted, facing the corner. He had not long to wait. For Selden and Krell, guns in hand, appeared almost instantly—their faces hideous with passion. As they rushed around the corner they saw Shorty.

They saw Shorty first, because Shorty dominated the scene. A gun in each hand, he made a terrible figure. His eyes were blazing with the cold rage that had seized him at sight of Lawler, wounded—for Lawler was now leaning against the wall of the cabin, and his gun had dropped from his hand.

The unexpected appearance of Shorty startled Krell and Seldon. Surprise showed in their faces as they paused for an infinitesimal space and looked at him.

And then their guns roared.

Shorty, however, had anticipated them. His guns went off simultaneously, slightly in advance of theirs, belching fire and smoke in a continuous stream.

Shorty did not seem to be hit by the bullets from the guns of the outlaws; he seemed to pay no attention to them whatever.

But the outlaws ceased shooting. Krell staggered, his guns dropped from his hands, and he stood, for an instant, looking foolishly at Shorty, his face becoming ashen. Then, without uttering a word, he lunged gently forward, his legs doubling at the knees, and sank into the dust in a huddled heap.

Seldon had ben hit hard, too. The shock of Shorty's first bullet striking him had turned him partially around, so that his left side was toward Shorty. He had lurched forward a little, and was turning, trying to use the gun in his left hand, when another bullet struck him. He grunted, stood slowly erect, and then fell backward stiffly.

Shorty ran to him and to Krell, scanning their faces with savage intentness. When he saw that neither of them would bother him again, he leaped around the corner of the cabin and cautiously peered into the doorway.

He saw Antrim stretched out on the floor of the cabin, face down and motionless. He stepped into the cabin, turned the outlaw over, grinned saturninely, then went out to where Lawler stood.

When he reached the corner he saw Lawler bending over, picking up the pistol that had dropped from his hand a few seconds before. Lawler's face was pale, but he grinned broadly at Shorty as the latter came up to him.

"Shorty," he said, "I saw you, but I couldn't throw in with you. I reckon Antrim hit me mighty hard. In my right shoulder. I was trying to change my gun to the other hand when I dropped it. I didn't seem to be able to get it again—just then." He grinned. "Lucky you came, Shorty," he added jocosely.

"I reckon it's lucky I'm here right now! You're hit bad, Lawler!"

He led Lawler into the cabin, where he tore away the latter's shirt and exposed the wound—high up on the shoulder.

After a swift examination, Shorty exclaimed with relief:

"It ain't so bad after all. She bored through that big muscle. Must have struck like a batterin' ram. No wonder you was weak an' dizzy for a minute or so. There's a hole big enough to stick your hand through. But she ain't dangerous, boss!"

Shorty had not been touched by the bullets the outlaws had sent at him. He was energy personified. He got water, bathed the wound in Lawler's shoulder, bandaged it, and at last grinned widely as Lawler got up, saying he felt better.

A little later they went out and mounted their horses. Lawler was pale, though he sat steadily in the saddle; and Shorty, big, exuding elation, grinned broadly as he glanced back at the cabin as they rode away from it.

They rode up the river trail; Shorty expressing his elation by emitting low chuckles of grim mirth; Lawler silent, riding steadily, his gaze straight ahead.

It took them long to reach the point on the plains where the trails diverged. And then Lawler spoke:

"Shorty, you go back to Hamlin's and tell mother I killed Antrim. You needn't mention this scratch I've got."

"Where you goin'?" demanded Shorty.

"Shorty," said Lawler evenly, "you do as I say."

"I'll be damned if I do!" declared Shorty, his face flushing. "That's the kind of palaver Blackburn handed me when he sent me after Caldwell's outfit, makin' me miss the big scrap. I ain't missin' nothin' else. If this thing is to be a clean-up, I'm goin' to be right close when the cleanin' is bein' done!

"I'm stayin' right here, as long as you stay! An' when you git goin', little Shorty will be taggin' along, achin' to salivate some more of the scum that's been makin' things howl in these parts. Get goin' where you're goin', Lawler!"

Shorty had not told Lawler all he knew of the wound in Lawler's shoulder. He knew that Lawler had lost much blood, and that he was losing more constantly; and that nothing but the man's implacable courage was keeping him up. And he did not intend to desert him.

Lawler laughed. But he said nothing as he urged Red King over the Willets trail, riding at a fair pace, not so steady in the saddle as he had been. His face was chalk white, but there was a set to his lips that told Shorty there was no use in arguing.

Shorty permitted Lawler to hold the lead he had taken when they reached the Willets trail. But Shorty kept a vigilant eye upon the big horse and his rider as they went over the plains toward town. Twice Shorty saw Lawler reel in the saddle, and both times Shorty urged his horse forward to be close to him when he fell. But each time Lawler stiffened and rode onward—silent, grimly determined, with Shorty riding behind him, watching him with awed admiration.

Lawler had not mentioned the purpose of his ride to town, and Shorty was lost in a maze of futile conjecture. Shorty knew, however, that a man in Lawler's condition would not ride to town to gratify a whim; and the longer he watched Lawler the deeper became his conviction that another tragedy was imminent.

For there was something in Lawler's manner, in the steady, unflagging way he rode; in the set of his head and the cold gleam of his eyes, that suggested more of the kind of violence in which both had participated at the Dickman cabin.

The sun was low when Lawler and Shorty rode into town—Lawler riding ahead, as he had ridden all along; Shorty a few yards behind him, keenly watching him.

There were many men on the street; for word had been brought in regarding the big fight between the Circle L outfit and the rustlers—and a doctor had gone, summoned to the Hamlin cabin by a wild rider on a jaded horse—and Willets's citizens were eagerly curious. And when they saw Lawler coming, swaying in the saddle as he rode, they began to run toward him.

However, they were brought to a halt by Shorty—who waved a hand savagely at them, his face expressing a cold intolerance that warned them away. And so they retreated to the sidewalks, wonderingly, to watch Lawler and Shorty as they rode down the street—Lawler looking neither to the right or left, but keeping his gaze straight ahead as though in that direction lay what he had come to seek.

Shorty's eyes gleamed with understanding when he saw Lawler halt Red King in front of the building in which was Warden's office. He was out of the saddle before Lawler clambered slowly out of his, and he stood near as Lawler walked to the door of the building and began to mount the stairs—going up slowly, swaying from side to side and placing his hands against the wall on either side of him for support.

And when Lawler finally reached the top of the stairs and threw open the door of Warden's office, Shorty was so close to him that he might have touched his shoulder.

Warden was sitting at his desk when Lawler opened the door, and he continued to sit there—staring hard at Lawler as the latter swayed across the room to bring up with a lurch against Warden's desk, his hands grasping its edge.

"Warden," said Lawler—and Shorty marveled at the cold steadiness of his voice—"I have just killed Antrim. Antrim's men ran off three thousand head of my cattle and killed about twenty of my men—five at the Circle L, and the rest in

a fight on the plains not far from the Two Bar. Antrim burned my buildings. Twenty-five thousand dollars for the buildings, and ninety thousand for the cattle. That's a total of one hundred and fifteen thousand—not to mention my men.

"I've got no proof that you were implicated in the deal; but I'm convinced you planned it—that you got Antrim and his gang to do the work. That evidence doesn't go in law, though, Warden—and you know it. But it's enough for the kind of law that I am representing right now. It's this!"

He drew his gun with his left hand, taking it from the waistband of his trousers, where he had placed it when he had picked it up at the Dickman cabin, and held it on the desk top, so that its dark muzzle gaped at Warden.

For an instant Warden sat, staring in dread fascination into the muzzle of the weapon, his face dead white, his eyes wide with fear, naked, cringing. Then he spoke, his voice hoarse and quavering:

"This is murder, Lawler!"

"Murder, Warden?" jeered Lawler. "One of my men was worth a dozen of you!"

Lawler laughed—a sound that brought an ashen pallor to Warden's face; then he straightened, and turned, to face Shorty.

He lurched to Shorty's side, drew out one of the latter's big guns, and tossed it upon the desk within reach of Warden's hand.

"I gave Antrim the first shot, Warden," he said; "I gave him his chance. I didn't murder him, and I won't murder you. Take that gun and follow me to the street. There's people there. They'll see that it's a square deal. You're a sneaking polecat, Warden; but you—I'm going to give you—"

Lawler paused; his knees sagged. He tried to straighten, failed. And while both men watched him—Shorty with eyes that were terrible in their ineffable sympathy and impotent wrath; Warden in a paralysis of cold terror—Lawler lurched heavily against the desk and slid gently to the floor, where he leaned, his eyes closed, against the desk, motionless, unconscious.

Silently, his eyes aflame with passion, Shorty leaped to the desk and snatched the gun that Lawler had placed at Warden's hand. With almost the same movement he pulled Warden out of his chair and threw him against the rear wall of the room. He was after the man like a giant panther; catching him by the throat with his left hand as he reached him, crushing him against the wall so heavily that the impact jarred the building; while he savagely jammed the muzzle of the pistol deep into the man's stomach, holding it there with venomous pressure, while his blazing eyes bored into Warden's with ferocious malignance.

"Damn you, Warden," he said hoarsely; "I ought to kill you!"

He shook Warden with his left hand, as though the man were a child in his grasp, sinking his fingers into the flesh of his neck until Warden's eyes popped out and his face grew purple. Then he released him so suddenly that Warden sank to his knees on the floor, coughing, laboring, straining to draw his breath.

He stood, huge and menacing, until Warden got to his feet and staggered weakly to the chair in which he had been sitting when Lawler entered; and then he leaned over the desk and peered into Warden's face.

"It ain't my game, damn you! If it was I'd choke the gizzard out of you an' chuck you out of a window! I reckon I've got to save you for Lawler—if he gets over this. If he don't, I'm comin' for you!"

He holstered his gun, stooped, lifted Lawler, and gently swung him over his shoulder; and without glancing back at Warden, strode to the stairs, out into the street, and made his way to the Willets Hotel, a crowd of curious citizens at his heels.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE WAITING.

DELLA WHARTON had watched from one of the front windows of her room in the hotel. She had seen Lawler and Shorty ride down the street to Warden's

office; she had seen Shorty come out carrying Lawler; and she heard Shorty's steps on the stairs as he brought his burden up, preceded by the proprietor.

She was standing in the hall when the proprietor and Shorty reached the upper landing, and when the proprietor looked inquiringly at her she silently motioned toward her room, and stood aside as Shorty entered and placed his limp burden upon the bed.

Della instantly took charge of Lawler. Which means that she set seriously to work with him, while Shorty stood by, his arms folded over his huge chest, one hand caressing his chin, grimly watching.

Shorty continued to watch. For many days he stood guard over his "boss"—a somber, brooding figure, silent, imperturbable. When he moved it was only to walk slowly up and down the hall, or downstairs to take his meals. At other times he would stand at the bedside looking down at Lawler's closed eyes and ashen face; or he would sit on the edge of a chair and watch him, intently, with stoic calm, his face as expressionless as a stone image.

Mrs. Lawler came early the next morning—after the doctor had told Della and Shorty there was a fighting chance for Lawler; and Ruth Hamlin. Shorty's eyes grew moist as he watched Mrs. Lawler and Ruth as they stood by the unconscious man; and his voice was low and gruff when, during the day Mrs. Lawler asked him for particulars.

"That's all there was to it, ma'am," he said in conclusion. "The boss oughtn't to have busted in that shack like he did, knowin' Antrim was there—an' giving the scum a chance to take the first shot at him. But he done it. An' he done the same thing to Warden — offered him the first shot. Ma'am, I never heard the beat of it! I've got nerve—as the sayin' is. But—Lordy!"

And Shorty became silent again.

For three days Lawler remained unconscious. And during that interval there were no disturbing sounds to agitate the deathlike quiet of the sick-room. Riders glided into town from various points of the compass and stepped softly as they moved in the street—whispering or talking in low tones. The universal topic was the fight, and Lawler's condition. On the second day of Lawler's unconsciousness a keen-eyed man stepped off the eastbound train and made his way to the hotel.

"I'm Metcalf of the *News*, in the capital," he told Keller, the proprietor. And Keller quietly ushered the newspaperman up-stairs, where the latter stood for a long time until Mrs. Lawler opened the door of the sick-room for him. Metcalf entered, looked down at Lawler, and then drew Shorty aside where, in a whispered conversation he obtained the particulars of the fight and the wounding of Lawler. He took the westbound train that night.

A pall seemed to have settled over Willets. The atmosphere was tense, strained. Riders from Caldwell's ranch, from Sigmund's, from Lester's—and from other ranches came in; and important-looking men from various sections of the State alighted from the trains at the station and lingered long in the dingy foyer of the hotel.

One of these was recognized by Keller as McGregor, secretary of the State Central Committee of Lawler's party. And Keller noted that McGregor wore a worried look, and that he scowled continually.

Willets waited; the riders who came into town waited; it seemed to the residents of Willets that the whole State waited, with the collective gaze of its citizens upon the little room in the hotel where a man lay, fighting for his life.

Shorty waited—still silent, the somber, brooding light in his eyes; his jaws set a little tighter, his eyes filled with a deeper glow. Shorty said no word to any man regarding the deadly intention that reigned in his heart. He merely waited, watching Lawler, grimly determined that if Lawler died he would keep his promise to "come for" Warden.

But Shorty would not have found Warden in town. On the night of the shooting Warden had taken the westbound train, and the next day he was closeted with the Governor and Hatfield—the three of them sitting in the Governor's office, where, their faces pale, though expressing no regret,

they sat and talked of the fight and conjectured over its probable consequences.

Singleton stayed close to the Two Diamond; and after the second day, Della Wharton rode to the ranch and sat brooding over the failure of her plans. When Lawler had been brought into the hotel she had entertained a hope that the situation might be turned to her advantage.

But there had been something in Ruth Hamlin's clear, direct eyes that had convinced her of the futility of attempting to poison her mind against Lawler by mentioning her stay in the line cabin with the cattleman. She saw faith in Ruth's eyes—complete, disconcerting; and it had made her feel inferior, unworthy, cheap, and inconsequential.

On the fourth day Lawler regained consciousness. The doctor had told them all that the crisis was at hand; that if the fever broke, marking the end of the delirium which had seized him, he would awaken normal mentally, though inevitably weak. But if the fever did not break there would be no hope for him.

Mrs. Lawler, Ruth, and Shorty were in the room with Lawler when he opened his eyes. For a long time the three stood, breathlessly watching as Lawler lay, staring in bewilderment at the ceiling, at the walls, and out of the windows, through which came a soft, subdued light.

And then Lawler raised his head a trifle, saw them all, and smiled. The clear light of reason was in his eyes.

"Mother, Ruth, and Shorty," he said, weakly smiling. "I've known for a long time that you were her. But I couldn't let you know. Mother and Ruth — and Shorty," he repeated. And then, in a lower voice, that trailed off into a murmur as he closed his eyes and appeared to be falling to sleep: "Good old Shorty!"

Ruth and Mrs. Lawler were clasped in each other's arms, joy unutterable in their eyes. It was some time before they turned to look at Shorty.

The tawny giant was standing near the foot of the bed. His lips were quivering, his eyes were wet, and his whole body seemed to be racked with emotion that he could not suppress. He was making an heroic effort, though—an effort that made the cords of his neck stand out lividly; that swelled his muscles into knotty bunches.

"Damn it!" he growled, as he turned his head away from Ruth and Mrs. Lawler, so that they might not see what was reflected there; "there ain't no sense of him gettin' mush-headed about it!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE NOMINATION.

IT was many days before Lawler was strong enough to ride Red King to the Circle L; and many more days joined the multitudes that have marched down the ages, before he forgot what he saw in Blackburn's eyes when one day, soon after his return to the Circle L, he listened to the range boss relate the story of the fight on the plains.

Blackburn's cynical eyes had changed expression. They had become tragic, strained, as though the man were striving to blot out mental pictures that were detailed there—pictures that memory persisted in drawing.

He rode with Lawler to the scene of the fight, and showed him where the Circle L outfit had brought the rustlers to bay.

"After Shorty left," said Blackburn—"me insistin' on him goin', an' him blackguardin' me for sendin' him—there was a little time when nothin' happened. Then the day broke, an' everything seemed to happen at once.

"They rushed us, Lawler. There was more of 'em than there was of us, an' they circled around us, howlin' an' shootin' like Indians. They got us between 'em. But we fought 'em—Lawler, we fought 'em till there wasn't a man left standin'.

"But there was too many of 'em. We planted twenty—afterward. But about that number got away. I was hit sort of hard, but I watched 'em scutterin' towards Kinney's Cañon. They'd been gone some time when Caldwell's outfit—an' Shorty—come up.

"Caldwell's outfit lit out after 'em; but Caldwell's men had rode pretty hard get-

tin' to us, an' it wasn't no go. Sigmund's men, though, an' Lester's an' the rest of 'em, had took a gorge trail that cuts into the big basin from the south, away the other side of Kinney's Cañon; an' they run plumb into the rustlers over at the edge of the basin on Sigmund's side.

"An' they brought back your cattle; though Slade an' twenty or thirty of his men got away, clean. I reckon you've heard about that, though, an'—well, Lawler, that's about all—exceptin' to tell you how the boys—an' I don't seem to want to go over that when I'm awake; I keep seein' it enough of nights."

But something of the deep emotion Blackburn felt was reflected in Lawler's eyes from the time he heard the story.

During the many days he had spent in the little hotel room recovering from his wound, and in the long interval of convalescence that followed, a small army of workmen had been engaged in rebuilding the Circle L ranchhouse, the bunkhouses, and the other structures. On the second day following his return to consciousness, Lawler had called in a contractor and had made arrangements for reconstruction.

A temporary cabin, to be used afterward by Blackburn, had been erected near the site of the bunkhouses, and into this Lawler and his mother moved while the ranchhouse and the other buildings were being rebuilt. Blackburn was slowly engaging men to fill the depleted complement, and the work went on some way, though in it was none of that spirit which had marked the activities of the Circle L men in the old days.

In fact, the atmosphere that surrounded the Circle L seemed to be filled with a strange depression. There had come a cold grimness into Blackburn's face, a sullenness had appeared in the eyes of the three men who had survived the fight on the plains; they were moody, irritable, impatient. One of them, a slender, lithe man named Sloan, voiced to Blackburn one day a prediction.

"Antrim's dead, all O. K.," he said. "But Slade—who was always a damned sight worse than Antrim—is still a kickin'. An' Slade ain't the man to let things go half-way. Them boys from the other outfits bested him, all right. But Slade will be back—you'll see. An' when he comes we'll be squarin' things with him — an' don't you forget it!"

It was after Lawler had been occupying the cabin for a month that Metcalf made his second visit. He rode down the slope of the valley on a horse he had hired at Willets, and came upon Lawler, who was standing at the corral gates, looking across the enclosure at the workmen who were bustling about the ranchhouse.

Metcalf regarded Lawler critically before he dismounted; and then he came forward, shook Lawler's hand, and again looked him over.

"A little thin and peaked; but otherwise all right, eh?" he smiled. "It's hard to kill you denizens of the sagebrush."

He followed Lawler into the shade of the cabin, remarked to Mrs. Lawler that her son would need some one to guard him if he persisted in meeting outlaws of the Antrim type single-handed, and then turned to Lawler, after Mrs. Lawler had gone inside, and said lowly:

"Lord, man, you've got this State raving over you! Your fight against the ring is talked about in every corner of the country. And that scrap with Antrim, Selden, and Krell in the old Dickman cabin will go down in history—it will be a classic! What made you rush in on Antrim that way—giving him the first shot?"

Lawler smiled faintly. "Shucks, Metcalf, there was nothing to that. Shorty told me what had happened, and as I recollect, now, I was pretty much excited."

"Excited, eh?" said Metcalf incredulously; "I don't believe it. What about you going in to Warden's office, offering to give him the first shot? Were you excited then?"

Lawler reddened, and Metcalf laughed triumphantly.

"Lawler," he said, "you're too damned modest—but modesty becomes you. I believe you know it. Anyway, this State is raving over you. You're going to be the next Governor. You've got to run! This State needs a man like you—it *needs* you!

You know it. Everybody knows it—and everybody wants you. That is, everybody except Haughton, Hatfield, Warden—and that bunch—including the railroad company.

"Why, look here, Lawler!" he went on, when Lawler did not answer; "the fight you made last fall against the railroad company was made, with variations, by all the courageous cattlemen in the State. If a strong man isn't elected this fall the same fight will have to be made again. Haughton is so rotten that people are beginning to hold their noses!

"The people of this State trust you, Lawler—they swear by you. You've got to run—there's no way out of it!" He looked keenly at Lawler. "Man, do you know what McGregor told me the day before he left the capital to come down here and look you over to see how badly you were hurt? He said: 'Metcalf, if Lawler dies we lose the Governorship next fall. He is the only man who can beat Haughton!'"

"Metcalf," smiled Lawler, "I'll tell you a secret—your argument has had no effect upon me. I decided this thing as far back as the day following the last election. I am going to run."

"Then we've got Haughton licked!" declared Metcalf enthusiastically.

Metcalf stayed at the Circle L throughout the day, and in the evening Lawler rode with him to Willets, where he saw him aboard the westbound train.

"I'm telling you something, Lawler," grinned the newspaperman as he gripped Lawler's hand just before the train started: "McGregor came to me yesterday. He told me he intended to come to see you, but he was afraid you'd refuse to run. He asked me if I had any influence with you, and I told him you'd do anything I suggested.

"Now, don't get excited, Lawler," he laughed as Lawler looked sharply at him. "I've proved it, haven't I? You've agreed to run! Lord, man, I'd hate to be an evildoer and have you look at me like that!"

He laughed again, exultantly. "What was it you said to Warden one day, when Warden refused to keep that agreement you made with Lefingwell? Oh, don't look at me that way — that conversation has been printed all over the State. I saw to that. How did I hear of it? Somebody must have talked, Lawler. It wasn't you. You remember what you told Warden? It was this:

"'I'm telling you this, though: a man's word in this country has got to be backed by his performances—and he's got to have memory enough to know when he gives his word!'

"You've given yours, Lawler; and you can't back out. McGregor will be waiting for me in the capital. And when I tell him that I have persuaded you to run, he'll fall on my neck and weep tears of joy. Then he'll hire a special train and run down here to fall on *your* neck!"

McGregor came the next day. And he took Lawler back to the capital with him. Lawler stayed in the capital for a week, and when he returned he went directly to the Circle L.

No word came from him to Willets during the summer. He did not appear in town, though Willets heard that the new Circle L ranchhouse had at last been completed, and that Lawler was living in it. Also the Circle L outfit had been recruited to full strength; Blackburn was occupying the new cabin.

When Corwin, who was chairman of the county committee, sent out a call for the county primary convention, which convention was also to choose delegates to the State convention, to be held later, Lawler did not appear. He sent a note to Corwin, asking to be excused.

"I reckon he ain't entirely over that wound," Corwin told an intimate friend. "We'll have to get along without him, this time." But there was a light in Corwin's eyes which told that he was not unaware of the significance of Lawler's trip to the capital with McGregor.

There came a day when Corwin and his brother delegates got on a train at Willets and were taken to the capital. And there came another day when they returned. They brought a brass band with them; and Willets closed its doors and went out into the street—and crowded the station

platform, where the band was playing, and where the returned delegates, frenzied with joy, were shrieking above the din:

"Lawler! Lawler! Lawler—our next Governor! Hip, hip—*hoo-ray!*"

"We swamped 'em!" howled a crimson-faced enthusiast. "There was nothin' to it! Unanimous after the first vote. *Hoo-ray!*"

In his office, Gary Warden heard the shouting, saw the crowd, and listened to the cheers. He stood at one of the windows, balefully watching; sneering at the delegates who had returned, flushed with victory. Singleton, scowling, stood beside Warden.

They saw half a dozen men draw apart from the others. Later the men—delegates, from the gay badges appended to them—rode out of town, southward.

"Notification committee," sneered Warden; "they're going to escort Lawler to town. Let's go to the Two Diamond. I'll be damned if I want to be in town to watch Lawler grin when he sees that crowd! There's a dozen big guns in that bunch, who have come down from the capital to watch the fun. Well, it's no fun for me!"

However, it was "fun" for the delighted citizens of Willets who, some hours later, saw the committee returning with Lawler. They escorted him to a platform which had been erected in the middle of the street in the absence of the committee, where, after the crowd had cheered him many times, Lawler made his first speech as the candidate of his party.

Energetic citizens had gayly decorated the street with flags and bunting—taking Corwin's entire stock—and the decorations swathed the town from end to end.

Warden and Singleton had scurried out of town long before the coming of Lawler. But Jimmy Singleton, with a number of other children who had mercifully been dismissed by the new school-teacher, were close to the platform during the celebration.

"He's gonna be Governor, Jimmy," whispered one of Jimmy's companions, awe in his voice as he indicated Lawler, who was just concluding his speech.

"I've knowed him a long time," went on Jimmy's friend proudly.

"Huh!" said Jimmy; "I've knowed him longer than you. An' besides that, he walloped me once. An' he walloped my paw, too!"

Shorty had ridden to town with Lawler; and Shorty rode home with the candidate for Governor—after the citizens of Willets had shouted themselves hoarse, and the prominent men who had come down from the capital had taken the evening train home.

And Shorty said nothing when Lawler veered from the Circle L trail and headed eastward, toward Hamlin's cabin. And he waited with much patience outside the cabin while Lawler went in, to stay an unconscionably long time.

Ruth was alone. And her eyes were glowing with happiness when she saw Lawler.

"Oh, I know!" she said when Lawler essayed to break the news to her. "On his way to town Blackburn rode over and told me. All of your men were in town—didn't you know that?"

"Ruth," said Lawler, "I will be elected. Won't you come to the capital with me—to be the first lady of the State?"

She looked straight at him her face paling.

"Wait, Kane," she said gently. "I—I can't, just now. Oh, Kane, don't you see that the higher you go the harder it is for me? I can't have people say—what they might say—what your enemies would be sure to say! Father is all right, now. But I can't depend upon him. We will wait, Kane—until we are sure."

Shorty rode with Lawler after they left the Hamlin cabin. And the gravity of Lawler's expression was noted by the giant, and duly commented upon the following morning, in Blackburn's presence.

"The boss's trail is sure hard to anticipate," said Shorty. "There's the State goin' loco over him—nominatin' him for Governor, an' folks in Willets makin' more fuss over him than they did over the President—the time he stopped for two minutes in town. Well, you'd think a man would be sort of fussed up himself, over that kind of a deal. But what does the boss do? He rides home with me, sayin' nothin' pretty

regular—with a face on him as long as the moral law—an' then some. I ain't got no rope on him—an' that's a fact. But he's all wool an' a yard wide—ain't he, Blackburn?"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

WARDEN MEDITATES.

IT had always been lonely at the Hamlin cabin, and it grew more lonely after Kane Lawler left the Circle L. For the barrier between Ruth and the happiness she had a right to expect seemed to grow higher and more impassable daily.

After receiving official notification of his nomination, Lawler had gone away on a speaking tour of the State, and Ruth had seen little of him. He came home once, for a few days, just before the election, and renewed his pleas to Ruth.

But the girl, rigidly adhering to her determination not to permit the shadow of her father's reputation to embarrass him, had firmly refused to consent. And after the election, when he had gone to the capital to take the office to which he had been chosen by a record vote, she watched him ride away with a feeling that the world had grown to gigantic proportions and that Lawler was going to its extreme farther limits, leaving behind him a gulf of space, endless and desolate.

Dorgan, the county prosecutor, had been defeated for reelection by a man named Carney—who was known to be friendly to Singleton. Moreton had also been defeated —by " Slim " McCray, who hailed from a little town called Keegles, southeast from Willets. It was rumored—after the election—that Slim McCray had been friendly to Antrim, though no one advanced any evidence in support of the rumor.

McCray—because Willets was the county-seat—came to the office that had formerly been Moreton's, immediately following his election. He was slender, tall, and unprepossessing, and instantly created a bad impression.

This news came to Ruth through her father, for she had not visted town since she had gone there to help Mrs. Lawler care for her son. She felt that she did not dare to leave the cabin. For one night, after her father had acted strangely, he got up suddenly and went out of the door. And after a while, growing suspicious, she blew out the light and stepped softly outside, to see him, at a little distance from the house, talking with Singleton.

That incident had occurred shortly after Lawler had departed for the capital to assume his duties as Governor. She suspected her father had talked with Singleton since, though she had never seen them together from that time until now.

Lawler had been gone a month. She had heard through various mediums—mostly from cowboys from near-by ranches who occasionally passed the cabin—that Lawler was " making good "—in the vernacular of the cowpuncher; and: " He's makin' them all set up an' take notice." Those terms, of course, would seem to indicate that Lawler was a good Governor and that he was attracting attention by the quality of his administration.

But it seemed that more than a month had passed since Lawler had gone to the capital. The days dragged, and the weeks seemed to be eons long. And yet the dull monotony of the girl's life was relieved by trips she made to the Circle L, to visit Lawler's mother—and by the presence of Mary Lawler, who had come home for her vacation, during the summer, and during Lawler's absence on his speaking tour.

Ruth had heard with satisfaction that the Circle L trail herd, attended by Blackburn, Shorty, and other Circle L men, had not been molested on the trip to Red Rock. Caldwell and the others had driven their cattle to Red Rock also—not one of them visiting Warden to arrange for cars. Lawler's influence, and the spirit he had revealed in undertaking the long drive the previous season, had had its effect upon the other cattle owners.

It seemed to Ruth that the fight between the Circle L men and the rustlers had made the latter cautious; and that even Warden had decided that discretion was necessary. At any rate, the surface of life in Willets and the surrounding country had become smooth, no matter what forces were at work

in the depths. It appeared that the men who had fought Lawler in the past were now careful to do nothing that would bring upon them a demonstration of his new power.

Gary Warden, however, was not fearful of Lawler's official power. In fact, he was openly contemptuous when Lawler's name was mentioned in his presence. Face to face with Lawler, he was afflicted with an emotion that was akin to fear, though with it was mingled the passionate hatred he had always felt for the man.

While Lawler had been at the Circle L Warden had fought him secretly, with motives that arose from a determination to control the cattle industry. Warden had had behind him the secret power of the State Government and the clandestine cooperation of the railroad company. His fight against Lawler had been in the nature of business, in which the advantage had been all on his side.

Now, however, intense personal feeling dominated Warden. Lawler had beaten him, so far, and the knowledge intensified the man's rage against his conqueror. The railroad company's corral had yawned emptily during the entire fall season. Not a hoof had been shipped through Willets. All the cattlemen of the district had driven their stock to Red Rock. And Warden no longer smiled at the empty corral.

Looking out of one of his office windows this morning Warden scowled. He remembered a day, a year or so ago, when he had stood at one of the windows of his office watching Della Wharton wave a handkerchief at Lawler. She had been riding out of town in a buckboard, with Aunt Hannah beside her, and Lawler had just come from the railroad station.

That incident had spread the poison of jealousy in Warden's veins; the recollection of it had caused him to doubt Della's story of what had happened at the line cabin during the blizzard of the preceding winter; it had filled him with the maddening conviction that Lawler had deliberately tried to alienate Della's affections—that Lawler, knowing Della to be vain and frivolous, had intentionally planned the girl's visit to the line cabin.

He did not blame Della for what had happened. Lawler had been at the bottom of the affair; Lawler had planned it all, merely to be revenged upon him for his refusal to keep the agreement that had been made with Lefingwell. Lawler, despite his reputation for square dealing, had struck at him underhandedly, viciously.

Warden sneered as his thoughts went to that day in Jordan's office when Lawler, a deadly threat in his eyes, had leaned close to him to warn him. Warden remembered the words—they had flamed in his consciousness since.

"But get this straight," Lawler had said. "You've got to fight *me!* Understand? You'll drag no woman into it. You went to Hamlin's ranch the other day. God's grace and a woman's mercy permitted you to get away, alive. Just so sure as you molest a woman in the section, just so sure will I kill you, no matter who your friends are!"

Apparently, in Lawler's code of morals, it was one thing to force one's attentions upon a pretty woman, and another thing to steal the affections of a woman promised to another man.

But Warden's passion permitted him to make no distinction. And his rage was based upon the premise that Lawler was guilty. Warden's thoughts grew abysmal as he stood at the window; and considerations of business became unimportant in his mind as a satanic impulse seized him. He stood for a long time at the window, and when he finally seized hat and coat and went down into the street he was muttering, savagely:

"God's grace and a woman's mercy. Bah! Damn you, Lawler; I'll make you squirm!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE JAWS OF THE WOLF.

FOR more than a month—or from a few days following the night on which she had seen her father talking with Dave Singleton—Ruth Hamlin had been aware that her parent was acting strangely. There had been an interval—directly after that

night when he had told her about his talk with Lawler, when Lawler had offered to help him to regain his place among men—that Hamlin had seemed to "go straight," as he had promised. During that interval he had taken her into his confidence many times, to discuss with her the new prospects that the future seemed to offer, and to renew his assurances to her.

Of late, though, a change had come over him. He no longer confided in her; his eyes were beginning to take on that expression of guilt that she had seen in them in the old days; his glances at her were no longer direct, but furtive, as though he feared she might learn something of his actions should he meet her gaze.

In the old days Ruth had passively endured the shame that Hamlin's crimes had brought upon her. They had been so unexpected that they had stunned her—so miserably mean that she had not dared to take any one into her confidence.

However, for her the days of passive endurance were over. Lawler knew, and Lawler had helped her father. And now, she was certain, her father had again fallen.

She steeled herself against pity for him, determined that she would not stand idly by and watch him betray Lawler. She did not know what she intended to do, or what she could do, to prevent the stealing of the Circle L cattle; but she determined to watch her father, hopeful that she might devise some way to prevent the thefts.

She had passed many sleepless nights. Sound sleep had become impossible to her since one night after she had heard her father moving about in the kitchen, she had got up, after a little, to find him gone. Looking out of a window, into a flood of moonlight, she had seen Hamlin ride away, southward, with Singleton.

That incident had occurred many times—though not aways had she awakened in time to note his departure. But it had happened often enough to make her nights sleepless, and she had got into the habit of awaking suddenly to lie silent, listening attentively for sounds that would tell her that her father was preparing for another of his nocturnal depredations.

She had never been able to catch him in the act of leaving the cabin; though she had determined, many times, to stay awake for that very purpose. It seemed that Hamlin knew she was watching him, and on those nights when she stayed awake he did not stir from the cabin.

To-night, she had determined to stay awake. She had gone to her room, to lie, fully dressed, upon the bed. For she had noted during the day that Hamlin was nervous and irritable, and she had observed that he was always in that condition on the days that preceded his absences at night from the cabin.

She had left the oil lamp burning, for Hamlin had been sitting at the table reading a month-old copy of a newspaper. She heard him get up after a while; saw the light flicker and go out; heard her father cross the floor and go to his room.

There was a fire in the kitchen stove, for the weather during the day had been cold, and she could hear the embers crackling for more than an hour after her father went to his room.

She drew a blanket over her, and its welcome warmth brought on a drowsiness to which she almost yielded. She was sure, however, that she would not go to sleep, and she lay there comfortably, for, it seemed merely a few minutes. And then a sound assailed her ears and she started up, realizing that she had been asleep. For a chill had come into the air of the cabin, and she knew the fire had gone out.

She sat up, breathing fast, and ran to her father's room. The bed had not been slept in; and she emerged from the room, her face pallid with resolution.

Running to the outside door, she swung it open and looked out. Far out upon the clear, moonlit sweep of plain stretching toward Willets, she saw the shadowy figures of two horsemen.

Moving swiftly, she went to the corral, caught her pony, saddled it, threw on a bridle, mounted, and rode after the horsemen, urging the pony to its best efforts.

The speed at which the pony traveled did not equal the pace of the animals ahead of her, however, and she steadily lost ground, though the night was so clear that she did not lose sight of the figures in front

of her until they reached the shadows of Willets's buildings. She did lose them there, though, and when she rode down the dimly lighted street she could see no sign of them.

There was no one about, and she rode back and forth on the street, searching for Hamlin's horse, which would give her a clue to Hamlin's whereabout. And at last, peering into a vacant space between two buildings, she saw Hamlin's horse and another, hitched to a rail near an outside stairway.

She got off the pony, threw the reins over its head, and ran around to the front of the building, into the light of some oil lamps that stabbed the semigloom of the street.

The building was occupied by the Wolf saloon. She knew that, and it was that knowledge which caused her to hesitate as she stood in front of it. But her father was in there, she was certain. She had recognized the horse that had been hitched close to her father's as one that Singleton had ridden to the Hamlin cabin on several of his visits, and the cold determination that had seized her at last gave her the courage to swing the front door of the saloon open.

She hesitated on the threshold, white, shaking with dread, almost afraid, now that she had come this far, to face the terrible men she knew she would find inside.

But while she hesitated, she heard her father's voice—a sound that drove her to instant action, for it was high-pitched, and carried a note of anger.

She went inside then, no longer thinking of herself; her heart athrob with concern, courage of a high order sustaining her. She pushed the outside door open, burst through the double-swing door that screened the barroom from the street, and stood in the front of the room blinking at the lights.

The room was full of men—she did not know how many. They made a great blur in front of her; and it seemed to her that all their faces were turned to her. She had a flashing view of a multitude of inquiring eyes; she noted the thick haze that hung over the room; her nostrils were assailed by mingled odors that were nauseating. The flashing glance showed her the long bar, a cluster of lights overhead, card tables, a low ceiling, and a stairway leading from the barroom to a platform.

All sound except her father's voice had ceased with her entrance. She saw him standing near the center of the room.

He was standing alone, in sinister isolation. Singleton was facing him, about a dozen feet distant. A few feet from Singleton stood another man—dark of face, with cruel lips, and eyes that held a wanton light. A little farther away—close to the bar—stood Gary Warden.

Her father seemed to be the only man in the room who had not seen her. A terrible rage had gripped him; he seemed to have undergone a strange transformation since she had seen him last; that manhood which she had thought had departed from him appeared to have returned.

For he made a striking figure as he stood there. He was rigid, alert; he seemed to dominate every man that faced him, that stood within sound of his voice. He had been talking when Ruth entered; he was still talking, and apparently unaware of her presence.

His voice was pitched high, it carried a note of defiance; it was vibrant with passion. Fascinated by the change in him, Ruth stood motionless, listening.

"So that's what you brought me here for?" he said, his voice shaking with rage. He was looking at Singleton and the man who stood near the latter. "You brought me here because you wanted to be sure there'd be enough of you to down me. Well, damn you—get goin'!"

His voice rose to a screech of awful rage; and while it still resounded through the room he dropped his right hand and dragged at the pistol at his hip.

It was done so swiftly that Ruth could make no movement to interfere. And yet as swiftly as her father's hand had dropped to the holster at his side, the dark-faced man who stood near Singleton anticipated the movement.

His right hand moved like a streak of light. It went down, then up again with the same motion. The air rocked with a crashing report, mingled with Ruth's scream of terror. And Hamlin's gun loosened in

his hand, his knees doubled, and he tumbled headlong, to fall face down at the feet of the dark-faced man who stood, sneering, some blue-white smoke curling upward in mocking laziness from the muzzle of his pistol.

Ruth had moved with the report of the pistol; she was at Hamlin's side when he fell, grasping one of his arms; and she went down with him, to one knee, dazed from the suddenness of the thing; palsied with horror, the room reeling around her.

How long she knelt at her father's side she did not know. It seemed only a second or two to her when she raised her head and looked around with dumb, agonized grief at the faces that seemed to fill the place. Then she heard Warden's voice; he spoke to the dark-faced man who had killed her father, and his voice was vibrant with a mocking, satanic satisfaction.

"You've wanted her, Slade—take her!"

The dark-faced man grinned at her, bestially. She leaped to her feet at the expression of his eyes, and started to run toward the door. But terror shackled her feet; it seemed that some power was dragging at her, holding her back from the door. She had not taken more than half a dozen steps when Slade was upon her.

His strength seemed to be prodigious, for despite her desperate resistance, he lifted her from the floor, crushed her to him, and started for the stairs. She screamed, begging the men in the room to help her. But through the haze she saw grinning faces turned to hers; heard loud laughter and coarse oaths. And then came oblivion.

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

THE prosperous looking stranger and the affable traveling man had been conversing for two hundred miles, man-fashion, before the former began to wax confidential. The train was approaching a junction point, and the prosperous looking stranger started at the long shriek of the whistle.

"That isn't Fenville we're coming to, is it?" he asked hastily.

"No," replied the traveling man. "Fenville is fifty miles farther on. This is Junction City."

"Ah, yes." The first man settled back and brushed a few stray cigar ashes from his solid-looking knees. His blue eyes, deep-set beneath rather heavy brows, became pleasantly reflective. "It's been some years since I was here, you see. A man's recollection of places changes."

The traveling man agreed. "You used to make this territory, then?" he inquired.

"Rather. I lived in Fenville once. Born there, in fact. I—do you know anybody there?"

"Most of the business men," assented the traveling man. "I've been selling goods through here about five years."

"Then I don't suppose you know Bill Tate." The first speaker gazed out of the window at the straggling houses of Junction City's suburbs, abutting the railroad tracks diagonally. "The man that's responsible for my being here to-day."

"Bill Tate?" The traveling man wrinkled his brows. "Seems to me I've heard the name. Isn't in business, is he?"

The other man laughed softly.

"Why, not exactly," he said. "More of a professional man, I reckon. If you read much fiction, you've probably read some of his stories."

The traveling man's brows cleared. "Oh, yes," he exclaimed. "He's the fellow that writes the yarns about London, Michigan. But—he doesn't live in Fenville, does he?"

"He sure does. Fenville, you see, is the London he writes about. He's made the old burg famous, Bill Tate has. I read every story he turns out, and so does every other Fenvillian, you can bet, whether he's at home or abroad."

"I see. And you've come back to see your old home, on account of Tate's stories?"

"Partly. But I have a lot better reason than that, my friend. Bill Tate pulled me out of the financial mire and made me rich. I'm going back to give him the time of his life—see? I've shipped two of my cars to Fenville. Bill Tate's going to see more high life than he ever dreamed existed. That's me!"

The prosperous looking stranger emphasized his declaration with a vigorous slap on his right knee, which act caused a large diamond on the middle finger of that hand to scintillate, and his thin watch chain to dance.

"But—I don't exactly understand," remarked the traveling man. "If Tate is rich enough to help his friends financially, how is he going to benefit by your—"

"He isn't rich," interrupted his companion. "I doubt if he has more than a decent living. These writer chaps don't make fortunes, you see. I'm positive that he's never been away from Fenville, unless it was to run down to New York some time or other to see an editor. So I'm going to show my appreciation by doing something handsome for him. He'll be some surprised, Bill will, to find out what he's done for me."

"Why—doesn't he *know* it?" The traveling man stared at the other, who chuckled comfortably.

"Not much, he doesn't. That's to be one of the surprises."

The train came to a grinding halt before a grimy station. Porters began trundling baggage trucks along the brick platform. A thin stream of people passed the window, their faces turned up expectantly after the manner of passengers about to mount the coach steps. The prosperous looking man looked at his watch.

"It 'll be pretty nearly an hour before we get to Fenville," he volunteered. "If you haven't anything else to do, I'll tell you a story that I'll guarantee to be interesting. It's about Bill Tate and myself; and it didn't begin to happen until Bill and I were a thousand miles and twelve years apart. Want to hear it?"

The traveling man tendered his cigar-case.

"Shoot," he said.

I can't say that I ever liked Bill Tate. Neither did anybody else in town, for that matter. He was one of these big-toothed, fish-mouthed boys, who grinned most of the time, and looked like he was grinning when he wasn't.

He talked a good deal, too, which didn't add to his popularity. Some fellows can talk and get away with it; but Bill Tate wasn't that kind. Every time he opened his mouth he said something to make somebody mad. Used to brag considerably, I remember, and wasn't above stretching things, or lying outright. His big teeth, which stuck down over his lower lip a good half-inch, made a broad slash across his face and were constantly in evidence. He had little, dirty gray eyes with a perpetually inquisitive expression in them, and a nose that turned up. His ears stuck out from his head quite a way. Altogether, Bill wasn't exactly prepossessing in appearance.

Even his hair used to make me mad. It came to a sort of a point behind, especially

when it needed cutting, which was most of the time. In front it always straggled down over his face.

As I said before, Bill was quite a boaster. What galled the rest of us was that he never had anything to boast about; for if ever there was a ne'er-do-well, it was Bill Tate. He never was known to have his lessons in school, and he was a poor hand at any of the games. I don't recollect that he ever took a prize in anything. He was a rotten baseball player; he could neither bat, pitch nor catch. He couldn't run. In his classes he was almost a joke. I say *almost;* for Bill just escaped being the poorest in the school by dint of help he wheedled out of some brighter and more studious boy. That was how he managed to pass most of the examinations, and finally to graduate from common school. When I left Fenville, as I recall, he was about half-way through high school, and with no more brilliancy or application than he had five years before. Just dragging along.

Of course, the rest of us didn't have it in for him just because he wasn't smart. That wasn't his fault. It was his confounded assurance that kept us sizzling. To hear him tell it, he was the brightest boy in town. He had a patronizing way about him, too, that didn't mend matters any. When I left to go West, I remember, Bill turned up at the depot just before I got aboard the train.

"Well, Frank, I s'pose you're going out there and make your fortune," he remarked.

"If I don't, it won't be because I didn't have enterprise enough to get out of this one-horse mud-hole," I retorted.

His big teeth were in evidence instantly.

"Maybe some of us back here'll do pretty well," he said. "I've got a little deal on now—"

He was in the middle of one of his everlasting lies—I was certain it was nothing else—when the train rolled in. The last thing I saw as we pulled out of the station was Bill Tate's smirk. He was the most self-satisfied individual I ever saw.

In the years that followed I had plenty of time to forget him, however. I went to Kansas City first, and got a job selling scholarships in a correspondence school. I didn't seem to catch on very well, though, and finally moved farther West. In fact, in the ensuing ten years I wandered pretty much all over the country west of the Mississippi, even taking in Los Angeles and San Francisco on the Pacific coast. I got a lot of experience, but not much in the way of money ahead. Some way or other I never could save.

That didn't stop me from getting married, however. Nell—that's my wife—had reason to be sorry of her bargain more than once, I suspect. She pulled up stakes a half-dozen times, without complaint, and went with me from one section of the country to another, always swallowing my enthusiastic tales of the distant pastures that were greener. A least, she pretended to swallow them. Afterward I found out that she went with me against her better judgment, all the time.

The grand blow-up came in Denver, a year ago. The war had shot living expenses up, you know, until a salaried man had all he could do to make both ends meet. I tried every expedient I could think of; but rents continued to rise and food to go up in price, until I had to quit buying clothes and just confine myself to buying something to eat and keep our old suits in repair.

Then I got into debt and couldn't get out. In my more prosperous days I had gained a little credit at the bank. When I applied for a loan of five hundred dollars they accommodated me readily enough, taking a mortgage on my household furniture. I renewed the note time and again; but at last I got a letter telling me plainly that the bank couldn't grant any further renewals. They wanted to see the color of my money. I had just one week to liquidate.

"Well, Nell," I said that night, after showing her the letter, "I guess we're up against it. The bank's going to foreclose."

"And are you going to let them?" Nell asked, a queer little glint in her eyes.

"Guess I'll have to," I answered. "I can't help myself. It 'll be all right, though. We'll just rent a furnished house, or a few furnished rooms somewhere, until I get on my feet."

"But you don't seem to be getting on your feet," she came back at me.

I took refuge in the usual thing.

"How can a fellow do any better?" I demanded. "With prices going up the way they are, it's all a fellow can do to break even."

She didn't say anything more just then, but I could see, by watching her out of the corner of my eye, that she was doing a lot of thinking. I was pretty certain that her thoughts weren't flattering to me.

After she had the supper dishes done up that night she came into the sitting-room, where I sat reading, and began to look over the paper. All of a sudden she looked up.

"Frank," she said, "haven't I heard you speak of a boy named Tate you used to go to school with, back in Fenville?"

I told her that she had.

"Well, here's a piece about him. He's become a great story writer."

"Become what!" I shouted, grabbing the paper. "There must be some mistake."

But there wasn't. There it was, as plain as print could be. William F. Tate, commonly known as "Bill," had made a name for himself over night with a story called "The Lights of London." Eastern critics said that it was the most appealing piece of contemporary literature portraying small-town American life that had seen print in a decade. There was a good half-column about Bill Tate.

Well, that was the beginning. In the next four months, if I saw one, I saw twenty encomiums on Bill Tate. Nell spread it around the neighborhood that I used to go to school with the celebrity; and every night or so some neighbor would drop in to congratulate me. It was maddening. In the mean time, I had managed to stave off the bank for another six months; but things weren't going any better with me. I had a job in a brokerage office at the time, with a salary that just got us by.

Up to that time I hadn't had any particular ambition, I guess, except to keep out of the poorhouse. Sometimes, at the sight of a big automobile, I would be conscious of a little envious thrill; but I took refuge in a hypercritical attitude toward the contraptions, and everybody that owned and drove them. I also did a lot of talking about the happiness which the rich didn't have, when all the time I suppose I believed as Shaw did—that it was not only a privilege to have money, but a duty as well.

Nell didn't say much, but the time for the payment on the note was drawing near, and I was nervous. Some way, I felt that a foreclosure would sort of mean a climax in my domestic affairs. The thought of Bill Tate stuck in my throat. If it had been Leon Westerhouse, now, or Elmer Kingsley, I wouldn't have felt as I did. They were brilliant students in school, and everybody predicted futures for them. But Bill Tate —ugh!

I got to wondering, naturally, how he did it. I didn't remember that he had exhibited any special talent for writing, when we were boys. He didn't have any special talent for anything that I could recall. And yet, he was famous; while I—

"If Bill Tate could do it, so could you," Nell told me one evening.

I had been enlarging, as usual, upon the queer turns of fate. There was Bill Tate, I remarked bitterly, who didn't deserve anything but the poorhouse, what with all his indolence and boastfulness.

"Perhaps he discovered his talent, and developed it," Nell said quietly.

It set me thinking. Had I done likewise? What was my talent, anyhow?

"Mr. Tate must have had a harder time gaining success than you would have," replied Nell in answer to my query. "With all the faults you say he had, I don't exactly see how he did it, myself. Unless—" she paused.

"Unless what?" I demanded.

"He had more *grit*."

Well, I don't mind admitting that got under my skin. Nobody likes to be told they haven't any grit, I guess. I had the good sense not to talk back to Nell; but for a couple of days after that I went around with my mouth shut, doing some hard thinking.

Hard thinking is good for the brain. It develops the habit of concentration, my friend. And concentration, I was to find, is the very first thing a man must achieve if he is to gain success in any line. Up to that time, you see, I had never tried it. Nell's remark was what started me to think-

ing. I guess it would have that effect on any intelligent man, wouldn't it?

So I thought. First, naturally, my thoughts dwelt on Bill Tate, the ne'er-do-well, who had outdistanced me in the race for success. Next they went to the pleasure he must be getting out of life, and that just as naturally led to reflection on the way he probably was showing that pleasure. Unless he had changed a lot, I could picture him with his everlasting smirk, his big teeth protruding down over his lower lip and his little, dirty gray eyes glittering under his thin brows.

"Well, Frank, I s'pose you're going out there to make your fortune," he had said on the depot platform that day.

I ground my teeth.

"I could stand it better if it was any one else," I said to myself. "But that conceited, self-satisfied ass is the last one in the world that has any business being successful. If I do say it, I'm a lot better man than he is, four ways from the jack. Yet—why can't I win?"

I went about mooning in this fashion for all of three days. Pretty soon it came to me that if I was ever going to meet that note, I had better be scratching gravel. I had to have more money, to begin with. I had never asked any boss of mine for a raise in my life; but this time I put my pride in my pocket, took my courage in my teeth and went into the private office to see Mr. Beardshaw, my employer.

"Mr. Beardshaw, I've got to have more money," I blurted out.

"How much?" he asked.

I scratched my head. Up to that moment I hadn't had any thought of the amount.

"Why," I said, "I've got a five-hundred dollar note to meet at the bank."

"How soon?" he asked.

"Next week."

"Then you want to borrow money?"

"Good Lord, no! I'm through borrowing. What I want is a bigger salary."

"What are you getting now?"

"A hundred and twenty-five a month."

"Well, I guess I can raise you to a hundred and fifty. How will that do?"

"Not very well, I'm afraid," I told him. "You see, this note has got to be met in a week. The bank won't renew any more. They've got a mortgage on my furniture."

The boss tapped on the desk-top with his pencil and looked out of the window. Finally he turned to me.

"Blackton," he snapped suddenly, "there's a man over in the National Trust building that we've been trying to sell those Fillmore industrials to for a month. They're good bonds, but they only net four-and-a-half per cent. He won't touch them."

"Yes, sir," I said, my mind still on that five-hundred dollar note.

"If you can sell him twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of those bonds, your commission, at two per cent, will be five hundred dollars. Want to try it?"

I came to with a start.

"Sell bonds, Mr. Beardshaw?" I stammered. "Why, I never sold a bond in my life. I couldn't do it."

"All right," he returned. "You say you need five hundred quick. I'm giving you a chance to get it; that's all. If you won't take it, I'm afraid you'll have to pay off your note out of the twenty-five dollars raise I'm giving you. You don't imagine that you're worth any more than a hundred and fifty, do you?"

Just then a vision of Bill Tate, with his big-toothed smirk, rose before my vision. I put both hands on the edge of the desk and faced him aggressively.

"Mr. Beardshaw," I said, with my jaw stuck out, "show me a few things about bonds, and I'll go you."

"Fine!" he approved, pressing a button at his elbow. Milson, the star salesman of the office, stuck his head in at the door. "Take Blackton out and answer his questions," the boss directed. "He's going over to sell Simon Fielding a block of those Fillmore industrials. That's all."

Well, Milson rehearsed me for a half-hour. I asked him not less than three hundred questions in that time. When I finally started over to the National Trust building my pockets bulged with blank contracts and my mind with newly acquired facts.

Ordinarily, I suppose, the thought of that menacing note would have spurred me on to a distasteful task. But it was Bill Tate

who was the real incentive. I'd brooded over his incredible hit in literature until his success had taken on the proportions of actual impertinence. I give you my word, when I left the elevator at the National Trust and walked down the tiled corridor toward Simon Fielding's door, there was just one thing in my thoughts. That thing was Bill Tate.

I found Fielding inside—a big, overbearing brute of a man, with dirty finger-nails and bulging eyes as expressionless as those of a fish. He looked me up and down, his thick lips pursed out and his jowls hanging down over his collar. He didn't say a word; so I plunged in.

"I've told you fellows often enough that I don't want those bonds," he mumbled when I had finished my opening statement. "If that's all you're here for, you'd better get out."

Curiously enough, his face seemed to merge into that of Bill Tate, on the instant. I could see a startling resemblance, especially when Fielding opened his fishlike mouth. He had big, white teeth that protruded a good half-inch over his pendulous lower lip, and little, dirty gray eyes—

"Mr. Fielding," I said, "you're a fool."

His big hands gripped the edges of his desk.

"What?" he yelled.

"If you don't grab these bonds," I continued. "They only net four and a half, true; but what of that? You have a reputation all over this town for being conservative and wise in your investments. Do you want it to get out that you're turning down such securities as these Fillmore industrials? Why, man—"

And I went after him, hammer and tongs. I used language that would have landed me in jail, only for the fact that I had the old man's attention. I pounded the desk with my fist to drive home my points; I played on his vanity in a way that would have made most men ashamed of themselves. In short, I treated him exactly as I would have treated Bill Tate had he been sitting at that desk. The pent-up resentment of months was let loose in my tirade.

"Here you are, a business man with a reputation for being a wise one," I exclaimed. "And you know, as well as I do, what is going to happen to a lot of these war babies." (Theretofore my knowledge of "war babies" had been confined to what I had read in the papers.) "They'll blow up. They earn big interest now; but somebody is going to lose millions and millions on them, some day. How do you know that it won't be mighty soon? And how do you know that *you* won't be one of the investors caught?"

I pulled a subscription blank out of my pocket and pointed at it dramatically.

"It's a cinch that nobody's going to commit suicide over the failure of these bonds," I shot at him.

Then I shoved the blank in front of him, my finger on the line at the bottom. I pulled out my fountain pen with my other hand.

"Sign there," I commanded him, "while your brain is directing you right."

His eyes bulged queerly and his breath wheezed as he took the pen and bent over the paper.

"This ain't filled out for anything," he muttered, looking up at me. "How many—"

Then I did the most daring thing of all.

"You'll take ten thousand shares, at par," I said.

He scrawled his name on the line. I snatched the paper from under his hand and began to wave it to and fro, to dry the ink of the signature. The old man watched the waving paper as if fascinated.

"What 'll ten thousand shares come to?" he wanted to know. "What's the par value?"

I had to look at the contract to find out, so great was my excitement.

"Ten dollars a share," I told him.

"Why—that's a hundred thousand dollars!" he exclaimed. Then he leaned forward and pulled his telephone toward him, grabbing the receiver off the hook and bellowing a number into the transmitter. "Hello—this the National Trust? This is Fielding. What's my balance, please?"

He waited a minute, awaiting the information, his lips puffed out and his breath coming in puffs. Then:

"All right."

He hung up the receiver and leaned back, looking at me. I'll swear, the old pirate was grinning!

"I'll expect those bonds to-morrow morning," he said. "Your check 'll be ready."

The prosperous-looking stranger broke off suddenly and leaned toward the window.

"That was old man Winters's corn crib, or I'm a goat!" he exclaimed excitedly. "Why, we're within two miles of Fenville, aren't we?"

"Sure are," returned the traveling man, grinning. "What did you do with your two thousand dollars commission?"

"I paid off that note, for one thing," replied his companion, standing up and lifting down a satchel from the rack overhead. "The main thing is that I'd learned something. I'd learned how to *make* money—not merely to earn it. See?"

The traveling man stood up while the porter made various motions about his anatomy.

"And now," continued the other, "I'm back home to see Bill Tate, and thank him for pulling me out of the hole. Funny, but as soon as I got that two thousand dollars commission in my pocket, I began to experience a change of feeling toward Bill. Why, I feel like I could hug him, right now! He certainly did me a good turn—although he doesn't know it."

The train pulled up at a little red station, flanked by a plank platform of ancient vintage. The porter had gone ahead with the baggage of the two travelers, preparatory to alighting. The usual crowd of small-town loafers was outside, their necks craned curiously toward the emerging passengers.

"The old place looks as natural as ever, and twice as dingy," observed the prosperous-looking stranger as he stepped down off the little stool and looked about him. "Why, as sure as I'm alive, there's old Pete Wilson with his hack. Hello, Pete!"

The grizzled veteran addressed as "Pete" shifted his cud and stared at the advancing stranger.

"Dog-gone me if it ain't Frank Blackton!" he exclaimed, holding out a horny hand. "An' lookin' as smart as they make 'em." The two hands clasped in a strong grip. "I allus said you'd make 'em set up an' take notice, Frank. Ask anybody if I didn't!"

"I know you did, Pete," said Blackton heartily. "And it was the faith of friends like you that—by the way, where can I find Bill Tate?"

The veteran's eyes twinkled.

"You ain't the only one that inquires about Bill," he remarked, expectorating. "Bill's considerable famous these days, ain't he?"

"He has certainly put this old town on the map," fervently agreed the returned native. "And I'll have to admit, Pete, that I owe a good deal to Bill. About everything I have, in fact. Isn't that so?" turning to the traveling man.

"Rather," assented that individual.

"Where can I find him?"

"Wall, I guess you'll have to go out to Greenhill cemetery if you want to see what's left of Bill," was Pete's startling rejoinder.

"Dead?" The returned native's astonishment was almost ludicrous to behold. "Why—how—"

"Yep. He married old man Winters's oldest gal, three or four year after you left—the one that was sich a hand at writin' composeetions in school, you rec'llect. Mind her?"

Blackton nodded dumbly.

"Wall, Bill got drunk the night of th' weddin', an' fell into Riffle crick an' got drownded. His widder, seein' as her dad wouldn't support her no more, had to go to writin' fer a livin'. She took Bill's name, 'cause she said it was th' least she could do to honor his mem'ry."

The traveling man "made" Fenville again two weeks later. He approached Pete Wilson.

"What became of my friend Mr. Blackton," he inquired. "I hear that he left town on the next train that day."

"He did," grinned Pete, shifting his cud and wiping away an amber stream from his chin with the back of his hand. "But the Widder Tate's ridin' around in the spankin'est, all-firedest, stylishest automobile you ever see. She says that Frank didn't want to pay the return freight on it."

The Great Discovery

by Charles V. Barney

Author of "Texas Fever," etc.

CHAPTER XL.

WITH THE KING.

AT the door of the royal apartments Judith was told that the king expected her. She entered quickly. She was nervously pale, but otherwise did not reveal her anxiety.

Ferdinand looked up and smiled craftily. He and Sansito were hovering over a low, silver brazier, for the night was cold. The air was heavy with some Moorish scent.

The young woman acknowledged the king's smile by a courtly bow, but she did not advance from her position near the door of the anteroom.

"I thought you were in man's clothes?" his majesty sucked in his under lip with a noisy, characteristic gesture.

Doña Judith did not reply, and the king resumed: "Where were you trying to go?" he inquired.

"I sought to escape," Judith responded defiantly.

"Escape?" the king echoed in surprise.

"Why do you strive to torment me?" she cried indignantly.

Her words did not change the king's tone.

"What do you mean by insinuating that you are a prisoner?" he inquired.

"You know it is true," she retorted; "as much a prisoner as if I were in the deepest, triple-locked dungeon."

Suavely his majesty replied: "We all are prisoners to your beauty, madam. The light of your eyes holds us all in thrall. I *know* that much!"

Judith made a movement of anger, and impetuously broke forth: "I would speak to your majesty alone. Will you grant me this favor?"

Ferdinand laughed lazily.

"The secretary's presence seems superfluous," he remarked quietly.

Much against his will, Sansito arose and left the room. As he did so Judith Merton came forward and faced the king.

"Why will you not allow me to leave this country?" she demanded sternly.

"Where would you go?" his majesty parried.

"It makes no difference *where* I would go," she cried; "England, or the ends of the world are all the same. You will not let me go—why? Why?"

For a moment Ferdinand hesitated, and then he deliberately announced: "You are possessed of secrets that are dangerous to me, and—"

She interrupted hotly: "I know nothing that in any way endangers your majesty's life or throne."

Her tone was vibrant with sincerity, but Ferdinand looked at her suspiciously.

There was a short silence, and then the king calmly remarked: "You know where this *Arthur Lake* is—eh?"

Doña Judith did not start, but Ferdinand, who was narrowly watching her, noticed her color change.

"Why do you not answer?" he inquired.

She spoke slowly, and her voice sank to low, deep notes. "Yes," she said, "I know his whereabouts, but you cannot drag that knowledge from me. No, not even with all your tortures."

This story began in The Argosy for March 20.

"Tortures," the king cried. "Who would think of your loveliness subjected to the torture! Besides, you are daughter of our English ambassador. Such persons are not tortured, even when they withhold the hiding-place of traitors——"

"Arthur Lake is no traitor," Doña Merton cried passionately. "He is dangerous to no one but your royal secretary; why to him, I do not know. But what knowledge Arthur possesses does not endanger even him. I know!"

"Just what do you know?" the monarch slyly inquired.

"I know that in Arthur's veins flows good blood," she cried, "and that he has a miniature of a beautiful woman who looks very much like him, and whom we believe to be his mother. That is all! Is that sufficient reason for the secretary's fear, and for my imprisonment?" she demanded scathingly.

"How do you know such precious blood flows in this sailor's veins?" the king smiled.

She spoke up quickly: "Because my father, when dying, declared to me that Arthur was better born than I, and he also besought me, for my own good, to foreswear his love."

"And you dare to disobey a dying father's commands?" Ferdinand inquired.

"Yes," she responded firmly. "I love Arthur Lake." She announced it simply, and looked squarely at the crafty monarch. The expression in her eyes was excuse enough for her conduct; it said as plainly as if she had spoken: "I can no more stop loving him than I can cease to be myself."

Before such unalterable affection the fickle king felt shamed; but his humiliation was short-lived.

"Is this all you know?" he inquired, "or, rather, is it all you intend to tell me?"

"I know one other thing," she confided: "In the miniature case was once a bit of parchment (now lost) which stated that *Seseca* could tell Arthur all that he wished to know concerning himself and his fortune—"

"Fortune?" cried the king. "Was there a fortune?"

"There was some gold," Judith confirmed, "but it was stolen. I suspect there were papers, also, but they, too, disappeared. All this was at the time when your secretary was in Dover! I believe he is implicated in those thefts. Call him in now, and we will question him."

King Ferdinand shook his head. Judith resumed. "Arthur has questioned him, but with no success. This is all I know, your majesty. It is all that Arthur Lake knows, I think."

The king narrowed his eyes, and silently contemplated the young woman.

"You give me food for thought," he remarked. "But how can I know that you speak the truth—all the truth?"

"I do not lie!" she cried proudly. "Surely you must have realized that, when you asked where Arthur Lake was. I did not deny that I knew. I might easily have done so."

There was a short pause, and then Judith cried impetuously: "Perhaps this will make you believe me."

She came closer, and lifting an ornament containing a bit of the true cross which the king always wore on a heavy chain about his neck, was about to swear upon this sacred talisman. But her nearness intoxicated the impressionable monarch, and he caught her to him.

"Let me go," she cried.

His majesty got to his feet, still striving to embrace her. She eluded him and, gaining the far end of the room, turned.

"For shame," she cried. "This is unworthy of you, and—off!" she cried, for the king, disregarding her words, was about to renew his attack.

She drew her crucifix from her girdle and touching a spring, a thin, triangular blade of sharpest steel flashed into view. Firmly grasping the cross, which now formed the handle of this little poniard, she cried: "Dare to take another step, and—"

The king interrupted, smiling evilly: "And you bury that in my heart—eh?"

"No, your majesty," she corrected, "in my own!"

"How will that harm me?" he murmured, blinking.

"I have long foreseen such a thing as this," Judith spoke rapidly, "and I am pre-

pared. At my death a packet will be delivered to that beautiful saint—your wife. In it I have plainly told her majesty why I killed myself. I think that when she learns how you conducted yourself toward a defenseless girl, that only with her own life could she purchase her honor—I think then, the blessed Isabella will be moved to such depths that she will appeal to Rome for freedom from such an unworthy spouse!"

These words had a stunning effect upon the infatuated king. He stood, immobile, for some moments, and then drawing himself to his full height, he motioned imperiously toward the door.

Doña Judith bowed low, and as she made her exit, walking backward, she announced softly: "I have already forgotten what has just taken place. I beseech your majesty to do the same."

CHAPTER XLI.

WITH THE QUEEN.

THE king did not respond, and Doña Judith hastened away. She at once sought an audience with the queen. Her majesty was with her confessor. Isabella was a most able ruler, and neglected none of the arduous duties falling to her share as cosovereign of one of the most active nations of the world, at the time of its most active life; still, she always made opportunities piously to perform all the duties enjoined by that church which she loved more than anything else on earth.

Doña Judith waited until Queen Isabella would see her, and when finally she entered the presence of the "beautiful, pious woman of imperturbable royalty," it was with a feeling of having reached haven after a terrible storm.

Judith fell on her knees before the queen, and kissed her hand, then she burst into tears.

"What's the matter, child? What has happened?" Isabella inquired, with no visible sign of the perturbation that stirred within her.

Doña Judith calmed herself and recited simply: "I attempted to escape from Spain, and was caught by his majesty's spies before I left the palace. I now find it inexpedient to remain in my own apartment, and pray your gracious majesty to allow me to remain near the sanctity of your person."

It was as plainly as the girl dared speak, and the queen understood her.

"I shall see to it that you are housed with me from now on," the queen comforted.

Judith gratefully kissed the strong, capable-looking hands.

There was a silence, and finally the queen asked kindly: "Was it very terrible, child?"

"No, madam," Judith corrected. "I have already forgotten it, and although I have told you nothing, I pray you to forget what I may have implied."

"Where were you going, had you escaped?" The beautiful blue eyes of the queen looked tenderly down upon the suppliant.

"I was striving to reach him," she began.

"Who?" Isabella's tone was sympathetic.

"The man I love—Arthur Lake—he who his majesty wrongly supposes is conspiring with me in some dangerous way."

"You know where he is?" Isabella demanded sharply.

"Yes, your majesty," Judith responded. "And, if you will give me your promise to keep the secret, I will tell you."

The fair-haired queen smiled. "It is not necessary," she responded. "I have no desire to know. This affair is my husband's. I will in no way interfere. I wish you all good. And, if I were that young man, I would marry you at once and take you home, and—"

"If the opportunity ever offers, will you aid us?" Doña Judith cried.

"If I can do so without meddling with the king's plans," the queen announced loyally.

"God bless you," Judith whispered gratefully. "It is not possible for him to come to Spain now, but some day he will, and then, I expect to hold your majesty to your promise."

"And I will keep it," Isabella declared.

"But now—" She paused, thinking. The clear brow remained unbroken in its serenity, but the eyes showed the many conflicting thoughts that were being weighed beneath its marblelike exterior.

When the queen spoke it was to declare that she would assign Doña Judith the duties of conversing in English with the Princess Catherine of Aragon—the affianced bride of the oldest son of King Henry VII of England.

"It will be reason enough for your always being close to me," she meditated. "And, if you conduct yourself with the judgment and tact that have so far distinguished your every act, I promise my constant and loving protection."

Judith Merton attempted to voice her gratitude, but the queen cut her short.

"There is little I can do," she remarked, "but from now on you will sleep in the royal apartments, in a chamber adjoining that occupied by the Princess Catherine."

Judith arose. The queen placed her hand gently on the young woman's shoulder.

"Was there more that you wished to tell me?" she inquired.

Doña Judith bowed her head and made a gesture of dissent.

"Then go, child. Continue to love your sweetheart, but remember—I am much older than you are, and I know—do not love him because you think him worthy of it. That way you only store up unhappiness for yourself. Love him just because he is the man you choose to love!"

The interview was over. Its shortness and the tangible results immediately effected were characteristic of the conduct of this sweet, capable queen whose head was as strong as her heart, but whose bigotry was stronger than all put together.

CHAPTER XLII.

WHAT COLUMBUS FOUND.

FOUR days later, the 25th of September, 1493, Columbus, without Judith Merton, sailed from Cadiz on his second voyage across the Atlantic, taking with him a host of men eagerly expectant of finding huge quantities of gold.

They went by way of the Canary Islands, where, as on the first voyage, they stopped to repair their leaky ships. Then the voyage was resumed, and most of the time the weather was delightful, but the water supply ran low, and the crew became sullen.

Columbus commanded that they drink all they wanted, and save only a little, declaring that within forty-eight hours they would find land.

The next day no land appeared, and the men were fearful, but Columbus laughed at them, and the next morning, November 3, a little island appeared. This they christened Dominica, and it proved to be some distance southeast of Española.

Instead of hastening thither to relieve the little ill-fated garrison, Columbus continued for four weeks to cruise among the Caribbean Islands and then along the southern coast of Española. Not until dark on the day of November 27, almost one year since he had left it, did he reach the coast before La Navidad.

It was too dark to see the little fort, and there were no lights on shore. Though surprised, the admiral ordered guns to be fired, but there was no response but the echoes from the forest!

Columbus was alarmed, but confided his distress to no one. He recalled now, as he had drawn nearer and nearer to this settlement, that the natives had seemed less and less friendly. Had something happened? Had disaster come to the colony? No—he told himself, this could not be. Arthur Lake, the beloved of the natives, had been there to adjust any difference that might have come up. He had put great trust in Arthur, and surely he would not betray this trust!

With this thought, the admiral went to rest, intending, as soon as it was light, to go ashore and investigate. But in the middle of the night a canoe of natives came alongside and demanded to know if the admiral was aboard. They conversed by means of one of the Indios that Columbus had taken to Spain with him.

Those in the canoe refused to come aboard until they were certain that Columbus was really with the fleet. The admiral's

own voice, speaking out of the darkness, was not sufficient, and they were only convinced when a lantern was held up to the face of the admiral. Columbus found himself wondering how it was possible that these suspicious, doubting natives could be of the same stock as those loving, trusting people he had left at La Navidad.

The natives came aboard and brought presents which had been sent, they declared, by Guacanagari. The admiral impatiently received the gifts and demanded to know about the garrison.

The interpreter seemed to have great difficulty in making himself clear, but at last it appeared certain that there had been much trouble in the settlement—sickness, and the men had fought among themselves, and some of them had wandered away and been lost or captured by unfriendly tribes. Then there had been an attack upon the settlement, and also upon Guacanagari, by a mountain chieftain, Caonabo. Guacanagari was now suffering from a wound in the leg received in this encounter; otherwise, he would have come to welcome the admiral; but he would come the next day.

"And Arthur Lake?" Columbus cried.

At first this question seemed to meet with no response from the natives. They seemed never to have heard of Arthur. Columbus explained to the interpreter, and the interpreter explained to the natives, and among themselves they conferred.

Finally the admiral was assured that he was well.

"But where is he?" the Genoese persisted.

More conferring followed this, and the interpreter began again a recital of the tribulations of La Navidad and of Guacanagari, during which he contradicted most of the things which had just been related.

The admiral lost his temper, but it was of no avail. Hé strove by all possible means to get a connected story, and failed. That mention of Arthur Lake seemed to have wrought a mental pandemonium among the natives.

Finally, there was nothing for it but to wait as patiently as possible for the dawn. And when that came, Columbus discovered that the little fortress was no longer there! What had once been La Navidad was a heap of charred ruins.

The admiral did not go ashore, as he was expecting Guacanagari would come to visit him, as had been promised. However, many of the sailors landed. These noticed that the natives were very shy, and would not approach, and peeped with fascinated curiosity at the Spaniards grabbling among the ruins of the fortress.

They found fragments of clothing and odd bits of things among the blackened ruins, which seemed to indicate that the place had been sacked before it was fired.

All that day Columbus waited in vain for the coming of his old friend, the cacique. The next morning he went ashore and discovered that the dwelling of Guacanagari had also been burned. He directed that the well and ditch of La Navidad be cleaned out, as he had instructed the colonists to hide their valuables there in case of disaster.

Nothing was revealed by these excavations, and Columbus was confirmed in his belief that the garrison had perished in a sudden attack. But attacked by whom? And why? And what had become of Arthur Lake?

The admiral went farther inland, and found a native village. But all the inhabitants fled at his approach. However, here he found many European articles of such value that he was certain that the colonists had never bartered them.

Upon returning to the site of La Navidad, his worst fears were realized. The investigators had discovered a grave in which were huddled the bodies of eleven Spaniards. A doctor who examined the bodies declared that these poor men had not been dead two months!

If he had come directly to La Navidad could he have saved them? This and many another sorry question presented themselves to the dismayed admiral.

Having discovered the whereabouts of the king, Columbus, with a magnificent escort, went to see Guacanagari. He found him lying in his netted bed or hammock.

There followed the usual presentation of bells and beads and such like. The king received these with graciousness, but his

manner was changed. Columbus complained of this, and was informed that the king was suffering with his wounded leg.

The admiral insisted that his attendant surgeon inspect the wound. The king arose, and leaning heavily on the admiral, limped into the light. The leg was unbandaged, and there were no signs of wound or bruise.

Guacanagari showed no chagrin, but insisted that the wound was internal, and he winced and moaned whenever the doctor's prying fingers came near the suspected spot.

Columbus hated to doubt his old friend, who frequently repeated that he had been wounded in attempting to aid the Spaniards.

Again the admiral inquired about Arthur, and again was met with blank silence. Even questions put to the king concerning Noanita elicited but one short word, which the interpreter declared meant that she was dead.

"And Arthur?" Columbus demanded loudly, feeling that by shouting he would more surely convey his meaning.

Guacanagari shook his head, and said something which the interpreter said meant that "he was not, any more."

The admiral in leaving attempted to present the king with a beautiful crucifix which he wore about his own neck, but Guacanagari shrank from it. He had come to know too much of the Christians; any symbol of their religion inspired only dread.

The admiral attempted by means of the interpreter to explain the significance of the crucifix, but Guacanagari declared: "That is not their god. Their god is this!" He pointed to a bit of gold that he wore through a hole in his nose.

Thus ended the interview between two men who had once loved each other so that, as Columbus had declared to the queen, "it was wonderful!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

ARTHUR'S TALE.

COLUMBUS worried a good deal about Arthur, but other cares and anxieties crowded fast upon him. He had to select a place for a new settlement, and direct its beginnings. He now had a considerable body of men to look out for, and whereas his handling of them on shipboard was most masterly, he was anything but efficient as a colonizer.

The new settlement was begun farther along the coast, and christened Isabella, in honor of the queen. Busy days followed. Stone buildings were started, lands cleared, and orchards planted.

The admiral forced all to labor excessively, and soon there was grumbling among those who had thought they were coming to a place where gold could be had for the asking, and where nothing would be required of them except the collecting of treasure.

Many of the settlers were noblemen who were unused to any sort of labor, and who resented and resisted the severe orders of the admiral. Sickness developed, and added its fears and miseries to the already disheartened men. But Columbus pursued his same ways.

Hearing that the gold mines were located in the interior of the island, directly back of the settlement, Columbus himself went to see, leaving his gentle brother, Diego, to look after the colony.

The admiral, upon reaching the mountains, which were in the country of the Spaniards' enemy, Caonabo, thought that he discovered evidences of gold, amber, lapis lazuli, and copper. Again his imagination had got hold of him! However, he established a fort here, as he noticed the natives were very different from the pacific creatures he had usually encountered.

The admiral left fifty-six men at the new fort, and returned to Isabella, where he besought all to gather what gold they could, keep in frequent touch with the fort near the mines; then he departed with three small caravels on a cruise of discovery. He left the ineffectual brother Diego in charge, and sent the fleet, in charge of his friend Antonio de Torres, back to Spain with various letters to the sovereigns, in one of which he proposed taking the natives captive and exporting them as slaves. This suggestion was met with a peremptory refusal from the merciful queen. A refusal which Columbus disregarded, to his own wo.

When he passed the former site of La Navidad, he attempted to see Guacanagari, but in vain. The king now avoided his former friend.

For five months the voyage of discovery continued along the coasts of Jamaica and Cuba; then the ships returned to Isabella in late September. The admiral was so ill that he had to be carried, unconscious, from the caravel. Not, however, before he had made his crew of eighty men swear before a notary that it was possible to go from Cuba to Spain by land! The penalty for any one who afterward told the truth, would be a fine of ten thousand maravedis if he were an officer, and if he were a sailor he would receive one hundred lashes and have his tongue pulled out!

As soon as the admiral was well enough to be consulted about the affairs of the colony, he heard sad tales. Every one was discontented, the fort at the mines had been abandoned, and Isabella was divided into various mutinous factions. The only bright spot in all this miserable gloom was the sight of his brother, Bartholomew, who had been sent out from Spain in command of a supply fleet.

Bartholomew brought good news to the admiral of his little children, and assurances of the continued high favor with which the sovereigns regarded him.

The first time that the admiral was able to go beyond the town, he walked alone on the seashore. It was here that a powerful, almost naked man came upon him. This man was sunburned to a dark-brown color. His head was tied in a brown rag of native weave, of almost the color of his skin. But the bright eyes that shone out joyfully upon the admiral were of an intense blue!

"It is I, Arthur Lake," the savage-looking creature cried.

Columbus was too amazed to speak. Finally he gasped: "But we thought you were dead."

"I have been, almost, more times than one," the young sailor cried. "But first, before everything, tell me, how is she?"

"Doña Judith Merton?" the admiral inquired.

"Of course; who else could I mean?"

"She is very well, and sent you a letter. She had wanted to come to you, but her duties at court would not permit."

"Her duties?" Arthur cried in surprise.

"Her father has died," Columbus announced. "She is always near the queen now—but all this, her letter to you will explain. But you—where have you been? What has happened? Why have you not come near me before?"

"I have tried," Arthur began, "but I was far away when you landed, and it was some while before I heard that you had returned. When I finally reached Isabella it was to learn that you had gone away on a voyage of discovery; then, you were ill and—"

Columbus interrupted: "But why did you not report yourself at Isabella? I had given up all hope that any of those of La Navidad were alive."

"I am the only one," Arthur said sadly. "Even Noanita is dead—"

"Dead?" Columbus echoed with wistfulness.

"Killed," Arthur announced, "but all of that I will relate to you properly, later. The reason I did not report at Isabella is that I could discover not one person who had been with you on your first voyage—not one person whom I knew! No one there ever suspected that I was other than a native, for I never spoke, and I have acquired the habit of keeping my lids lowered so that the casual observer never sees my telltale eyes. My hair, as you see, I keep discreetly covered. Its brightness would betray me."

"Yes, yes," the admiral cried impatiently, "but none of this explains why you did not report yourself to those in charge."

"Why should I?" Arthur cried. "You were not there. Why should I willingly surrender myself to a life of drudgery and hardship—almost of slavery? Pardon me, Don Cristobal, but your under-men suffer cruelly in Isabella. You should look into it."

"And what have you been doing?"

"Awaiting your return," Arthur smiled, "and wandering in the forests, mingling, when I could, with the natives. Often they do not trust me, but they fear me. They

will not harm me. I have learned many secrets, and can speak their language. King Guacanagari is afraid to have me near him lest his enemy and mine, and most of all *yours*—Caonabo—should come to capture me and bring, as he did before, ruin in his train."

"Then it was he who destroyed La Navidad?" Columbus cried.

"I think so," Arthur responded, "but even I am not certain. Sit down here, for you are weak from illness, and I will tell you all I know."

Columbus seated himself on a fallen log, and Arthur crouched beside him.

"After you left," he began, "things went from bad to worse. The natives came to hate our men more and more because of their cruelty, extortion, and revolting excesses. I was living, at the commander's orders, in the home of the king, striving to learn the language. Poor Noanita was ever with me, serving and caring for me.

"One night we were both taken bound into the woods by four of Guacanagari's men. I believe the plan was in this way to save us from the attack of Caonabo upon the settlement—an attack in which I believe Guacanagari was more or less a silent partner.

"We were bound, so that it would appear that we were already captives in case we were met by any parties of the enemy. This is just what did occur.

"We were stopped by a band of five of Coanabo's men. Our guides declared that they had taken us captive, and were conducting us to Caonabo. They explained how they were forced to take Noanita lest she move her brother by her prayers, and he send to rescue me.

"The Caonabo braves doubted the truth of all this, because we were considerably out of the direct road. They suggested killing me at once, and one of them, armed with a knife which he had got by trading with those at the fort, came upon me!

"I thought my end had come, and it would have, except that the Princess Noanita, bound as she was, threw herself between me and the descending knife. The steel was buried in her heart. She died almost instantly.

"But her death so enraged her servitors that they set upon the Caonabo braves with great fury. They killed two and wounded another, but two of their number were badly injured. Then, hearing another body of men coming, King Guacanagari's men fled, and I was left bound in the forest.

"This oncoming body of natives passed by without seeing me, and finally I managed to free my hands. Then I buried the poor woman who had given her life for mine, and hastened back to La Navidad; only to find it in ruins. All about were the dead!

"I found the body of my friend, Will Harris, and buried it. I also found the Jew doctor, and searched his cold carcass, but my missing miniature was not upon it. Then I went to Guacanagari. He told me that he could no longer protect me, and advised my fleeing to the forest. He told me the whereabouts of the country of Caonabo, so that I could avoid it. He fairly drove me away. I think he could not forgive me for the death of his beloved sister. And, if it had not been for me, she would have been living still—the beautiful, gentle woods-creature that she was."

Arthur Lake paused, and gazed sadly out at the sea. Neither man spoke for some time. Finally the admiral inquired: "What do you intend to do now?"

"Go back to Spain as soon as possible," Arthur cried.

"Perhaps—perhaps—" and Columbus seemed to be pondering something as he looked intently at the big, dark-skinned man beside him.

"I will speak with you again to-morrow. Meet me here at the same time. It is perhaps just as well that no one in the town knows that you have survived the massacre, and—"

"But my letter?" Arthur cried. "I will not wait until to-morrow for that."

"It will be brought here and put under this log by my brother to-night," Columbus promised. "See, I make a great cross here, in the sand, so that he can easily find the spot."

As he spoke the admiral arose and marked the soft sand, and Arthur sadly noticed how much older the great discov-

erer seemed than when last he had seen him.

"Why should I not accompany you back to Isabella?" Arthur demanded. "It will bring me that much nearer to Spain."

Columbus smiled strangely: "I will tell you all that to-morrow," he announced. "Now, good night. I am glad—more glad than I can tell you—that you are alive, my son. God has preserved you, and for a purpose!"

That night Arthur received his precious letters, and the next day the admiral made known his wishes.

CHAPTER XLIV.

COLUMBUS'S ENVOY.

COLUMBUS wanted to establish friendly relations with Caonabo and his people, or failing in this, to effect the capture of the chieftain. In these schemes, Arthur Lake would be of immense value to him, and so, on the island of Española, Arthur remained! Not without protest, however, for he was most anxious to return to his sweetheart.

Judith had again written to him, having refused to believe De Torres's sad tale of the extermination of all the garrison at La Navidad. It was a beautiful letter, and the young lover hastened to reply, sitting at the admiral's own desk and writing with the admiral's own quill.

Columbus stood by, smiling somewhat sadly at the impetuous energy of this big brown man whom the Spaniards supposed to be a friendly native.

Columbus took advantage of the presence of such an able scribe to dictate a long letter to the sovereigns, who had sent assurances by De Torres of their continued faith and high esteem, besides a general letter to the colonists, urging them to obey the admiral in all his wishes and to bow to his authority.

Later on, Columbus entrusted to Arthur the writing of other and more important letters. These were sent to the sister of De Torres, the royal nurse, who had always been a firm supporter of Columbus. In these epistles, the Genoese revealed matters concerning the colony which he wished conveyed secretly to the queen. He told of his trials and troubles, and made accusations against various men by name, begging the queen to aid him in diplomatically removing them.

Shortly after, it became necessary for Columbus to send his brother, Diego, to protect his interests at court. For colonial matters were in a very bad way; many discontented men, some of them possessed of powerful influence, had returned to Spain with complaints.

With Diego went the sorry showing of gold. Feeling how little he had to return, Columbus dared to ship five hundred captive natives to be sold as slaves! This, despite the fact that De Torres had brought emphatic words from Isabella, begging that even the man-eating Caribs be converted to Christianity by some other means than force.

Meanwhile things went from bad to worse in Española. It is true that through Arthur Lake's information, the chieftain, Caonabo, was captured, but the mines of his country proved to be less rich than had been supposed. The sovereigns were disappointed. The priest, sent out by the Pope to take charge of the conversion of the natives, returned in disgust to Spain with bitter tales.

Although the queen did not say that she believed all that was said against the admiral, she at least listened to his accusers.

She was very angry about the slaves. And when Columbus created his brother, Bartholomew, adelantado, or governor of the island, Ferdinand, thinking that this was a presumption, added his insinuations to the luckless admiral's detractors.

Ships plied often between the two worlds. Arthur heard every time from Judith, and he never failed to send a letter back to her.

Nor did Columbus fail to receive information from Spain, and always these letters brought forth hints of his waning favor. Something must be done to increase the returns from the mines. The admiral firmly believed that gold would blind the monarchs to all his mismanagement and mistakes.

He imposed a tribute upon the whole na-

tive population of the island. Every one over fourteen within the provinces of the mines must pay, every three months, a little bellful of gold. Brass and copper tokens were given to the natives to show when the tribute had been paid, and these they wore about their necks.

In an effort to relieve the sufferings of his unhappy people, the king of the mine province offered to institute a huge farm, and produce enough corn to maintain all Castile, if the admiral would only release them from that tribute which they could not collect.

But Columbus would not consent. He must have gold to send to Spain! The demands from there became more and more insistent!

The admiral was in a sad dilemma.

The poor natives withdrew from their old haunts, and hid themselves in the mountains. Even Guacanagari fled, and took his people with him.

Then the settlers hunted these poor creatures as if they were beasts and when they succeeded in capturing any, they herded them back, with lashes, to their labors.

Such conditions obtained for months! The harassed admiral did not know which way to turn. These new possessions were costing the crown far, far more than they were bringing to it. There was little gold, and Columbus had declared that there was such a quantity! The natives were now his enemies. His own colonists hated him. At court he was maligned; people said that he was keeping everything for himself.

He had amassed nothing but misery.

The only thing he was really able to do and wanted to do—discover—he could not, for whenever he left his colony ungoverned the greatest misfortunes took place.

Matters reached their climax when, in October, 1495, his brother Diego returned, bringing with him Juan Aguado, a man sent by the sovereigns to investigate affairs, and bearing a warrant of unlimited authority.

The admiral was absent at the time, and Aguado lost no opportunity in making his presence felt. Bartholomew could do little, as the discontented colonists had at once accepted Aguado as a royally appointed righter of their wrongs. Any move made against him would have resulted in a serious outbreak.

Arthur Lake was the one to bring to Columbus the news of Aguado's arrival. And, in the young man's company, Columbus hastened back to Isabella.

His meeting with Aguado was quiet and dignified. With that simple courtesy that a great man sometimes displays, Columbus bowed before a superior authority.

But it was only a short time before Columbus saw how serious the situation really was. Then he sent for Arthur Lake, and announced that the young man must proceed at once to Spain as his envoy.

"There are things which you can say by word of mouth which I dare not write," Columbus declared.

Arthur nodded.

"You know more about the actual state of affairs here than—than I do myself," the admiral resumed. "Much that Aguado has collected against me has been furnished him by natives, who hope in this way to secure themselves with the man they believe to be the new viceroy.

"But he will never be!" Columbus cried excitedly. "The queen will never forsake me like that. You will explain to her. Keep nothing back. Tell her everything! Speak just as you would to me. But"—the Italian raised his finger in warning—"only speak when you are alone. Mind you, in the presence of no one else!"

Arthur understood that he meant King Ferdinand, but said nothing.

Columbus resumed: "You are to go immediately to Doña de Torres, and she will arrange for your interview with the queen. The moment you reach Spain, seek out the court, and Doña de Torres. Your whole trip and mission must be secret. The queen would not receive you openly when the royal investigator is already working on the case. You must be very circumspect, and you must waste no time. My very life probably depends upon your forestalling Aguado's reports."

Columbus looked inquiringly at his silent listener.

"What do you say?" he cried.

Arthur did not speak, but shook his head doubtfully.

"What's the matter?" Columbus cried. "Here you have been, for months, fretting to be permitted to return to Spain, and now, when there is most urgent need, you are reluctant—"

"But this is a most delicate mission," Arthur interposed; "I am not a diplomat. Already you have learned that, to your grief, in connection with La Navidad. I am not fitted to execute this service, and—"

But Columbus would not hear him out. He had made up his mind that Arthur was to go; and go he did, on the next ship, dressed like a Spanish grandee, and bearing various important documents for the queen, besides—most valuable of all—the vast store of knowledge which he had accumulated during his more than three years' stay on the island.

He endured a most tempestuous voyage, and did not arrive in Cadiz for four months. When he did, it was the last day of May, and the court was at Valladolid. He hired a mule, and continued his journey overland.

CHAPTER XLV.

CAUGHT.

DOÑA JUDITH MERTON had gone on from month to month, hoping always that the next boat would bring Arthur rather than a long letter telling how necessary he was to Columbus and the welfare of the faraway colony.

The king's infatuation for her continued; but, with the additional protection of her new duties as preceptress of the Princess Catherine, she found it easier to keep him from annoying her.

The queen still showed marked favor for the English girl, but a slight coldness had come into the attitude of Doña de Torres. It was not enough for Judith to complain about, but she felt the defection of her friend, and feared that it was because the nurse resented her appointment to a position almost as important as her own.

One day Judith had been surprised to see a missive written in Arthur's hand in the possession of Doña de Torres. Both young women were in the queen's presence at the time, and Judith had said nothing, but she had seen that the missive was actually directed to Doña de Torres!

It could not be a letter for herself, sent, as always, in care of Doña de Torres, for it had been opened. At her first opportunity Judith demanded an explanation.

The nurse showed great perturbation, and refused to surrender the letter. Almost tearfully she besought Judith to believe in her, declaring that she could say nothing without involving great names.

"It concerns you in no way," she protested. "You must believe me."

"But I must know *why* he is writing to you," Judith cried.

"He will tell you some day," Doña de Torres replied lightly, "and you will laugh at all your fears. Do not be jealous of me," she pleaded, "it would be silly."

But Judith *was* jealous, and determined to write to Arthur about it; but when the time came, she could not force herself to pen the question. Arthur had once told her that he did not know Doña de Torres. To confront him with having written to her would be to insinuate that he had told her a falsehood.

She refused to believe such a thing, although there seemed to be proof of it—more proof than that one letter; for on two later occasions, Judith saw letters addressed to Doña de Torres in Arthur's handwriting.

Either Arthur was writing letters that were intercepted by Doña de Torres, or he was carrying on a correspondence with the beautiful nurse!

Judith was wretched. When she could bear with her suspicions no longer, she went to her friend and again sought an explanation. She was met by the same prayers for blind belief. The Spanish woman swore that Arthur Lake meant nothing to her, nor she to him.

"Perhaps he doesn't love me any more," Judith faltered sadly.

"You do not deserve his love," Doña de Torres cried, "if you doubt him so easily!"

Judith remonstrated: "Then why does he not return to Spain?"

"You know he cannot. He has—" Doña de Torres stopped short.

"What were you going to say?"

But the friend would say no more, and

the Doña Merton's jealousy continued to rankle.

One day Judith stood with a crowd of lords and ladies in the king's antechamber; she was looking out of a window into one of the small, inner courtyards.

Suddenly she leaned eagerly forward.

She saw a man enter the yard, and then make rapidly for the palace. For only a brief moment did she see his face; it was very sunburnt, and he was dressed like a courtier, but love sharpened Judith's eyes.

It was Arthur Lake!

Why had he come without letting her know?

All at once a terrible thought crossed her mind. She was remembering that Doña de Torres had excused herself and remained in her rooms, pleading a headache.

Could it be possible that Arthur had come to see her, in secret?

All the color left Doña Merton's face, and she moved unsteadily toward the door. Her way was barred by the Count of Sansito, who had been watching her.

"Where are you going, madam?" he inquired. "You look ill."

"I am." She strove vainly for control. "I must seek my room."

She gained the exit and fled, making rapidly for the long hallway through which she knew Arthur would have to pass if he went, as her instinct declared he would go, directly to the apartment of Doña de Torres.

When she reached the hall she thought it was deserted, then she saw that Arthur was just passing out of it.

He had taken the turning that led to the little stairs to the upper corridor.

It was on this corridor that the chamber of the royal nurse was located!

Thither Judith followed, keeping at a safe distance, and taking care that her steps made no sound on the old flagged floor.

Once she was almost discovered when Arthur apprehensively turned and looked back. She had barely time to slip into the deep shadow of an archway. For a moment she saw his face very clearly. It was undoubtedly Arthur, and he was bound upon some clandestine mission. His manner was furtive and nervous.

When she had reached such a point as enabled her to view the fatal door, she paused and watched anxiously. She recalled her friend's protestations of innocence and Arthur's avowal that he did not know Doña de Torres. Then came the thought of Noanita, and what she had been told about Arthur and the Indian princess. And he had stayed away so long!

Arthur Lake had paused before the door of the nurse!

He looked about apprehensively, and then, deciding that all was safe, he scratched on the door. Almost at once it opened, and Judith heard the voice of Doña de Torres welcoming him!

A low cry escaped Judith, but almost at once she stifled it. The Count of Sansito had appeared at the end of the corridor.

Gathering herself together, she attempted to walk calmly away and ascend to the floor above, where were located the apartments of the queen and royal children.

Sansito had evidently followed her from the king's anteroom. What did he suspect? How was he concerned in all this? The count thirsted for Arthur's life—she knew that. But what could he do?

She pretended not to be aware of the secretary's approach, and moved quickly away. She ascended to the floor above, and he did not follow. Instead of going to her own room, she walked the length of the corridor and descended by the stairs at the far end.

Within a few minutes after she had departed from Doña de Torres's door she was again beside it.

She wondered where Sansito had gone, as she rushed to the nurse's door and cautiously tried it. The latch responded, but the door did not open. It was barred on the inside.

She placed her face against the door, and listened. She could hear voices. First Arthur's, and then the nurse's, and then quick little words said together. She could not distinguish the words, but her jealous heart told her.

They were making love! He was telling her how hard it had been to be separated so long, and she—and she—

Judith could not bear the torture. She wanted to beat upon the door and call

aloud to them that she had discovered their shameful secret. But she controlled herself. Perhaps, after all, there might be some explanation. There must be! She would not doubt Arthur. If she doubted him—if he were false—then there was nothing in the world in which she could ever believe.

"No, he loves me. He does! He must!" she cried aloud. Tears came into her lovely eyes, and she pressed her hands to her breast.

She could still hear those voices. The low, soft sound was terrible in its suggestion. What was he saying? What was Doña de Torres replying?

Then again she attempted to comfort herself by repeating pathetically: "He loves me. I know he loves me. It *is* true!"

Had the poor girl but known, Arthur Lake was speaking calmly to Doña de Torres, who was seated quietly before him. In her lap lay a bundle of documents which she had consented to convey secretly to the queen.

Arthur was striving to make the most moving appeal he could for his friend, the admiral. The queen had flatly refused to grant him an interview. Columbus should have come himself. Besides, things had now gone too far. She dared not display her partiality for the great man by receiving, even in secret, his apologist.

So the nurse had sent Arthur's messenger back with instructions how to reach her apartment, and granting the envoy an interview with herself.

And, at this interview, unknown to everyone, Queen Isabella was present! Having descended by the private stairs that led from the royal apartments to those of the nurse, she had secreted herself behind the hangings, which not only masked the entrance to the stairs, but ran almost around the large room.

To every word that Arthur spoke she was attending. She liked Columbus. She would aid him if it were possible. She believed in him in spite of all his detractors, but she wanted to know the truth. Yet she dared not openly go against her husband, who had sent Aguado out to collect a budget of accusations against the admiral.

Arthur's presentation of the situation was very simple, but it was also very moving. Columbus could not have chosen a better envoy, for the very directness and lack of embroidery in the young man's narrative impressed the listening queen more than any amount of flowery sophistication.

Suddenly the queen heard some one creeping down the stairs. It was a man's tread, stealthy, and almost without sound. Could it be Ferdinand? She dared not show herself to those in the room, and her retreat was cut off.

With infinite caution, she slipped from her place on the stairs, and crept along the wall behind the hangings. The arras moved slightly with her progress, but either Arthur and his auditor were too engrossed, or did not notice the slow undulations of the great folds.

Meanwhile the steps on the stairs had ceased. The newcomer was listening also. The queen could not see him nor he her.

A low cry came from Arthur's lips. The man behind the arras had shown himself!

"In the king's name, I command the surrender of those documents," he cried. The voice was that of the Count of Sansito!

Arthur sprang forward and attempted to secure the papers intended for the secret perusal of the queen. It was in this act that his face was first revealed to Sansito.

"You!" cried the count in amazement. "Oh! This is too good to be true!"

"But you haven't got me yet," Arthur yelled. He had forgotten all diplomacy, his mission, and its dangers for himself and others. He was just a plain man confronted by his enemy.

"Be still, you fool!" Sansito warned. "One call from me, and the room will be filled with armed men. Put up your sword."

"On guard," Arthur cried.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE QUEEN'S WORK.

THE arras was pushed aside, and Isabella stepped quickly into the room.

Seseca cried aghast: "The queen!"

Arthur turned, and in amazement his rapier fell from his hands.

"Those papers," her majesty announced coldly, "*I* will take them in charge."

As Arthur hastened to place them in her hands, she cried:

"I have come, Juan de Seseca, to demand what you mean by intruding within the royal apartments?"

Sansito made no response.

The queen resumed: "I cannot say that I *commend* these gatherings in your chambers, Doña de Torres. But I *strictly forbid* that those attending them enter by my private stairs!" Her tone was haughty. "I will speak further with you, madam, on this subject." She smiled frigidly at the nurse.

"You, gentlemen," she indicated the door, "may depart."

Sansito stepped forward. "This man must go as my prisoner," he cried.

Doña de Torres exclaimed in dismay.

Sansito placed his hand heavily on Arthur's shoulder. "I apprehend him for murders committed in Granada."

The voice of the queen rang out: "Unhand him, Count of Sansito!"

The queen's manner was cold, but her eyes showed an angry gleam.

"If you were aware that I knew as much as you about those *murders* in Granada, you would not press such trumpery claims against this young man," she warned as she dismissed Sansito.

The count reddened, and started toward the door, stepping backward and bowing humbly.

Isabella looked kindly at Arthur: "You are free," she said, "to go and seek those you wish to see."

Sansito lifted the bar, and was about to disappear in the corridor, but before he could cross the threshold, Arthur gained the passageway. He did not pursue the frightened count. Instead he went toward the slender figure who was leaning wretchedly against a column at the far side of the hall.

"Judith," he cried, and attempted to take her in his arms, but she would not let him.

"What's the matter?" he gasped, in astonishment.

She did not speak, but lifted her head proudly and looked at him. The color came flooding into her face, and her eyes snapped ominously.

"Aren't you glad to see me?" he cried playfully. "Don't you love me any more? What has happened?"

"Why did you not tell me your were coming?" she demanded, disregarding his questions. She was fighting against the pleasure it gave her to be close to him, hear his voice, and watch the shadows come and go in his eyes as he strove to understand the situation.

"I could not tell you," Arthur began; "I myself did not know until as I was leaving, and—"

"*She* knew!" Judith cried.

"Who?"

"Don't seem so amazed," the girl exclaimed, angrily. "Go back to her, and—"

"Who?" Arthur demanded sharply.

"Doña de Torres!" Judith said it fiercely. "I know everything. I know that you love her!"

"I love only you!" he cried, and again attempted to embrace her. But Judith struggled away from him.

"Doña de Torres?" he muttered; "I never saw her before this afternoon."

"*Arthur!*" she warned.

"What *is* the matter?" he begged pitifully.

"You have been writing to her, and—"

He interrupted: "I have never written to her!"

"I have seen the letters," she said witheringly.

"Oh!" he cried with relief. "I understand, at last. Those letters were not mine. I wrote them for the admiral. They contained secret information about the colony. Doña de Torres is an old advocate of Columbus. She has been the go-between—"

"You expect me to believe that?" Judith cried.

He caught her in his arms, and, although she struggled, he would not release her.

"Let me go!" she commanded.

"Not unless you look into my eyes and tell me that you no longer love me," he said doggedly.

"I—" she began, and attempted to look at him, but before his gaze hers faltered.

He held her face tenderly between his big hands, and kissed her unresponsive lips.

"It has been more than three years since

I saw you," he whispered, "but I have kissed no one else since last I kissed you. I haven't wanted to," he said. "I swear it."

Still she was not convinced. "What about Noanita?" she inquired.

"She is dead," he said, sadly, and added: "She gave her life to save mine."

"You loved her!" Judith persisted.

"I did not. I have never loved any one except you. I never will love any one else. Don't you believe me?"

At first she would not reply, but finally, from the security of his arms, she whispered: "My heart believes you—but my head—"

He interrupted: "Then you have a very wicked head, but I will fill it with new thoughts: First, you must get rid of all the old ugly ones!" He paused, but impulsively resumed: "You have got to marry me now! I'm going to take you away from this court. That's one thing that's the matter—"

"Not so fast," she cried. "I haven't said that I would marry you. Besides, there is a lot for you to explain."

"And for you, too," he expostulated, gently, "but I trust you."

"What do you mean?" she demanded, sharply.

"Don't you suppose I have long since heard all the gossipy tales—the king this and the king that, and Doña Judith is so and so—and—"

"Well?" Judith demanded.

"I never for a moment suspected anything."

"Why?" she interrupted.

"Because once you told me—that was in the days before you became such a grand lady—that no matter what happened, you were always mine. Do you remember?"

She nodded.

"Arthur, you make me ashamed," she cried, "but—but—well, you have got a lot to explain."

They settled themselves in the embrasure of one of the tall windows, and talked for a long, long time. They considered their affairs from every angle, and finally arrived at a decision. The immediate effect of this was their seeking an audience with the queen.

To Judith's surprise, she found that Isabella agreed with her in all things.

"He is much too handsome to be allowed to roam alone," the queen said, and smiled wisely. "Besides, as you say, you have been betrothed for almost four years. It really is time you were being married."

"I never intend to suffer again, as I did this afternoon," Judith declared.

The queen smiled.

"Are you really determined to settle in the Indies?" Isabella inquired doubtingly, when this part of their plan had been revealed to her.

"Yes," the young man replied. "I love it there, and I am sure that Doña Judith will also—"

Judith interrupted: "I forbid you to *love* anything except me," she admonished. "But I *do* wish to go out to these new lands with him," she announced, turning to the queen.

Arthur had already decided upon something else that he was going to do before he left Spain, but he did not reveal this just yet. He had undertaken enough for the next few hours. That very night, through the queen's assistance, a hurried wedding was solemnized in the royal chapel.

Arthur Lake and Judith Merton were married!

Isabella had kept her word—at the first opportunity she had contrived for her young friend to wed the man of her choice.

There seemed an almost scandalous haste about the way in which her majesty discharged her promise. But she probably had her own reasons; certainly she pleased Ferdinand by her speed. Yes, he was really overjoyed when he heard what had taken place, and this was scarcely to have been expected considering that he still looked with longing eyes upon the young bride.

CHAPTER XLVII.

SESECA'S LAST CARD.

NEXT morning all the palace heard this news, and also that of the arrival of Columbus, at Cadiz! The admiral had been accompanied by his accuser, Aguado, and a host of diseased and discouraged men

from the colony, and the captive chieftain—Caonabo.

A messenger came on ahead, to beg permission for the great navigator to present himself to their majesties. What the messenger did not announce was the pathetic way in which the unhappy discoverer was already proceeding toward Valladolid, going from town to town, exhibiting, as he had done in his triumphant days, the *Indios* and foreign plants and bits of gold; striving vainly to win something except mockery from the throngs. But the people knew that he was in disfavor at court, and they believed, as he was beginning to fear, that his Great Discovery was a greater curse!

Arthur heard this news with surprise and not a little dismay. He wondered if he had really done all he could to pave the way for a gracious reception of his old friend.

As he walked rapidly down the corridor, going to find Seseca, the young man wondered what had brought Columbus thus unexpectedly to Spain. He surmised that the admiral had become afraid of Aguado's testimony unless he was present personally to rebut the accusations.

But the Englishman really thought little about it. His mind was engrossed with his own affairs. Judith had told him about the letter from Don Luis which she had intercepted, and she had restored to him his precious locket. She implored her husband not to risk placing himself in his enemy's power, declaring that she did not believe that anything would be discovered from Seseca; but the young man was determined to demand from the secretary an explanation. "I *must* know about my birth and the mysterious treasure, of which I am convinced that Seseca robbed me," Arthur declared.

The Count of Sansito did not reside in the palace, but had his own home in Valladolid—a small, Gothic building that had belonged to his family in poorer days.

Thither Arthur went; in a very different mood from that in which he had timidly presented himself at the palatial home of the count in Granada. He knocked at the sinister-looking door and demanded audience.

He was left to wait in a small, bare anteroom while his name was taken back to the dining-room, where the count was having his morning meal.

Sansito was astounded at Arthur's temerity in coming alone, and was savagely glad that the young man had thus placed himself in his grasp. But he did not at once give orders to admit him. He first gave various directions to insure his own safety, and to make it certain that Arthur Lake should never leave that tapestry-hung chamber alive!

When the young man entered the long, narrow room, that was so dark as even at midday to require candlelight, the count arose ceremoniously.

"I am just finishing breakfast," Sansito announced. "Will you join me?"

Arthur smiled at the humor of the situation, but otherwise ignored the invitation. He came forward, his hand resting lightly on his sword.

The catlike eyes of the secretary saw everything. He quickly divested himself of his own rapier and poniard and placed them on the long table. With a gracious movement of his hands he indicated the empty chair beside his own.

"You see I'm disarmed," he smilingly commented. "Much has transpired since I saw you last night. I, who was your opponent, am now your friend."

His smile seemed to insinuate that Arthur was expected to remove his sword also and place it on the table. But the Englishman's hand continued to rest on his weapon, and silently he seated himself at the table.

There was a pause, and the men eyed one another. Arthur was the first to show impatience, by demanding abruptly: "Who am I? Tell me that!"

His tone was threatening, and Sansito raised a deprecating hand.

"Of course I will gladly tell you *now*," he announced suavely. "You are the only son of Charles, Prince of Viana—King of Navarre, perhaps heir of all Spain."

His words rang out loudly in the dimly-lit room, echoing against the heavy, dark furniture, then vibrating into chilly silence.

Arthur frowned and leaned forward. "What?" he cried.

"It is true," Sansito announced calmly.

His eyes met those of the young man. It gave the count an exquisite pleasure thus to play with the victim whose death was so fast approaching.

"Yes," he resumed, "I have known this secret all along. But until last night I strove to prevent you from discovering the truth."

"And last night?"

"Last night," Sansito announced, solemnly, "I first understood that Spain needed a *new* king. You are that king!"

Arthur was dumb. He stared doubtingly at the count. These revelations seemed presposterous, and yet there was a sincerity that pervaded Sansito—a sincerity deeper than his look, manner, or tone of voice. All this could not be true, and yet—he was almost beginning to believe it.

"The proofs," Arthur faltered, "what proofs have you?"

"First, your likeness to your mother," Sansito cried, "then, there are proofs I have, or can obtain."

"You?"

"Yes, I am your friend!" The count declared it bravely, but his false eyes dared not meet the other's honest gaze.

Sansito arose quickly, and going to the dresser, selected a crystal wine glass. He brought this and placed it before the young man, and slowly filled it from a flagon on the table.

He glanced at his own glass, but it was already brimming; so, with a slight clatter, the count put down the flagon. Then he lifted his glass, and leaned toward Arthur.

"To the king!" he cried, and motioned for the young man to rise and join him in the toast.

Like one in a dream, Arthur stood and faced Seseca. He found the eyes of the secretary as fascinating as a bird does those of a snake. He could not look away. With fumbling hand, he reached for his glass, lifted it, and touched its edge to that of the Spaniard's goblet.

In silence he raised the drink to his lips. But before he tasted the wine, a shudder ran through him. He had been looking intently at the secretary, and in the soft candlelight a woman seemed to come between them.

She raised a hand warningly. Her face was infinitely sad, infinitely appealing. It was the face of one dead, at the far side of the world—Noanita!

The apparition disappeared, and at just the same time something within Arthur seemed to awaken. He was no longer bewildered, but keenly alert and on his guard.

He lowered his glass. In surprise the secretary did the same; but quickly protested.

"To the king!" Sansito repeated gaily. "Drink, man, to your—"

Arthur coldly interrupted: "First," he began, "we will change glasses." He pushed his own toward Seseca, and held out a steady hand for the secretary's.

Sansito hesitated, and by that moment's wait Arthur was convinced that his own glass contained poison.

He took the glass of true wine from Sansito's unwilling fingers, and forced the poisoned goblet into the secretary's grasp.

"Drink!" Arthur cried. "Drink to what king you please, but drink from *that* glass!"

The young man drank, but the secretary dared not.

"Drink!" Arthur commanded, drawing his sword.

The secretary saw the threatening blade flash in the candlelight. But before Arthur had taken a step, the frightened count clapped his hands and called aloud.

The hangings were dashed aside, and sevéreal armed men sprang upon the scene.

Pointing to Arthur, Sansito shrieked: "Kill him! Kill him!"

Arthur lunged toward his enemy: "You die *first!*" he cried.

Sansito attempted to spring aside, but he was too late. The great chair held him prisoner with its huge, projecting arms. Arthur's sword ripped through the count's silken garments with a whispering sound, and buried itself in the villain's breast.

The cries of Sansito died suddenly; his eyes assumed a strange, uncomprehending look, and then blood came from between his quivering lips.

With such violence had the thrust been made that the rapier had passed through Sansito's body, and embedded itself in the padded back of the big chair.

The wretched creature was impaled in a most tortuous manner, but Arthur did not attempt to withdraw the blade. He looked quickly away from the hideous, bloody contortions which were becoming more and more feeble.

Facing the count's astonished men, he cried: "He is dead, or will be any minute! I am unarmed!" He threw his hands above his head. "I surrender myself to you!"

He came boldly forward.

A commotion ensued. Some ran to the dying man, others rushed away for aid.

Whether or not it was his audacity that saved him from instant death, Arthur did not know. Perhaps the men were too bewildered by the sudden rush of events; or, maybe the real reason was the confusion attendant upon the horribly grotesque death of the count (he had almost immediately expired in a paroxysm of agony). Arthur came to no harm for the time being.

He was bound and placed with a guard at his side and another before the door, in a small, cell-like room at the top of the house, there to await word from the king. Announcement of the murder of the secretary had at once been sent to the palace.

By this same messenger, Arthur had vainly sought to communicate with Judith. But Sansito's majordomo, who had taken charge of everything, flatly refused.

All that day and night Arthur remained in confinement; but he was fed and made moderately comfortable. He surmised that he was well treated because the words of Sansito, concerning his birth, had been overheard by the hidden guard. These men probably did not believe that he was the son of the Prince of Viana, but they were going to take no chance with one who might be of the blood-royal.

Next day Arthur expected to be summoned before the king, or thrown into some dungeon, but the day passed and he remained unmolested.

During the afternoon he heard a noise in the street, and was informed that it was the procession of Columbus going to his audience with the sovereigns.

The young man now understood why he had not been brought before Ferdinand.

But the king had been very near the room occupied by the prisoner that very morning. He had been searching the hiding-places of the Sansito abode and, finding many long-looked-for documents! Some of these had been instantly consigned to the flames.

The noise of the procession continued, and before Arthur's mind came visions of the new world, and Noanita. How strange had been his hallucination and how wonderfully fortunate! If he had not thought he saw Noanita, he probably would never have been roused from that curious state of apathy, and would have drunk the poison.

Then he almost wept to think of the suffering that he had brought upon Judith and himself. Would they never see each other again?

He slept little that night, wretchedly musing; vainly striving to unravel the mystery of himself and Sansito.

Next morning he was ordered to appear before the king at noon.

He made himself as presentable as possible and, guarded by four men, was conducted to the palace. He was hopeless about the future. He had taken the life of a nobleman, almost as powerful as the king, and one who was very close to Ferdinand. No matter if he had struck in self-defense—still, he killed the greatest man in Spain!

He noticed how the people whom he encountered in the halls and corridors looked away, or deliberately walked aside. Evidently the news of his deed had become common property.

To his surprise, Ferdinand received him in private, even dismissing the four guards after ordering them to unbind their prisoner.

When they were alone, the king commanded Arthur to tell all that had taken place during his visit to Sansito.

Briefly the young man recounted the events leading up to the secretary's death.

"There is more here than appears on the surface," Ferdinand remarked thoughtfully. "Tell me what gained you such enmity? What do you know concerning yourself? Tell me everything."

And Arthur did; beginning with the death of old Tobit, and the discovery of the bags of gold behind the "Agony in the

Garden," and telling of De Lajes, and finally exhibiting the miniature.

The king listened with attention, and after examining the locket, inquired: "Do you know the name of this lady?"

Arthur admitted that he did not.

Slowly the king announced: "She looks like an English woman whom my half-brother, the Prince of Viana, loved."

He paused to note the effect of his words. But the young man's face revealed nothing.

The king continued, cautiously: "If you are their son, *and* if it could be proven, *and* if they were really married, and that also could be proven, you would be heir to a kingdom. But the only proof you have is the picture of a lady whose features your own closely resemble—that is all."

He ceased speaking, and awaited some word from Arthur, but the young man said nothing. After a few minutes the king asked: "Well, what are you going to do?"

Arthur did not speak.

"Of course," Ferdinand began, "you might attempt to establish your claims. Certain persons might even rally to your cause. Malcontents exist in every kingdom. Besides these there are the adventurers and those rascals who are eager to join even the most folorn hope, anticipating personal gain. But you would stand little chance unless you could win the strong support of some noble family. You might effect this through a fortunate marriage."

Arthur started, and the king's eyes narrowed almost to slits as he continued: "But I hear your affections are otherwise engaged."

The young man bowed.

"You would have to forswear this young lady," Ferdinand announced.

"I would not if I could," Arthur cried, "and I cannot, for we were wedded three nights ago." The king pretended surprise.

Arthur could restrain himself no longer.

"What is going to be done to me for killing the Count of Sansito?" he cried.

"Nothing!" his majesty announced. "You only anticipated the executioner. I have discovered that Juan de Seseca was a treacherous villain, a monstrous traitor, and worthy of a worse fate than you meted out to him. Besides, you killed him to prevent his murdering you. You have the protection of our laws. Spain is a Christian country!" he added, proudly.

"You don't mean that I am free?" Arthur cried.

"I mean just that," Ferdinand announced majestically.

"You mean, I can go?"

His majesty smiled, and nodded slowly, and then, fearing lest this unceremonious young fellow should dash away without any more being said, he hastened to grant him permission to depart.

Within less than half an hour Arthur had Judith in his arms. He would not have been that long in reaching her but on the way he encountered Columbus, who insisted upon stopping him. The admiral declared that he owed all his good luck to Arthur.

For it seems that not only had he been most graciously received by the sovereigns, but not one word of reproof had passed their lips. They had ignored all Aguado's complaints; had appointed Bartholomew vice-governor of Española for life, and made one of the admiral's sons a page in the palace. But the greatest blessing of all, they had directed the Genoese to begin preparations for a third voyage of discovery.

The navigator was in the greatest spirits. He had returned to Spain in disgrace, and now—behold! "I owe it all to you, my son," he said embracing Arthur.

The envoy was inclined to doubt this, but he proudly recounted the speech to Judith, along with the tale of his adventures with Seseca and his interview with the king.

When he had finished, the young woman held him away from her as she said sadly: "Perhaps you are giving up a throne for me, Arthur, and—"

He would not let her finish, but caught her close and kissed her.

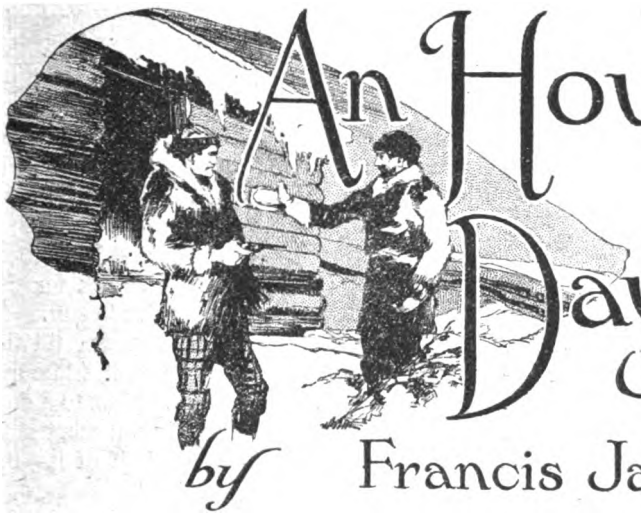
"I have discovered something greater than a throne—greater than all the discoveries of the admiral—*I* have made the Greatest Discovery!" She smiled.

"You must ask me what?"

"What?" she inquired dutifully.

"Love!"

(The End.)



An Hour of Daylight

by Francis James

BARDWELL'S awakening was gradual and reluctant. His mind, loath to face the cold reality of the cabin, tugged back to linger among the warm dream pictures of the night before. These memories were like dancing shadows for their vagueness, but brightly tinted as fancies of lights and beautiful women.

For the first time in the weeks of his imprisonment, Bardwell had had company. There had been laughter, songs, carousing—the noise of voice and footsteps not his own. Many other pleasant things, too hazy to identify, were jumbled in, the whole widening out into a sea of recollections, in which there swam together mistily the stranger, the food that he had brought, the drink, the many blazing candles, the glowing stove-top.

Out of this maze of bliss, however, stood two objects that did not waver, about which the rest revolved, like the blazing circumference of a pin-wheel around its center; they were the stranger's eyes, blue as the light in fathomless iceberg caverns, steel-pointed and unlaughing.

Bardwell stirred, twisted in his bunk, and was neuralgically aware of a sensation, once familiar, but now for weeks untold, a stranger. Hands pressed to his throbbing temples, he swore, craned his neck over the bunk edge, and peered into the powdery blackness that filled the room.

Gloom and headache notwithstanding, an uneasy feeling had laid hold upon him; that he had slumbered long, extraordinarily long, and within the tiny room, all was not as he had left it. The place had been circumscribed enough before, but square and four-bunked. Now it assuredly held but a single pair of sleeping lofts, one of which he occupied with the other directly overhead. And to the best of his jaundiced vision, whereas it had measured about twelve by twelve, it was now oblong.

The fire was out. Nothing to be seen of Lacey.

For perhaps five minutes Bardwell lay motionless, after he had eased himself back, trying to pin his skipping fancies down to some kind of orderly chronology. Going for wood—seeing the fellow down on the river—and hustling up the bank—

Suddenly he started to his elbow. From somewhere a curious sound had broken forth. It was mellow, soft with sad lament. It made the gloom and solitude thrilling with weird suggestions. Presently as he listened with bated breath, he managed to identify it—the moaning of a violin. It came from beyond the wall. The fellow had lugged a fiddle along with him up into the frozen hell and was outdoors in the cold and dark, playing to himself.

Bardwell staggered to his feet and lurched across the room. His hands fell upon the logs and gripped them or he would have crumpled. For a full minute he clung, amazed at what he found. The timbers his fingers clutched were wet and cold. Instead of running horizontally, there were set ver-

tically from floor to ceiling. Through the chinks he could see a light. From beyond there also came the playing. He was not looking toward outdoors—he was peering into another room. But the cabin had, the night before, no more than the single chamber.

Bardwell put his mouth to the crevice and bellowed: "Lacey, Lacey!"

The playing stopped. There was the scraping of a chair pushed back, another of a door opened and closed. In a few seconds his own door was shoved ajar behind him and the fat man came in. He was, as the night before, clean-shaven, pink and smiling. His eyes twinkled and his shoulders heaved mountainously as he stood looking down at Bardwell.

"Well?"

Bardwell moistened his lips. His throat was parched and his head jumping. The words that broke from his lips were by no means the ones he had intended saying:

"Got a drink?"

Lacey reached round under his coat and pulled out a flask. He poured two fingers into an empty tumbler from the table and passed it over.

"That's all. To taper off. What do you want?" His eyes were suddenly hard; his tone crisp, and without respect.

"What do I want?" blazed Bardwell, rage flushing him. "I want a lot. First of all, what's this?" He pounded the new wall with his fist, teetering back and forth as he glared at Lacey. "What is it? What's the idea? How long 've I been laid out here, anyhow?"

"Forty hours," said the fat man levelly. "You had a grand sleep."

"Forty hours. Then you knocked me out. It was your booze. You drugged me, you damned crook! That was what you trailed me for. You—"

"You knocked yourself out," snapped in Lacey. "I drank the same as you, only less. There was nothing in it. But you had four full bottles to my one-half. Now—"

Bardwell grimaced and shook his fist at the partition.

"Well, what's that, I ask you? What've you done while I was knocked out? You've come into my cabin, damn you—"

"It's mine as much as yours," broke in Lacey. "Fact is, it's anybody's. No titles registered out here. Not that I want it; last thing on earth. When I dropped in I intended to mush ahead next moonlight, same's I told you. Maybe you've forgotten that it came on to snow. We're hived in, both of us, now; no man or dog could go a mile through the drifts. There'll be another in a couple of days—twice a week for the next three months, now they've begun.

"That hives us up here together till the trail opens. No offense to you if I like my own company. Always did. Next to a dog, I get on better with myself than most anybody else. So I fenced off half of it—the small half, if you take notice."

"How?" demanded Bardwell curiously, running his tongue over his dry lips.

"Went out to that bunch of firs after the storm stopped and cut enough to run a partition. Did the whole thing, sawing and pounding, right here, and you never batted an eyelid."

The big man's eyes narrowed again, his face pinkened, and his great frame quivered with his chucklings.

"You snooze like you had a baby's conscience, pard."

Bardwell, flushing with tipsy resentment, drew up to his full height and lurched toward the other.

"Pard, hey? Not by a damned sight! Not if I ain't good enough for you to live with, Lacey. Lucky to have a roof—my roof—over your head without gettin' so fine about your company."

His face was purpling as his anger mounted; also his hang-over was making him incoherent. He brandished his fist, while with the other hand he fumbled at his hostler and demanded: "You take down that wall to-day and live in here with me like buddies or I'll know the reason. I'll croak you, you sneakin' crook."

With two steps Lacey covered the few feet between them and jerked the weapon from his fingers. He broke it, flipped out the cartridges, and tossed it on the bed.

"The wall stays up," he answered coldly. "We'll be buddies aplenty on opposite sides of it. And as for killing me, go ahead, if you think best. There's your gun and

there's your shells. Load it and drill me through the eyes. Or if you don't feel like it now, wait till I go to bed some night and punch the snout between the logs. Then you'll have all my grub and dogs. You can live here alone like a king till the trail opens."

He turned his back contemptuously and shouldered out the door, finishing over his back: "Easiest thing you ever thought of, Bardwell; hundred ways to kick me in, but all the same I'd think twice if I were you."

Bardwell, slumped back against the damp logs, heard his deep chuckle over the slamming of the door. In a moment, on the other side of the wall, he had shut his own door—the one he had cut between the windows—and dropped the iron hasp into the hook. Motionless, suffocated with anger, he held his breath to listen.

Lacey began to whistle. He was clattering about getting dinner. The odor of coffee floated through; later the aroma of good tobacco. By and by, after Bardwell had climbed back into his bunk, and pulled the furs over himself for warmth, there was the sound of fluttering pages as Lacey tossed down a book he had been reading, and then the strumming of the violin. It infuriated Bardwell more than anything that had ever happened to him.

Between rage and hunger his brain cleared rapidly in the next few minutes. Lying there, he gave himself up to thinking it over, the rotten business he had gotten into from the moment he had mushed out on the trail with a dog team not his own, till the on-sweeping night, the terror, and the lost way had sent him scuttling to cover in the abandoned cabin like a rabbit into its hole.

Till the other man's coming, he had been sick with fear. It was the mountains, the dancing flames of the Aurora over them, the cold and the solitude. As Lacey had remarked the night before, grinning at the banquet he had unpacked and brought in from his own sled, guest though he was:

"Broadway to sixty-five north's a big jump. More than you and me have knuckled to it, Bardwell, and fellows that ought to have known it to a stand-off. Listen to that wind!"

Bardwell nodded. The storm had risen swiftly. From his window he had seen it frothing at the traveler's heels as he flogged his dogs up the last yards of the bluff side from the river. Five minutes later it had swirled, foglike, about him as he tossed frozen fish out to the animals, almost concealing them at ten feet distance.

Now the blizzard in full force buffeted the cabin with blasts like slaps of a gigantic hand. Beyond its walls was nothing but a maelstrom of cold and whirling flakes. For a man to have ventured out would have meant death in a quarter of an hour by suffocation. The dogs, curled under their light and ever thickening blanket, slept peacefully.

Inside, the men sat by the red-hot stove and gorged. Lacey, laughing with amusement that Bardwell could not understand, was spinning yarns of the far north. He touched, as one who knew, on the compelling fascination of it, that merges into wonder, then to loathing. "If a man outstays his time," he smiled, "he will either kill himself or go insane. If the latter, the Indians may promote him to a medicine-manship. Or they may brain him and chuck his carcass to the wolves."

Then there was the case of Sitka Jimmy, who, after ten years' prospecting, all in the best of health, had suddenly gone amuck midway of a six months' dark spell and knifed four of his tent buddies before a bullet sealed his troubles.

Glancing at Bardwell keenly, Lacey asked:

"You're from the big town, I guess, stranger? First time in the Yukon country? Well, let me tell you—"

Bardwell's gray eyes slitted, gleaming yellow. He bridled surlily.

"None of your business, is it?"

Lacey laughed again, even more heartily, apologized and turned the subject. But it left Bardwell shaken; it was too near the truth.

Not that logically there was anything to be afraid of, either in his being there or in the other's knowing that he was a tenderfoot. He had argued the thing—the first part of it, that is, out with himself too often.

He had, to begin with, plenty of clothes; the warmest that money could get. As for that, incidentally, he had money enough, as he assured himself, to buy up all the fur-posts in northwest territory. Money? Tons of it! But of that later.

Then he had an ax, and there was an abundance of fir-trees not so far off. For a long time after he arrived, it was easily light enough around noon to cut them down and drag them up to camp. So that the fuel question occasioned no uneasiness.

For one man who fed sparingly, there was also grub enough. Bardwell had found on the sled when he took possession of it, in addition to all the regular supplies, corn meal, flour, and baking powder, which was almost unheard of opulence for winter sledging. Then through a hole chopped in the river ice the salmon were still to be had almost for the asking. There was nothing which prevented him from settling down in safety and comparative comfort—nothing but one thing, and that was himself.

Bardwell had never been used to planning and looking ahead and doing for himself. All his life, like the others of his blithe brotherhood, he had levied his necessities as a charge on all society—from which, they say, a living is surely due them as much as any one.

In the matter of food, for instance, when one meal was over, there was no question of the next till hunger suggested the need of ways and means. Food had always been at hand in full abundance—some one else's food. The only problem was of laying possession to it, and cleverness had furnished the solution. Never, so far as he recalled, had Bardwell paid honestly for a meal with money that he had earned himself.

So that instead of cutting his great wood-pile, as any other man would have done, he fetched only as he needed, and then sourly and grumbling. Catching salmon was too cold work, and he would not bother with it. Never having learned how to cook, he pitched the flour-bags into the corner and forgot them. The fine dog-team he slaughtered one day in a fit of pettishness so as to be rid of the problem of feeding them.

What he subsisted on was the most obvious and easily prepared—the bacon, fried in huge slices at spendthrift rate, soda crackers from the single box, and tea, into each cup of which he dumped four times as many heaping spoonfuls of sugar as he had any business to.

Of the hour when he would scrape the bottoms of his boxes he did not dare to think; yet its nearer marching terrified him. Foresightless days he had lived, all his life; foresightless he continued. As long as he had grub at his elbow he served himself unstintingly, although the sight of his dwindling supplies brought agony.

Although he ate voraciously, he began to grow thin. His hands took to twittering. He became more and more terrified of the thickening darkness, and going out not at all except when he must for wood, took refuge behind his foot-thick door, getting daily more white and tremulous and bearded—which last is passing bad for a man, because it slovens his self-respect and undercuts his nerve—and slept and gorged and blasphemed the northland and his thoughts. It had begun to get him.

That was the way things lay when the other man, Pete Lacey came. Bardwell, staggering back with wood one twilight noon, had, open-mouthed, watched his figure struggling up the steep trail, a snow squall thickening at his heels. Then he dropped out of sight behind the boulder at the turn, and Bardwell ducked back into the shack. In a moment the stranger came scrambling around and up, and the yard was clamorous with the powwowing of the huskies.

Bardwell, standing back among the shadows, saw the door pushed open and a mountain of fur blocking the entrance. Then the bulk advanced, pushed up its seal-skin helmet, and perceived him.

"Hands up!" snapped Bardwell, stepping forward into the light. The snout of his automatic was eloquent.

The other obeyed promptly. It was evident that he was surprised but not frightened. His eyes flitted about, taking in the squatter's figure, the dirty room, the odds and ends of food littering the table, the disemboweled wood-pile in the corner.

Then he did an amazing thing; he began to laugh, jiggling his huge shoulders and

squinting up the fat around his keen, pig-like eyes in vast amusement. As he did so he lowered his hands, and extending the right, stepped forward.

"My name's Lacey—Pete Lacey. Don't know who you are; needn't tell if you don't want to, but that gun-play's no way to welcome the only other white man in three hundred miles."

He laughed again, and his tone was wholesome and confidence inspiring; but his blue eyes gimleted into the other like lighted candles. "Put Bessie up and shake," he said. "I'm friends."

Bardwell lowered the gun, but did not move.

"Where you headed for?" he insisted slowly. "It's late; you're way off the trail."

A crafty gleam had stolen into his face, and he spoke thoughtfully. Although the newcomer had never seen him before, he caught the look and catalogued it.

"So're you, stranger. Welcome to it and no questions asked." He slitted one fat eye with jocose significance. "If perhaps you're a mite leery; if so happen that you've got reasons for not wanting to be bothered by strangers dropping in like this just now, let me whisper to you. When I pulled out, some weeks back, I didn't leave a forwarding address with the postmaster myself; clean forgot it, I was in such a hurry.

"Perhaps we've got things in common between us, perhaps not. Doesn't matter. All I want now is fire, feed, bunk till moon-up; hit her again if it don't snow too hard. And if you happen to need any little thing for supper, I've got a few small extra snacks out there. What say, stranger, will you start that fire or will I?"

Bardwell said nothing and made no gesture to accept the proffered hand. But he put away his gun, moved forward slowly, as if he were still pondering, and began to lay paper and kindlings in the stove. At that the big man went out to unharness his team. After he had finished, they sat down to supper, nine-tenths of the grub, as well as the whisky, being from off the visitor's sled.

As for the liquor, Lacey had put out a pair of bottles, one for each. To Bardwell it was nectar, utter bliss, heaven on earth. For weeks he had parched after it. Before the other had fairly commenced on his, sipping temperately, he had gulped it down and begged for more.

Smiling queerly, Lacey produced it from beneath his coat. There followed a second and then a third; there followed a sea of perfect happiness, passing off into restless hours of oblivion, punctured by two things only that were stable: Lacey's eyes.

It was three days after this, and one and a quarter after the moment that Bardwell's consciousness had painfully awakened to the truth, that having formed a plan, he went round and knocked civilly at the big man's door.

Lacey admitted him at once, and without referring to anything that had passed, offered him a stool by the stove and a cigar. Bardwell accepted the second, but declined the first. He showed the effects of his debauch. He was bearded more frowzily than ever; he was disheveled and bleareyed. Lacey, as usual, was smooth-faced as a baby; his hair was carefully brushed, and a clean flannel shirt was open at the neck. He stood by the stove, his hands behind him, sucking at his noisy pipe and waiting for Bardwell to speak.

"See here, Lacey," Bardwell broke out abruptly, "there's something else I want to talk about. You got more grub than you can use, and I'm cleaned out. I told you that. I want you to hand some over. You owe it for taking my house away from me. Besides, you make me miserable. You've no right to come in here and do things to trouble me."

"How do I make you miserable?" demanded Lacey judicially, putting his foot on the stove and drawing at his cigar.

"Only half the room I had."

Lacey blew the smoke ceilingward.

"As much as you can use—as much as I have."

"But I was here first. Suppose there was a dozen more, and they all acted the same as you. I'd be thrown out into the snow. Would that be right?"

Lacey grinned.

"Well, I'll reserve that," he said. "Go on; what else?"

"I hate the sound of your fiddle."

"Your own fault. Shows that you've

got something on your conscience. No man that isn't afraid to look behind his back hates music the way you do."

"You lie!" yelled Bardwell; but he did not pursue the point. "And I get the smell of your coffee and your pipe, damn you, and all the other stuff that you've got and I haven't. It ain't right. It's cruel and unnatural. You ought to be glad enough of the chance to be here under shelter to give me something. If you don't I'll starve to death, Lacey; before God I will."

All the anger and resentment had evaporated from his tone; it was wheedling and professionally pitiful.

Through the smoke of his cigar, Lacey squinted unemotionally at him.

"Let's see," he murmured; "now just why should I? I don't owe you anything. This shack is free to any comers. Besides which, when you got in you was as well fixed as me, I reckon, only you wasted it. You could have fished, back then, for salmon, and frozen 'em. They'd have kept all winter. Same with wood; when the light was good and cutting easy, and you'd ought to have made your pile, you was waiting for some one to come along and do it for you.

"Up here a man don't very often get two chances; lucky, most time, to have one, and damn well thankful to make the most of it. It's sink or swim according to yourself."

Suddenly he began to chuckle again in the quiet way he had, heaving his shoulders and wrinkling up the fat around his eyes.

"Never got up against anything just like this before, did you, Bardwell? Where it was man to God, and the devil take him if his foot slipped? No; I don't believe I'll give you any grub, Bardwell; it's against nature."

There was a murderous flare in Bardwell's eyes, but he kept it out of his voice.

"Well, then; sell it. I got—money."

Lacey looked surprised. For a full moment he hesitated.

"No;" he decided finally. "I don't want to. Queer reason, perhaps, but never mind. Because I'm going to put you in the way of getting what you need—actually have got to have to live, and nothing more—another way. In a way, you figured right. I don't want to have a man dying next door if I can help it; not any man, no matter how much he deserves to starve. And if any one ever did, that's you, Bardwell.

"As you say, I've got grub and you've got money. Besides, I've a deck of cards—poker deck. Whenever you feel like it, come round in here. Bring along some dough and a dish for your grub. We'll fix up a schedule—one cracker, so much; one slice of bacon, so much; can of beans, so much—bearing in mind that it's life itself you're going after, and gold dust by comparison is fairly cheap stuff."

"You put your grub, hey, against my money—and if I lose—"

"Winner takes the pot. If it's you, you get your money back, *plus* grub. If it's yours truly, what's a little dirt beside a light in hell and a square meal? When the nights are twenty hours long, and your belt gets tighter every day with famine, Bardwell, you'll see a cup of flour or a slice of pork outweigh a man's life like a flash of lightning. I have—often. It's the law of supply and demand at its wickedest—"

"You're a crook!" snarled Bardwell. "You'll cheat! I'm damned if I'll—"

"Can't you cheat, too?" smiled Lacey. "That's the whole proposition, anyhow. Take it or leave it—"

Bardwell left it and stamped profanely home. But the next day there was nothing else to do but avail himself of the fat man's good nature and reconsider. He had scraped the bottom of his boxes.

In an hour's session he lost two pounds of gold and acquired in exchange a can of beans, a quarter of a cup of sugar, six slices of bacon, and five crackers. This food sufficed him just twenty-four hours, and was lean rations at that.

For three days after that he kept away. When he reappeared he brought hunger in his eyes, and the edge of his voice was vitriolic. For three hours they played, all jack-pots. Bardwell left behind a pint of gold, almost, and took back with him enough food for half a week. That was, as it turned out, extra good luck, for him, because he soon made it plain that in the game of poker, which requires unblemished

confidence and nerve instead of ratlike cunning, he was not in sight of the fat man's class.

His losses were terrific—more than he could possibly have kept his temper under if he had not already perfected a plan for ultimately recovering them. And his winnings were so minute that the edge of wolfish hunger was forever rasping him.

Night after night his gold slipped away as through a sieve, while Lacey doled out his pittances of grub; and both men kept their thoughts, and, for different reasons, smiled.

In Bardwell's mind was the picture of spring days when, with sunlight in the sky, he would no longer need the company of the other to drive away his terrors. Then one skilful move would give him back all.

The fat man, looking in his eyes, must have seen the flame of hate growing brighter. No one realized better than he how the long night works poisonously in the minds of men hived up together, so that even the best friends of them brood and nurse silly trifles into mountains that crash down suddenly with frightful deeds.

Yet as the hour-brief days flitted over the mountaintops, and the interminable nights dragged into eternity, he sat there immaculately clean, pink cheeked, cheerful; talking as he bet, joking as he bluffed and won, telling story after story of the great northland as he had heard them around the camp-fires of the Indians and *voyageurs*.

Gradually the shallow twilight that marked noon began to lengthen and to deepen. The cold tongues of the aurora took flight before it. Then, after another pair of weeks, a faint crescent of gold slashed the horizon above the hills. The following day a full inch of the sun appeared. In a week more it was a blazing, life-bringing reality.

All about the wild world stirred into activity. Off in the firs the kildees began to whistle. Lacey, coming in from a walk, said that he had seen a fox and innumerable rabbits. The following noon there was a dark shadow blotched against the snow on a near-by hillside that might have been a caribou. Spring was certainly at hand, and Bardwell bethought himself that there was no time to lose.

A sudden restlessness seemed to have attacked him. One afternoon after he returned from the fat man's, where he had left almost the last scraping of his final sack, he set about rummaging over a heap of dunnage in a corner. One of the articles was a leather suit-case in which he had laid away his temporarily useless city clothing. Into a vest-pocket he thrust two fingers, paused, swore softly with satisfaction, and whirled his back to the partition with its many chinks as he withdrew them. He unfolded the small packet, studied its contents a full minute, and put it back.

The following noon, at Lacey's suggestion, the two men put on snow-shoes and went hunting in the patch of timber some half mile back.

Among the game, at least, the winter had not been one of famine. The thickets of scrub pine and the burrows behind the rocks turned out their white rabbits, the mainstay of the arctic, by the dozens. More than one gray fox slipped into view, then vanished as mystically as he had come.

Out in the center of a little barren place, protected from the wind by a gigantic rock, Lacey pointed to a cluster of broad footsteps and murmured: "Caribou. To-morrow, before light, we'll come out here and get one, if we can. Fresh meat's the thing now—and then for the mush-on. Ought to be pulling out now, in a day or two, it's all so fine. Think I'll go day after to-morrow. How long you staying?"

Bardwell growled noncommittally. Later he suggested that they start on together; at least as far as Forty Mile, over the pass, where a branch of the trail forked off to the south and west, down toward Chilcat.

Lacey, though not enthusiastic, agreed, and spent the day overhauling his sled and running-gear. The next morning, while the aurora still ruled the sky, they sallied out and made their kill of caribou. The huge animal was cut up and packed on the sledge. To his eight remaining dogs Lacey gave a square feed—their first in weeks—and stood over them, whip clubbed, while they gorged it down.

That evening was to take place the cere-

mony. To show that bygones were bygones, and no hard feeling rankled, Bardwell had asked Lacey to be his guest. Out of his winnings, he explained, he had saved a little grub—enough for a blow-out. Wouldn't Lacey do him the honor of coming round and playing company the last meal?

Lacey smiled unhesitatingly and said he would. Also, he would contribute something; a small flask or two—

It was a regular feed. Not as glorious as the impromptu one that had been staged the night of Lacey's arrival, but for a larder that, having been designed for one, had wintered two beneath the shadow of the circle, it was immense.

Bardwell did not serve the coffee till after his guest had come and they were sitting opposite across the narrow table. It was a great treat, because both had imagined the last scrap had long since been used up. Bardwell explained that he had found a bag with a little in it underneath the bunk. He gave Lacey a second cup, and took one himself. There were caribou steak, rabbit stew, biscuits, and strawberry jam. Lacey had decreed that the liquor should be left till last.

Nevertheless, the meal waxed merry. The talk was that of old and tried friends. Bardwell had never been happier in his life. His satisfaction was caused principally by one of the commonest of sensations—anticipation.

Throughout everything he kept his eyes fixed on his guest's moonlike countenance. A subtle change was due soon to appear there. He wanted to be sure of catching the first fleeting shadow of indecision, and then of seeing the eyelids begin to sag and the mouth corners relax. On the bottom of Lacey's cup he had smeared enough of the white powder from his vest-pocket to send a dozen men over the divide.

But the big fellow was incredibly slow in knuckling to it. While he was still active as a colt, Bardwell realized that with the heat and the quantity of food he had consumed, he himself was having a struggle not to yield to numbing drowsiness that for the last ten minutes had been stealing over him.

A cold chill swept his limbs. Suppose in some way he had fumbled and the cups had become changed! He surged half to his feet, intent on getting out his gun to finish off his enemy before it was too late; but just then the latter, tipped still farther back on the two legs of his stool, puffed a cloud from his cigar, and shot a question.

"Say, Bardwell," he began, "ever hear of Toby Ramsdell?" His tone was casual. Apparently it was a stray question, the matter of a moment. But Bardwell had slumped back into his chair and his face was ashen. His fingers caressed the hilt of his gun and stayed there. His eyes, if Lacey had noticed, glittered snakily. But the big man, still intent on his cigar—his last—had continued reminiscently:

"They made quite a yarn of it at the fort, how he got puffed off. Nobody seemed to know exactly just what had happened, barring that he was fool enough to mush off alone with all his dust—two years' washings, that would be—piled top of his sled, a full month after everybody else had put up for the winter. He said he'd been laid out in hell as long as he could stand—wanted to get back. To his wife, he meant. Great home lover, Toby was—according to accounts. Then there would be a kid, too, he'd never seen."

Critically Lacey peered at the tip of his cigar with its flaky ash and wavering thread of smoke.

"Curious, isn't it, how a fool idea like that will get a man, so that he'll risk hell for sight of a woman's face or the feel of his kid's fingers wound around his? Rather than wait a few weeks for a sure thing."

Lacey's voice had gone very soft and purring. Bardwell was momentarily reassured. He imagined the drug had started taking hold of him. His own brain, though wide-awake, was whirling. It was almost on him. In a moment now—

Lacey had started up his monologue again.

"Yes, poor Toby, he loaded up and started off. They all gave him God-speed—all but one of them, so far as anybody could tell. This chap did more—he followed on behind. There wasn't a great deal known about him, it seems. Some

tenderfoot that drifted in from God knows where and hung around the dives.

"The day Toby pulled out, this one disappeared. Nobody ever saw him again, but an Indian that drifted in at sundown allowed he had seen him on the trail, ten miles out, and going strong. Might have, might not; those devils are awful liars.

"Well, anyway, Ramsdell never got there. Something—somebody—did for him between McPherson's and Forty Mile. Probably the wolves got him when he camped. Funny, though, about the gold. Don't suppose you heard anything about him, did you, Bardwell, coming through this way?"

As if by common impulse, both men had risen to their feet. Bradwell's automatic hovered half out of the holster. His finger-tips about it were squeezed white. Lacey still bit the cigar between his lips and his thumbs hooked over the slack of his belt.

Bardwell was the first to speak. His voice snarled and grated like a wildcat's:

"What in hell are you getting at? What do you mean, you— Are you trying to accuse me—"

Lacey tossed his cigar to the stove top. His face was suddenly set like iron in a mold. The muscles under his great shoulders heaved like burrowing animals.

"When Toby Ramsdell's wife was a girl—before she married him—her name was Lacey, My sister. Down at the fort, when I got in, they told me all they knew. They thought you might make the pass before I caught you. I said I'd get you, this side or the other, heaven, earth, or hell. I did. When you were dead drunk that night I looked things over.

"Those dog harnesses have got T. R. burned into every one. My brother-in-law's. That watch under your bunk mattress my wife's father, when he died, gave to her husband. You are a murderer, Bardwell. You shot Ramsdell in cold blood from ambush. You're the man I swore to catch, by God, and now—"

Bardwell's gun had flashed, but the fat man was quicker. Like a tiger he hurdled the table, crushed him against the timbered wall, and jammed the muzzle up. With a single twist he wrenched it from his grasp and threw it in the corner.

"Not that, you coward! God's life, for once you'll do with what your Maker gave you and no more. A fair fight, hand to hand, and hell swallows the—"

A sudden tremor ran through him. He broke off speaking; his grasp slackened, and an expression of bewilderment clouded his eyes. His hand swept his forehead. His cheeks had become ashen. His eyelids wavered, the mouth corners quivered curiously into a grimace.

Bardwell fell back a step and laughed.

"What were you saying, Lacey?" he taunted. "Don't stop. I'm listening. Did you say you wanted a fight? I'm ready whenever you are."

The big man had been wavering. It was clear that a moment more would finish him. His knees were water. He staggered blindly as he clutched out for support.

But at the sound of Bardwell's gibes a thrill swept over him. His eyes focused from nowhere into the other's, burning with frozen scorn. Miraculously he stiffened. In the throes of the struggle for mastery his face worked frightfully and perspiration gathered and rolled down from it.

It was perhaps an eternity-long two seconds that they confronted each other, silent, Bardwell charmed out of the idea of movement by the horror of the thing, Lacey fighting, ruthlessly brutal, against himself.

Suddenly his eyes cleared. His fingers gripped spasmodically. It was as though an electric shock had momentarily galvanized him back to vigor.

"You—you doped me!" he cried. His voice was still soft but frightful in its loathing. "You planned to get me, too, you hell-spawned coward! You hadn't the nerve to shoot, but poison—"

Without a backward look he swept an arm behind him, knocking up the door-catch, flinging it open and admitting a flood of tingling air. He inhaled deeply, drawing his lips back from his teeth. Bardwell, caught off his guard, flung up his arms to ward off the plunging mass that hurtled at him from three feet of distance, but Lacey's fists, working like flails, beat sight

from his eyes, and his great mass crushed him like an elephant.

Slithering, straining, blood spurting from Bardwell's nose, they whirled into the corner. A cold mass beneath the gunman ground into his shoulder. It was his automatic. He twisted like a ferret, reached back and got it. Again, before he could aim, Lacey had the wrist. A flirt of his arm and the hand was limp, then empty. Bodily he seized Bardwell and flung him the length of the cabin, just as a farmer slings a sack of meal.

Turning, Lacey stooped to gather up the gun, went dizzy; crumpled in a heap, his bowed figure covering it. Like a gigantic hand had come the clutch of the drug again, hammering his brain, compressing it, stifling consciousness. It filled him with one mad frenzy—the longing for sleep. It was as though a legion of wild horses were tugging at his soul, trying to tear it loose from his body. Alone in a great desert he struggled against them and held it. But the agony in his head was driving him insane.

His cheeks and tongue ran blood where he had bitten them. Of the frozen air that bellied in the door he sucked in killing gasps, but still he could not get enough to fill the emptiness of his lungs or to cool the sweat that sluiced down from his face.

Vaguely, afar off and through a fog, he perceived that Bardwell had gotten up and was creeping forward. A bludgeon of firewood was in his hand. Still ghostlike and far away, Lacey saw him lift it up to strike. He raised his hands—slowly, doubtfully. There was a thud, an aching somewhere on his head and arms. Then, like the sun breaking through a cloud, came a swift momentary flash of strength, and he was aware, dreamwise, of the flabby flesh once more between his hands.

Lacey gripped him, worried him, and flung him into blackness.

Silence came. Lacey could never tell how long. He drifted through a sea of doubt, half reality, half nightmare. Always there was the screaming cry for sleep, for sleep. Madly he fought to pull himself up and out, but every sensation sloughed off into vagary and haze. Only, far in the rear of his subconscious brain, something, heaven sent, held fast to the one reality of wakefulness and fight.

The rest was a dream forever after. There were other charges, other fights. Groggy, blinded, dripping foam and crimson from his lips, Lacey, like a gigantic terrier, shook and pummeled the gunman's ratty body. Presently Bardwell ceased to charge, and the other in instinct, went in search of him. It seemed sometimes, in later days, that he could recall that dimly. But he never could visualize the final meeting, the eventful settlement.

After a desert of empty time had passed, Lacey glimmered back to life. He was lying on the floor of the ruined cabin. It was very still, and through the open door the night air, murderous with chill, poured steadily. He was not as cold as he might have been—only his finger-tips and toes were frost-nipped.

The reason was that he had a covering over the middle of his body. It was a mass from which the natural warmth had quite departed. The clothing was ribboned, the features unrecognizable. It was startlingly like a huge rat that has met its end in battle with a terrier. And it was terribly still.

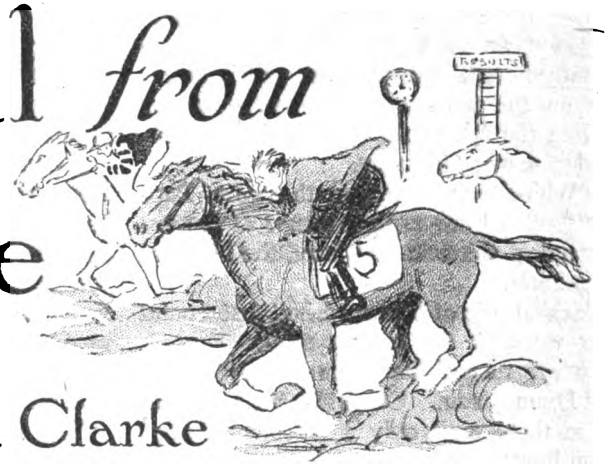
Lacey, shuddering as with fever, heaved off the mass, sat up and listened. Outside, the dogs, as always, were howling to the stars. It was very cold, and they had no shelter. They were impatient to be off.

In a moment Lacey was at their backs. The sled was already packed. Even to the last grain of gold dust that he had won the night before. Silently, not cursing as is the custom of the usual driver, the big man, trembling so that he could scarcely stand, got them at last into the harness and out on the trail.

The snow was very soft, so that he had to go ahead and break a path. The work was hard, but it did him good and kept thoughts out of his mind. Overhead the moon was brilliant, but it did not outblaze the banners of the aurora to the north. The trail led straight into it, and despite the night, there was light enough.

Making no sound, not even to the dogs who followed close, the big man walked on, bowed and not looking back.

A Fall from Grace



by John Boyd Clarke

A DOVE was mourning in a black gum-tree by the roadside while Pappy Granger and Enos were plowing for corn.

The moaning note of the love-sick bird was attuned to the feeling of protest in the breasts of both the old man and the boy. Spring had opened early, and although carp and mullet were plentiful in the deep holes below the mill-dam, there was no reasonable excuse for going fishing instead of following laggardly behind the Rose colt and the mule as they turned the moist, red furrows.

The work entailed in the making of the corn crop was a discouraging vista in Enos's mind; nor did the old man take joy in it.

Following the plow would come the harrow; then they must mark off the rows with the bull-tongue, drop the seed with the planter that had been built by Pappy's "grandpap," who had been a blacksmith, lay the corn by later, and then—wait on the harvest.

To the mind of the up-to-date Northern farmer the small amount of work here cataloged would seem laughable. But so generous is the Virginia soil that Pappy knew they would get three barrels to the acre, and that should satisfy any Hanover County farmer.

"This is sure a hard world to travel, Enos, son," the old man agreed, swinging the heavy plow to point a new furrow. "G'lang, Rose! Come up, mu-el!"

The boy sniveled, wiped a ragged sleeve across his sweating face, and shook the lines. The beasts strained in their collars to start the plow.

But, whereas the mule plodded soberly on, the little mare flung up her head and snorted, expanding red nostrils to the perfumed breeze from the dogwood hedge. She would always be "the Rose colt," although she was now well along in her teens and was counted past her best days.

She was rough-coated, ragged-maned, and looked altogether unkempt; for Pappy had not owned a currycomb in years. Nevertheless, no shaggy winter coat or its uncared-for condition, could hide the beauty of her slim limbs, her thin, long barrel, her courageous eye and spirited carriage.

The Rose colt's ancestry was in the books. Her own progeny had run good races in the past—were running yet, in fact. And the old mare herself had made a record on the Virginia tracks in her maidenhood.

But Pappy had long since given over racing. His father had frittered away much of his property at the game. Pappy's own sporting career was still remembered by the horse-breeders of the State.

It was remembered nearer home, too. Granny Granger used it as a text in her strict bringing up of Enos, her oldest grandchild. Pappy's past was held up as an example of what a growing youth should not become, morning, noon, and night. Never was the harvesting of a man's wild oats so garnered by a woman's tongue!

Pappy had conserved the rags and tatters of the Granger plantation at last, and had settled down to desultory farming. Occasionally he might try a brush with a neighbor on the road when he was riding or driving the Rose colt. But he had not attended a meet in years.

"Who-all d'you reckon them are, Pappy?" asked Enos as they turned at the upper end of the field and faced the highway once more.

A cavalcade of horsemen had just wound into view on the county road. Pappy's keen eye ranged the riders sharply.

"Dunno, son. Cain't be no fox-hunt, 'ca'se there ain't only a passel of dawgs. Hum-hum! That's Major Blithedale's Breecher, that black hawse in front with the negra on him.

"An' that sorrel's Mr. Garry's Firefly. Garry's riding of her himself.

"Why, Enos, I reckon it's the folks goin' over to Westhall for the Spring meet. I heard they was goin' to have one this year. Right smart of these yere hawse-owners is after a reputation for their colts. The major 'specially. *He* hopes to see that Breecher running on the No'then tracks this year or next."

He talked while guiding the plow. They reached the road just as the cavalcade came up. Major Blithedale, who rode a long-legged hunter in the ruck of the crew, hailed the plowman:

"Hi, Pappy!"

"Howdy, major! Howdy, Mr. Garry! Pretty day, ain't hit? What you-all projectin' at?"

Blithedale, who was a big, unctuous man with a florid complexion, a twinkling black eye, and not over clean linen, did not directly reply to the question. His gaze was fixed upon the Rose colt.

"Say, Pappy, ain't that your old Rose, out of Rosemary by Ben Drummond? What you-all doin'—hitchin' that mare to a plow thataway? Ought to have nine and thirty lashes for that—you sure had!"

Pappy grinned, his toothless under-jaw wagging. "She'll work anywhere, that Rose colt will," he said proudly.

"Can she run yet?" asked the major.

"You ax Mr. Garry," cackled Pappy. "He an' I had a bresh one day a while back."

Garry, a long, ginger-whiskered man, chewed vigorously and nodded assent. "That Rose has got some steam left," he allowed.

"Come, Pappy. Why don't you-all go along with we-uns to the meet at Westhall?" said Blithedale, favoring Garry with a huge wink. "Straddle your mare and come on. We reckon to show some pretty young stock, and there'll be a free-for-all race that ought to yield the winner fifteen hundred dollars. It 'll be a race worth watching."

The ruck of the cavalcade passed on; but the two leaders, Blithedale and Garry, who knew that Pappy had money in the bank as well as a clear title to the residue of the Granger plantation, lingered to coax and cajole him. They expected some buyers from the North to be present at the meet. The county ought to show these "damn' Yanks" what the breeders and farmers of old Hanover had in the line of horse-flesh.

Enos listened, big-eyed and slack-jawed. The Granger itch for taking chances was born big in the boy.

"My soul, Pappy!" laughed the major. "A man can plow for corn any day. But he cain't always see a good hawse-race."

Pappy agreed with that philosophy. And his own desire was already yoked with the temptation. He cast the Rose colt loose from the plow chains, slipped off her collar, and threw a cloth over her back.

"Enos," he commanded, "take the mu-el up to the stable and tell the old woman I won't be back to-night."

He straddled the mare as he was—in hickory shirt, patched pants, and with the brim of his old black hat flapping about his withered face—and rode after the laughing horsemen. The Rose colt as well as he snuffed the spring air with freer appreciation of its wine. They were two old sports.

At the turn of the road where it touched the further boundary of the Granger place Enos, sweating, and with a saddle on his shoulder, overtook his grandfather. Enos was fourteen, freckled, lanky, "splay-footed," as the saying is, and built of steel

wire! His desire now made him bold, though he ordinarily stood in much more awe of his usually silent grandsire than he did of voluble Granny.

"I'm goin', too, Pappy," he snuffled. "The young 'uns can look after the stock. It ain't fitten for me to stay, nohow. Granny's got down the Bible, an' she says you-all have fell from grace agin."

The old man chuckled, got down, and cinched the saddle on the eager mare, and then, with Enos up behind him, clattered along the road toward the old race-track at Westhall.

There was a likely bunch of two and three year olds at the track, and a few horses like the major's Breecher and Garry's sorrel mare that already had some reputation. Most of the owners were breeders as well. They were here to get records for their horses and to sell the more promising ones to the big stables in the North.

There were several nice little purses offered. And the greater the number of entries the bigger the purses and the larger slice for the association holding the meet, of which Major Blithedale and Mr. Garry were the principal backers. They were not in the racing game for their health.

The free-for-all race without age limit which had interested Pappy from the start, promised the winner a juicy plum. The major and Garry were trying to fatten this purse by getting all the entries possible.

"Come, Pappy, be a sport. Enter Rose for that race. It ain't but three hundred dollars entrance fee, and you can withdraw when they come to the scratch if you don't like the looks of the field; and *then* it 'll only cost you a hundred.

"If it turns out to be only a scrub race, your Rose may stand as good a chance as any, and you might even pull down the purse. Half goes to the winner, you know, and half to the association."

Pappy's sporting instincts were already revived. And those of young Enos took fire. The latter wished he had money to put on the Rose colt. Despite the flirting of the young stock in tryouts around the track, and the bragging of the white and negro rubbers, Enos believed that the little gray mare was the best put together piece of horse-flesh in all Hanover, if not in Virginia itself!

There were several days before the races in which to work out the horses and get them familiar with the track. Pappy looked over the possible field for that free-for-all race with canny gaze, and aside from Breecher and Firefly there were few horses the old man really feared.

If either of the favorites were not in good fettle at the time the race was called, Pappy knew their owners would scratch them. Neither the major nor Garry would risk having their entries beaten in a scrub race, save one by the other.

So the old man allowed himself to be influenced to enter the Rose colt, and put up the first hundred dollars' guarantee of good faith. He went at once to work to prepare the little mare for the coming event. Most of the horses were "winter-bound." They had not been worked much for some months. Whereas, the little flea-bitten gray mare was toughened in sinew and wind by the farm work she had already done this spring.

Pappy and Enos curried her until she began to shine—in spots. They trimmed her tail and mane. Enos scarcely left her day or night. He even curled up and slept in her stall, and she often rolled him off her sweet hay-fodder with her soft nose.

"They goin' to give you-all a chance to show your mettle, Rose," the boy whispered to her. "Make a killin'! Make a killin'!"

The old man put Enos up on her for a tryout, and Rose ran away with him and went twice around the track like a crazy horse before the boy seemed able to pull her up. Nobody timed her but Pappy himself, with his old stop-watch, hidden in his palm.

The few onlookers were immensely amused by this exhibition, and prophesied that the bookies—there were several of that gentry already on the ground—would make her a hundred-to-one shot. But Pappy only grinned and did not exercise her much after that.

Indeed, Pappy paid more attention to the Rose colt's possible antagonists than he did to his own entry. He watched the work-

ing out of each. In Firefly and Breecher he showed an interest sceond only to their respective owners. This interest was not unmarked by Blithedale and Garry. They were apparently much amused by Pappy's owl-like manner when either of the favorites were up for discussion; but in secret the two promoters had an ace in the hole.

"The old man's got money in the bank, I tell you," said the major to his confrere, "and he's bugs on the game. Get him really interested in a promising proposition, an' he'll bet his haid off—sure will!"

As Pappy Granger already displayed such interest in Firefly and Breecher the two owners laid their heads together and plotted the old man's downfall. Of the Rose colt they took small notice. There were several scrubs already entered for the particular race in question that looked much more promising than the shaggy veteran.

Pappy, however, could not learn too much about Firefly and Breecher. He had been studying their traits and foibles from the start. Either would run away with the field if things were just right—if no accident intervened. But accidents are always intervening in the racing game. Otherwise it would not hold that element of chance it does.

Pappy leanred that Firefly was inclined to sulk if things didn't go her way from the start. In a big field, unless she could take the lead and keep it, she lost heart. A spurt by one or two horses that carried them ahead of her was likely to cost the sorrel's owner the race.

And there was a peculiar trait in the character of the fiery Breecher, too—a trait that Pappy noted and which perhaps nobody else but Breecher's hostler knew. Spirited as Major Blithedale's black was, *he did not love the track.*

The track was small, and the big event of the first day—the scrub race in which the Rose colt was entered—was two full circuits of the oval. There were fourteen entries, which meant a hard start, with a jumble of nervous horse-flesh at the post. It might be a ticklish start for any horse that was not well mounted.

"Who you got to ride your mare, Pappy?" asked the major, exuding good nature. "That boy of yours cain't handle her. I'll lend you a boy."

But Pappy shook his head. "I 'low to ride her myself, major—if she stays in," he said. "She'll carry me, all right."

There could be no fault found with that. Pappy was a lean and wiry little man who never in his life had tipped the beam at more than a hundred and ten. Now he was down to minus the century-mark. There were not many of the jocks at the meet who weighed in less than he. Indeed Enos, his grandson, scaled ahead of Pappy.

"I believe the old man will stay in," said the major gleefully to Garry. "I reckon his three hundred is as good as ours, anyway."

"But them's small pickings," ruminated Garry, chewing his cud of "sand-leaf" ruminatively.

Before Pappy both of them talked expansively about their entries. They said if they did not scratch their horses at the last moment and forfeit each his hundred dollars, either Breecher or Firefly would win. They confessed that if their two horses stayed out, the Rose colt might have a chance of being in the running.

"Bet ye anything you like, Pappy, that if the Firefly and my hawse stays in, your old Rose won't even *show*," chuckled Major Blithedale.

This was the way to egg Pappy on, for the old man was a sport from his bald crown to the very insoles of his patched shoes. A "side bet" was what the two astute race-track men were after—a side bet by which Pappy would be done brown, and the two plotters divide the winnings.

"We got the old man int'rested—for a fact!" Major Blithedale said to his side partner the day before the opening of the meet. "He's got a tall opinion of his mare's chances, too."

"But will he bet?"

"He'll bet—and bet *big*—if we play him right. Take him just before the scrub race. We'll tell him we're going to stay in and offer him odds that with Breecher and Firefly in the field the Rose colt won't even run third. *That 'll* hold his whole three hundred."

"But them's small pickings," said Gary

again. "And putting odds on the mare only *showing*—"

"That's the idee," said the major, confidently. "And I bet the old man will bite."

"And mebbe we-uns 'll get bitten."

"Not a chance! Not a chance!" declared Blithedale airily.

"She's a pretty good old skate," objected Garry, remembering his brief brush on the road with Pappy.

"So he thinks," grinned the major. "We couldn't get his goat and make him bet on a proposition that didn't seem reasonable. But see here! Let's toss a penny to see which of our hawses is goin' to win the event. Then give the boy that mounts the loser his instructions, and—"

The rest of the suggestion he whispered in Garry's ear. The latter's mean visage slowly brightened. He chewed faster, and his little eyes twinkled with eagerness.

Thus the plan was laid, and the two waited the psychological moment to enmesh Pappy Granger in their web. Both the old man and Enos stayed right by the Rose colt that night, and both of them were never asleep at the same time.

The first day of the meet was a smiling spring day, the breeze cool and odorous from the blossoming woods. There were a couple of tryout events first to whet the appetites of the sports. There was a good crowd, a fast track, and much interest. When the gong sounded for the horses to come to the post in the scrub race there were eleven in the crew; three had forfeited at the last moment, but neither of those were Major Blithedale's or Mr. Garry's entry.

"You still reckon you got a chance to even *show* with that old mare, Pappy?" chuckled Blithedale, strolling past the stables, which were strung along beside the home-stretch and not far from the barrier. "She won't get once round, I don't reckon."

"She's got as much bottom as ever she had," snapped Pappy, his thin hair behind his ears fairly bristling as he swung himself into the mare's saddle.

"But how 'bout speed?" rejoined the other. "Either Garry's or my entry is going to win; but where 'll old Rose be? 'Way back in the ruck, I reckon."

"Money talks, major!" cried Pappy, blazingly. "Old Rose 'll *show*, all right, an' don't you fergit hit."

"Money talks, jes' like you say, Pappy," Blitheadle drawled, hauling out his betting-book. "How much does you-all's money say at three to one the mare runs third?"

"I—I got a thousand in the Pawmunkey Bank, major," stammered Pappy, his withered-apple face screwed into a hard knot, and with eyes blazing with anger.

"At three to one," said the major, writing coolly, "that Rose won't run third—"

"Or better!" snapped the old man.

"Or better," repeated the major, stiffling his feeling of glee. "Yo' is on, Pappy. There's the second gong, old man."

He strode away, fearful of showing his satisfaction too soon. Pappy leaned from the saddle, his old face changing expression instantly, and whispered in Enos's ear:

"Now, we got 'em! 'Member what I done told you-all. It ain't me an' the Rose colt what's a goin' to win this race. *Hit's you!*"

"Yes, sir, Pappy."

"I knowed them two was cookin' sumpin'. And now I got 'em," repeated the old man in keen delight. "Now, keep your haid, and 'member, Enos."

"I's wise to what yo'-all tell me," said Enos, the freckles shining on his face.

"When you see us in the stretch," continued Pappy earnestly. "Not the fust time, but the second. Yo' do like I tole yo'. W'en we-all gets to the haid of the stretch."

His grandson felt as important as any jock on the track, although he was not astride a horse. Pappy's good money was up. Much depended on Enos, and the boy was determined to be faithful to his charge.

The Rose colt ambled out after the other prancing horses. She might have been carrying her master and a grist to the mill, as she had many times and oft. When the grand stand spied the old man and the rather scrubby looking mare, laughter and applause greeted them. Pappy was not the only rider that rode his own entry; but he was the most bizarre figure in the field.

Just as he had ridden in from the plow did Pappy come—displaying the flapping, broad-brimmed hat, stockingless ankles, pants already hitching up his bony leg half-way to the knee, and an old brown shirt not entirely whole and not at all clean. He created the same interest that the hobo clown does in the circus parade.

One of the bookmakers laughed, rubbed out the forty to one odds on the Rose colt, chalking it up one hundred to one; and at that there were few takers.

The bunch of horses—some of them ill-bred beasts that would kick and bite and were badly ridden—jockeyed for position. Pappy kept out of the ruck until the starter grew stern and spoke sharply. Then the old man pulled the mare into line.

By this time the other horses were lathered and nervous. The Rose colt was eager, but she was an old hand. She blew softly through her nostrils, tossed her head once, and then crouched for the word. She was, indeed, the only mount ready when "They're off!" sounded in a roar from grand stand and bleachers. She might easily have taken the lead at the start.

But Pappy let Breecher and Firefly do that. The big black leaped to the fore after the first few rods, and began to lead a fast race. Daylight could be seen between his outstretched tail and the rest of the field, and that strip of daylight grew.

Well in the lead of the field was Garry's sorrel mare, her eyes rolling to see that nothing passed her. A full length behind her ran the Rose colt, gliding over the ground with her sixty-year-old rider—Pappy riding so easily that it seemed the mare was not trying at all.

The rush and scurry of the other horses—the hoof-beats, the dust, and the flying pebbles—did not trouble the old mare in the least. Already some of the laggard riders were using whip and spur as though once around the course was the length of the race. But those too eager riders soon dropped behind—spent.

Breecher, with his wonderful stride, kept the lead. As he flashed past the post first around, the crowd roared at the favorite. It was all Breecher. And, if any accident befell the black horse, there was Firefly, her head and shoulders out of the ruck, ready to forge forward, it seemed, and win the race.

The horses reached again the first quarter post in the order already named. The flea-bitten gray with the scarecrow figure of Pappy on her back, was running sixth. Then, for the first time, the old man spoke to her:

"Come up—*Rose!*"

At the weird, shrill cry the mare actually doubled her speed! She passed two horses so quickly that their riders scarce realized that they had lost place. But the rider nearest Firefly heard the Rose colt coming, and in his nervousness laid on the whip. His mount made a heartbreaking spurt and shot ahead of Firefly before the sorrel's rider could let her out.

This was the moment for Garry's jock to follow the instructions which had been given him. He shot a glance behind and found the red nostrils of the gray mare at his mount's tail. But he was too late, then, to turn the trick. It was only for a moment that Firefly was outpaced; but it was sufficient to rattle the sorrel. She had been passed. Her head came up, and she faltered in her stride.

It was to her, not to the Rose colt, that Garry's jockey must give his attention. Firefly recovered her lead on the first sprinting horse almost immediately, and that animal lost two places in as many seconds—for the Rose colt was coming on!

Her hoof-beats pounded in Firefly's ears. Her nose drew to the sorrel's saddle. It crept inch by inch along Firefly's neck. In a moment, it seemed, they were running nose and nose, and instead of crowding the Rose mare against the rail, Garry's jock found himself in the trap!

The sorrel's eye rolled and her temper was ruffled. The flea-bitten gray and her uncouth rider crept on and on, and Firefly began to sulk. She was being passed by a rival that could not be beaten.

The horses were so far from the grand stand—they were now half-way round—that the change in their order was not at first noticed. Free of the field, with only the black in front, Pappy began to ride!

Enos, watching through a battered pair

of glasses, saw the Rose colt stretch out, with her belly so close to the ground that Pappy's feet seemed almost to drag. She saw her work cut out for her now. That big black was in her way, and she set forth to prove that "the gray mare was the better horse!"

They came down to the last quarter in a rush. Breecher had the inside and the gray was in his tracks. Pappy did not try to pass. It would have been suicidal. That big black had every advantage over the old mare of speed, stamina, and place.

They came into the stretch, and the grand stand began calling the favorite home:

"Come on, you Breecher! Come on!"

Suddenly some piker who had risked a long shot on the Rose colt, saw her in the dust of the leading horse, and yelled:

"Come on, you gray skate! Rose! Rose! Eat 'em up, daddy!".

A roar of laughter burst from the crowd. Enos dashed the tears from his eyes. He was trembling all over. That big black seemed running away from the Rose colt.

Then—*he remembered!*

Pappy was leaning forward, talking soothingly to the mare, petting her, coaxing her, but not yet using the whip. His hat was lost somewhere back in the ruck where Rose had made her first bound. His thin gray hair streamed in the wind. So, too, did the tail of his shirt which, working out above his belt, snapped like a pennant.

Breecher's rider looked back and raised his whip. They were almost in line with the stables, not many yards away. And suddenly the door to Breecher's stable swung open.

The black saw it and thought of his manger. Before his rider could ply the raised whip he had swerved toward the outer barrier. It was his one vice—a desire to get back to his quarters. He fell for the enticement of that open door!

His rider yelled at him, and cut desperately with the whip, sawing, too, at the bit. Breecher kept on to the rail. He went up in the air like a kite, and before he came down to earth and recovered his stride, the Rose colt, running like a fox, passed him on the inside rail.

The crowd shrieked like bedlam let loose. Pappy plied the whip now, and the gray mare, straining every nerve and tendon, putting every ounce of her wonderful endurance and spirit into the race, came down the stretch like a shot from a gun.

Breecher recovered and came on gloriously, responding nobly to the encouragement of the throng yelling his name. Had the race been ten yards longer he would have won.

But the Rose colt and her scarecrow rider came under the wire a long nose in advance.

Two days later Pappy and Enos, riding slowly along the county road, came within sight of the neglected field which they had been plowing for corn. The plow stood in the furrow where they had left it. The dove—or another—still mourned in the black gum-tree.

Pappy drew rein and scanned the red field with discouraged mein.

"I reckon we was bitin' off more than we could chaw, Enos, son, when we struck out that land," he proclaimed. "We-all don't need so much corn. And if we *do* chance to need a little more than we make this yere season, I reckon we can buy hit.

"That's thanks to you, Enos. I tole yo'. W'en you opened that Breecher's stable door, yo' won the race for us—sure did!"

"But—but, Pappy!" murmured Enos. "That stable do' didn't win you-all the three thousand from Major Blithedale."

"Nope. That yere was strategy," chuckled Pappy. "Major Blithedale and Mr. Garry 'lowed they'd play me like I was a catfish. But I been a spo'tin' man, Enos, son, 'fore them fellers had their milk-teeth cut.

"Anyhow," he pursued, "we'll jest plant what we done got plowed. Seems too ornery to make a hawse what's done earned us so must money to go back to plowin'."

He grinned widely, reflectively.

"And d'you know, Enos, son," he said, "I don't reckon Mr. Blithedale, nor yet Mr. Garry, b'lieved the Rose colt was so good as she is, not by a long shot, or they wouldn't have axed us over to Westhall to that meet."

The Log-Book

By the Editor

TO rouge or not to rouge; to write to soldiers unknown to one or not? I am sure my readers must have grown as tired of the discussion as I have, so here is a request to drop both subjects. In their place I'll give you a topic which surely ought to be live enough in these times. How much salary should a man make on which to marry?

It appears that the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago has issued a dictum to its employees that no man of them receiving less than one hundred and twenty-five dollars a month shall marry without first taking up the matter with the chief clerk. In these days of high living costs a scant bit over thirty dollars a week would appear to involve pretty close figuring to support two in a city flat. The *Sun* heads an editorial on the matter, "A Rule Against Mutual Misery." Come, then, Log writers, what do you think ought to be the weekly wage on which a man should consider himself justified in asking a woman to share it?

The West from a different angle: the vast and diminishing perspective of the kingdom of sheep, yet a country of savage hates and loves, of passion and tragedy—that is our six-part serial starting next week—

"LONESOMENESS"

BY GEORGE WASHINGTON OGDEN

Author of "The Duke of Chimney Butte," "The Listener," etc.

a story with a hero at once whimsical and brave; of a heroine of beguiling charm. Even as Jacob of old served the crafty Laban for Rachel, so *John Mackenzie* tended the flocks of *Sullivan* for *Joan,* his daughter, child of the wide spaces. And of the forces he fought, ruthless, terrible, elemental, there is none more grim in the wide range of fiction than *Swan Carlson,* the man without a soul; none stranger than *Hertha,* his wife, with her tragic melody; the brothers *Hall,* tigers of the range; *Reid,* strange anomaly, with wise eyes and salamander mouth; and, last of all, *"Dad" Frazer,* whose marital misadventures furnish a note of humorous relief to the tremendous sweep of the story.

Sherlock Holmes it was, I think, who pointed to an instance of the average man's lack of observation; *Watson* had gone up and down the same stairs for years, with absolutely no idea as to their number.

"A HABIT OF NOTICING THINGS"

BY CHARLES WESLEY SANDERS

Author of "Fugitives," etc.

adds a rather unique instance of a man who had eyes in his head, and photographic eyes they were, too—keen eyes—and behind them a brain like a steel trap. Is it any

wonder, then, that such a man would refuse to labor for a pittance of fifty dollars a month, especially when the dearest girl in the world was ready, and waiting? And so, when opportunity came knocking, *Joe House* was at home, and the starter's pistol, so to speak, gave him his cue. This is published as a complete novelette in THE ARGOSY for April 24.

Some years ago I lost a camera containing a dozen snap-shots which, of course, I had never seen. I did a good deal of speculating on what the finder would think when he developed the photographs, and when you read "OUT OF PAWN," by Maxwell Smith next week you will see why I was instantly reminded by this story of my own experience. Incidentally it's one of the cleverest crime yarns I have printed in some time. In "A GOOD-FOR-NOTHIN' GAL," Edwina Levin tells a remarkable tale of self-sacrifice coming from a perfectly extraordinary quarter. In short, the entire narrative is of a most unusual description and deserves to rank high in the year's fiction output. "COMPOUNDIN' A FELONY" is another of Raymond J. Brown's inimitable accounts of how *Joe Conner* contrived to keep the wolf from the door.

A LOVER OF THE UNREAL

Derby, Iowa.

I want to express my feelings toward THE ARGOSY. It is the best magazine I ever read. I for one do not see how it could be improved, It is sure a great magazine. I am a lover of Western stories. Among my favorites were: "The Duke of Chimney Butte," "Beau Rand," "Cold Steel," and "Drag Harlan." In fact, any good Western story full of pep is what I like. I sure enjoy the short stories, but can hardly wait for the serials. "Crossroads" sure is starting in promisingly. I like —but some of your other readers do not like— unreal and imaginary stories. Please find enclosed four dollars, for which extend my subscription another year. Yours for success. ED SWIFT.

NONE TO TAKE ITS PLACE

Des Moines, Iowa.

Just a line to let you know how I stand with THE ARGOSY. Have been a constant reader for eight years. Don't think it can be equaled. I think if Mr. Willette would read more of them he would soon change his mind as to novelettes and serials; and as to the difference in the stories of to-day and fifteen years ago, I think we have got to stay closer to possibilities.

I can't help but think THE ARGOSY is far ahead of any other, as none will take its place with me. I also want to state to Miss Curlis, of Ohio, and Miss Smith, of Oklahoma, that all men are not alike, and I think most of them will agree with me that a little powder and sometimes a little paint sure helps the girls along. Nearly every man powders after shaving, and sometimes oftener.

D. J. COON.

A PUFF FOR POWDER

Birmingham, Alabama.

I have been a reader of THE ARGOSY for eight years, and in my opinion it is the very best published. I like Charles B. Stilson better than any author you have.

Miss Marie Curlis, of Hamilton, Ohio, seems to think boys don't like girls who powder. I say, the more the better.

This is my first letter to THE ARGOSY, but not the last. Please print it, as I want Miss Curlis to see it. L. BLAIR PARSONS.

P. S.—Where can I get "Polaris of the Snows," by Charles B. Stilson?

"Polaris of the Snows" ran in *All-Story Weekly*, December 18, 1915, to January 1, 1916 —three numbers, twenty cents each.

INDORSING THE AUTHOR IN COAL MINE DEPTH

Cleveland, Ohio.

I see where some gink speaks of some of your stories as "poor." I am like the Kentuckian with whisky, I never saw a poor story in THE ARGOSY; some are better than others, but they are all good.

I see where some one criticizes one of your authors about the depth of a coal mine described by him. I was raised in a coal district, and the average depth of the mines in southern Iowa is 128 feet, while some are just drifts in the side of a hill. The deep mines the critic refers to are the quartz mines, which are as deep as near 6,000 feet at the Calumet & Hecla, at Red Jacket, Michigan. The average quartz mines at Butte, Montana; Bisbee, Arizona, and the Colorado district are about 1,000 feet. I have worked in most of them, and know. JACK H. LONG.

GETTING BACK AT MR. RETTBURG

Denver, Colorado.

Please tell me how Mr. H. D. Rettburg *could* get that way so bad. I have seen a lot of Rettburgs in my time; you know the bright young man who spends his odd minutes in front of the store on Main Street casting critical eyes at the girls as they pass, and if he can find another bright young man for a companion he generally whispers something; then they both giggle and look like they thought they had really accomplished something worth while. Mr. Rettburg deplores the use of "camouflage" by us girls.

Now, Mr. Editor, perhaps we dislike the yellow garters he uses as sleeve-holders for that blue-and-green-striped near-silk shirt he wears with the electric-blue suit—you know, the one with the black-pearl buttons for trimming and the patch-pockets let in at an angle. Now, we girls might overlook Mr. Rettburg's camouflage if we didn't know that he is the fellow who, as he confesses, goes to the shows to see all of us he can with camouflage and little else—then starts hunting a wife whom he believes will be satisfied with a calico dress and a picture-show once a year; a meek little wife, who will let him swipe the butter-and-egg money most of the time, and who will not spend anything on camouflage.

Mr. Rettburg expresses considerable anxiety as to whether you will print his yelp. On the contrary, I do not care a whoop if this is or is not printed, but I *would* like to send him just one little letter. I would like to know how he gets that way. (Miss) EDYTHE DILL.

A CHALLENGE TO "CHAP FROM THE GOLDEN WEST"

Canora, Saskatchewan, Canada.

I have been a reader of THE ARGOSY for only six months, but I never read the Log-Book, so last night I gathered all my ARGOSY magazines and read the Log letters over. The letter of Nelson Andrews, of Lyndhurst, New Jersey, sure did make me laugh and giggle every time I read it. I read it over about three times, and will read it again.

What made me write to the Log was the letter of Miss McGee, where she ends it with "one wish, one smile, I bide you all good night." I went to bed and dreamed of reading THE ARGOSY, and a lady encouraging me to write to the Log-Book. I wish to say to Elizabeth Lockwood, who wrote from Fresno, California, that Canada is not as bad as H. L. Walker—whoever he was or is—might be able to paint it.

I read that Miss Ruth Finfrock and F. Marion Jordan and many others are opposed to having faces powdered. I know some Western girls, and there are many besides that are a little tanned by the heat and winds, use it with success in beautifying their complexion. Why, all barbers nowadays powder men after a shave. I am a Westerner, but I never object to a barber powdering my complexion after a shave.

What is the matter with readers of Saskatchewan? I haven't yet seen a letter from this province, nor from either of the other two prairie provinces.

Well, for a good word of THE ARGOSY I say that it can't be beat. I like all the stories, serials especially. I think that the best short stories are written by William Merriam Rouse. I have no kicks to register, but I like to read others' kicks.

"A Chap from the Golden West," Eveleth, Minnesota, surely has a nerve to call his fellow reader crazy simply because the latter has a different taste in short stories. He says that if J. B. Sense does not like short stories why does he read them. Now, you "Chap from the Golden West," if you do not like girls that powder their faces, why do you walk by their sides? I know you wouldn't walk with them if you didn't like it. Come out and sign your name; you're not the only chap in the golden West.

Well, *Hista la Vista*—if you've read Douglas Grant's "Fifth Ace"—and probably *au revoir* to some of you; and best wishes to our dear editor, readers, writers, and THE ARGOSY itself.

JOHN ELLSWORTH.

SCENTING THE EDITOR'S SIXTH SENSE

Gatesville, Texas.

I wish to say at the start that I have read THE ARGOSY for over twenty years. I have noted its many changes. I remember a few years ago THE ARGOSY came out for a time with every story complete. I thought at the time it was as near the ideal fiction publication as anything I ever saw, but when it changed again to its present style, I didn't say anything, for I am leaving the management to the publishers.

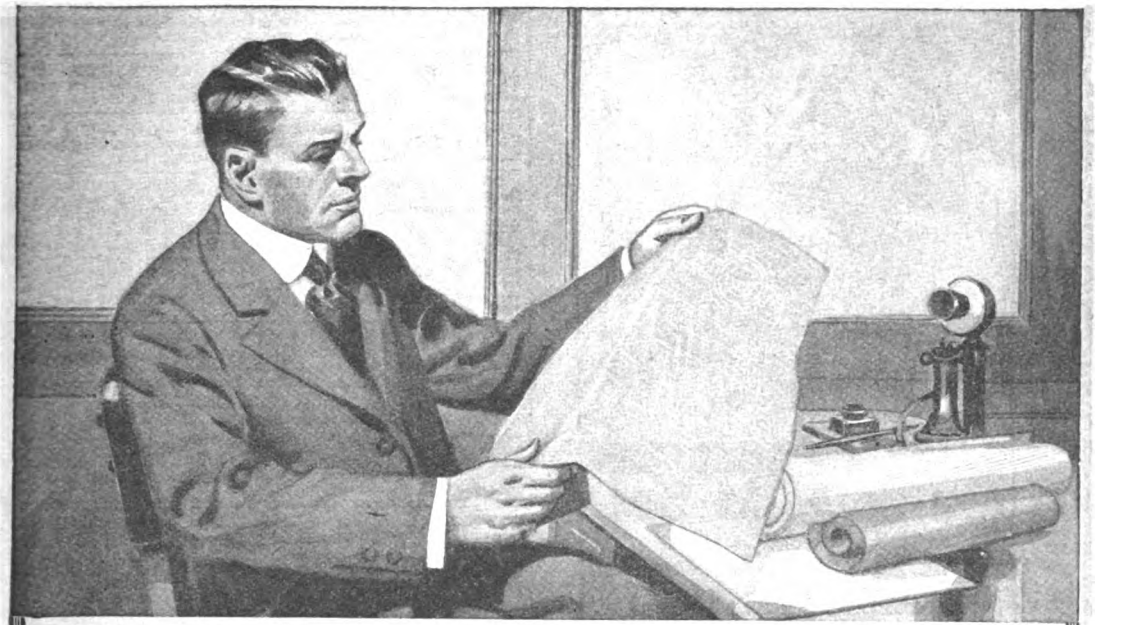
Now a word to the readers of THE ARGOSY: I have noticed through life the ease with which a novice will sometimes point out a little defect in an otherwise perfect production, when he couldn't begin to duplicate the thing himself. This is very often the case with the Log-Book critics. I don't read a story to discover its objectionable features, but rather for entertainment. If it has too many and glaring faults I quit it and try another. This Log-Book is a kind of club where the readers of THE ARGOSY are permitted to meet and discuss the merits of its authors and the magazine as a whole. It seems to me some of the contributions to the Log are just a little too flippant, breezy and slangy. We are not as serious in our discussions sometimes as we should be, and the element of charity is often sadly wanting.

Did you ever stop to consider the task of the publisher in putting out a weekly like THE ARGOSY? Each thing that goes into the make-up of the paper must be gone over separately by experts. Even the cover-design is a factor and a problem for every week in the year, and it has a department of its own. You may rest assured of one thing, your editor sees the shortcomings of all these stories before you do, and he finds defects the average reader never discovers. We shouldn't be too hasty in our judgment of an author, since he might be just entering the field, and we, through severe criticism, might be the cause of our editor taking him off the roll, when it might have been, with a little patience and time, he would become a good writer.

We sometimes see a letter from some one asking for a story like one he read in THE ARGOSY a quarter of a century past. I have an idea these readers wouldn't like such a story as much as they think they would, since as time goes by our literary tastes undergo changes so subtle and gradual we are not conscious of them until we attempt to read some of these old stories. We are constantly demanding of the editor a magazine with a higher standard of workmanship, and I am sure one of the requisites of a magazine editor is the development of a kind of sixth sense that points out to him just how and when these changes are coming.

Now, a suggestion to the story-writer: Don't attempt to write a story about anything unless you know what you are writing about, for your ignorance is certain to be discovered by some of your readers, and you might mislead others. With best wishes for THE ARGOSY and family,

L. A. STOVALL.



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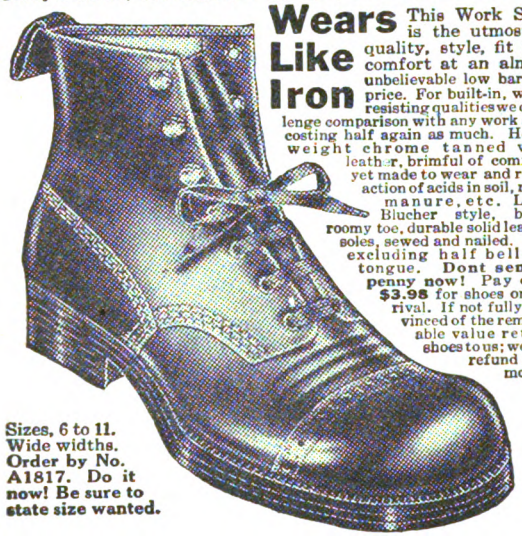

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Send no money—only your name, address and size. Pay our low bargain price, $4.69, for shoes on arrival. If not a stunning bargain and satisfactory in every way, return them and get your money back. You have nothing to lose—everything to gain—so send your order today. Sizes, 6 to 11—state size and width when ordering. Order by No. A15105.

Four Wonderful Shoe Bargains

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Here is a very attractive and unusual offer typical of the wonderful shoe values put out by the great Mail Order House of Leonard-Morton & Co. Fashionable Hi-Cut Boots, lace style, of fine quality soft black kid finished leather on the very latest French last and with the new popular 1¼-inch walking heel. Light weight flexible leather soles. Just the sort of footwear a woman possesses with a feeling of pride. The kind that adds to a reputation as a stylish dresser. You can only appreciate the high degree of service and the quiet elegance which are combined in this shoe by seeing them on your feet. Wide widths. Sizes, 2½ to 8. **Order by No. A1080. Price only $3.98, payable on arrival of shoes.** If not the greatest bargain you ever saw, return to us and we will promptly refund your money.

Women's High Grade Black and Brown Low Heel Oxford

Just the smart Spring and Summer style to give your appearance that final touch of well-dressed elegance; and at a price so low that you should lay in not only one pair, but several pairs in order to benefit fully by the remarkable saving. In these oxfords is to be found a combination of smart style and satisfactory service usually found only in shoes at much higher prices. Extra fine quality dark brown or black, soft, glove fitting, kid finished leather. Light weight flexible leather sole and stylish new 1¼-inch walking heel. Send for these shoes at once. Their look, feel and wear will more than satisfy you. Wide widths. Sizes, 2½ to 8. **Order Black by No. A158. Order Brown by No. A159. Pay only $3.98 for shoes on arrival.** Examine critically. Try them on. Test their fit and comfort. Compare our low price with others, and if you are not more than delighted with your bargain, return shoes to us and we will cheerfully refund your money. When you send in your order do not fail to mention the size and width of your shoe.

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In

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Easy—Clean—Safe—Quick

Johnson's Carbon Remover is the easiest, cleanest, safest and most satisfactory remedy for carbon. It will save you from $3.00 to $5.00 over any other method without laying up the car. Johnson's Carbon Remover, the engine laxative, will stop that knock—quiet your motor—save your batteries—and reduce your gas consumption.

JOHNSON'S CAR SAVERS

Johnson's Cleaner and Prepared Wax—make body, hood and fenders look like new.
Johnson's Hastee Patch — can be applied in two minutes.
Johnson's Valve Grinding Compound—gives a velvet seat.
Johnson's Stop-Squeak Oil—a wonderful spring lubricant.
Johnson's Auto-Lak—a splendid one coat body varnish.
Johnson's Black-Lac—the perfect top dressing.
Johnson's Radiator Cement—liquid.

Write for our folder on "Keeping Cars Young"—it's free.

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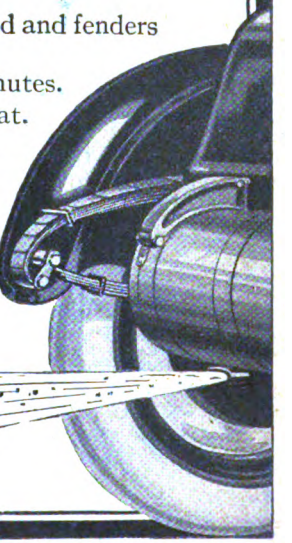

Out

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So people said when I first started in 1891. But now, after over twenty-five years of steady growth, I have far more students than were ever before taught by one man. I make them skilled players of the piano or organ in *quarter the usual time at quarter the usual cost.*

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