ARGOSY

Issued Weekly

LONESOMENESS

by George Washington Ogden

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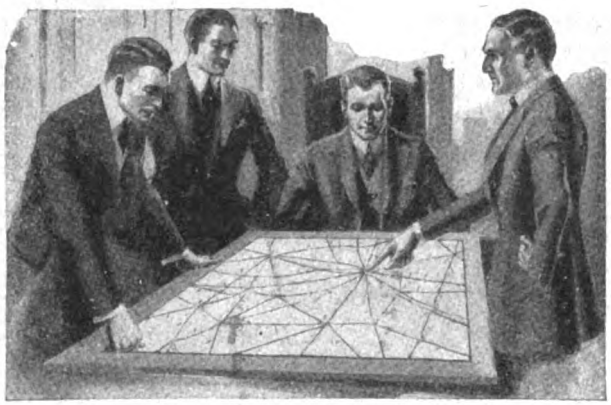
Be a Master of Traffic Management

There is a big and ever-increasing demand for men trained in Railway and Industrial Traffic Work. The salaries offered range from $50 to $100 a week and up. Hundreds of ambitious men have trained themselves successfully at home by mail under the guidance of LaSalle experts.

Every big business organization must have its traffic expert, its interstate commerce director—and yet not enough really competent men are available. In many places, "second-raters" are trying to direct the shipping while their employers are looking, inquiring, advertising for efficient men able to handle the complicated traffic problems which come up many times every day. This is your opportunity to get into an uncrowded profession — to make quick advancement—to step into a specialized calling—to be the man always needed and to earn a salary which many men do not reach after years of patient, plodding service.



Train by Mail

The LaSalle traffic-experts will give you a thoro, specialized knowledge of the methods used by great shippers, railroad and steamship lines; instruct you in rates, classifications, routing, bills of lading, claims, demurrage, railroad accounting, organization, management, interstate commerce laws, etc. Every phase of the subject under the direction of a specialist. You get in months what years of experience alone would not bring, because you profit by the combined experience of many men acknowledged as traffic authorities. Every point made clear. The whole ground thoroly covered. You are prepared to act as a traffic manager because you have a grasp of the entire subject—ready to direct all phases of traffic work.

You need not leave your present position. LaSalle training is given by mail. You can become a traffic expert in your spare hours by the LaSalle method—thoroly prepared to hold a high salaried industrial or railway traffic position. You can pay for your training on our easy terms —a little each month if you wish.

Salaries Raised

Mr. Fred Hoffman took LaSalle training in traffic and reports 500 per cent profit on the cost of his course. Harold Watson got 400 per cent salary increase. B. S. McMullen rose from freight checker to General Manager. Reports like these come to us daily.

Already over 200,000 ambitious men have profited by LaSalle training. More than 35,000 enroll annually in our various courses, getting the benefits offered by an organization of 950 people including 450 business experts, instructors, text writers and assistants. Thousands of LaSalle men are employed in the offices of great corporations like the Pennsylvania R. R., Armour & Co., Standard Oil Co., U. S. Steel Corp., etc. Not only men seeking advancement but many prominent executives have found in these courses the way to larger success.

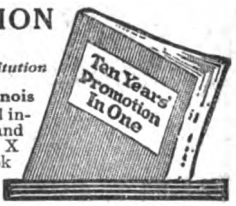
Send the Coupon

Get information about the profession of Traffic Management. The coupon or a letter will bring this—also catalog and all details about LaSalle training—and our famous book, "Ten Years' Promotion in One," the book which has been an inspiration to thousands of ambitious men.

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

"The Largest Business Training Institution in the World"

Dept. 432-TR Chicago, Illinois



Please send me catalog and full information regarding the course and service I have marked with an X below. Also a copy of your book "Ten Years' Promotion in One," all without obligation to me.

☐ **Traffic Management — Foreign and Domestic:** Training for positions as Railroad and Industrial Traffic Managers, etc.

Other Courses in LaSalle Training:

LaSalle is the largest business training institution in the world. It offers training for every important business need. If interested in any of these courses, check here:

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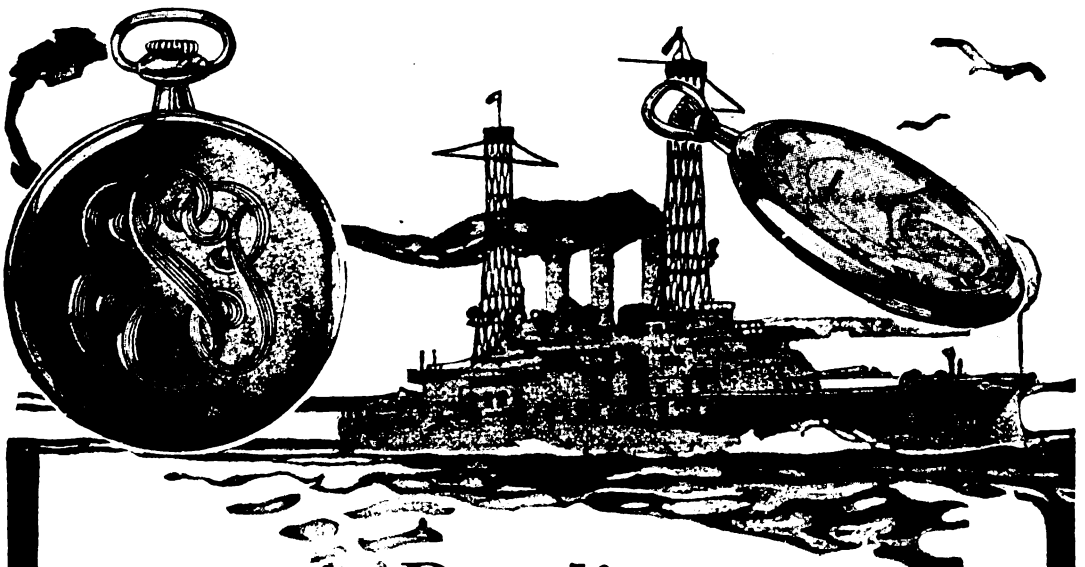
☐ Business Administration	☐ Bookkeeping
☐ Production Efficiency	☐ Commercial Spanish
☐ Business Letter Writing	☐ Public Speaking
☐ Law—Bar, LL.B. Degree	☐ Business English
☐ Commercial Law	☐ C. P. A. Coaching for Advanced Accountants

Name.....

Present Position.....

Address .....



8,320 Burlingtons in the U. S. Navy—

8,320 Burlingtons have been sold to the men aboard the U. S. battleships. Practically every vessel in the U. S. Navy has many Burlington watches aboard. Some have over 100 Burlingtons. **The victory of the Burlington among the men in the U. S. Navy is testimony to Burlington superiority.**

A watch has to be made of sturdy stuff in order to "make good" on a man-of-war. The constant vibration, the extreme heat in the boiler rooms, the cold salt air and the change of climate from the Arctic to the Tropical are the most severe tests on a watch. If a watch will stand up and give active service aboard a man-of-war, it will stand up anywhere.

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And yet you may get a 21-jewel Burlington for only $3.50 a month. Truly it is the master watch. 21 ruby and sapphire jewels, adjusted to the second, temperature, isochronism and positions. Fitted at the factory in a gold strata case, warranted for 25 years. All the newest cases are yours to choose from. You pay only rock-bottom price—yes, "bed rock-bottom price"—the lowest price at which the Burlington is sold.

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You don't pay a cent to anybody until you see the watch. We ship the watch to you *on approval*. You are the sole judge. No obligation to buy merely because you get the watch on approval.

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Put your name and address in the coupon or on a letter or post card now and get your Burlington Watch book free and prepaid. You will know a lot more about watch buying when you read it. Too, you will see handsome illustrations in full color of all the newest cases from which you have to choose. The booklet is free. Merely send your name and address on the coupon.

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Address .....

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THE ARGOSY

Vol. CXX ISSUED WEEKLY NUMBER 2

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THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 Broadway, New York, and Temple House, Temple Avenue, E. C., London

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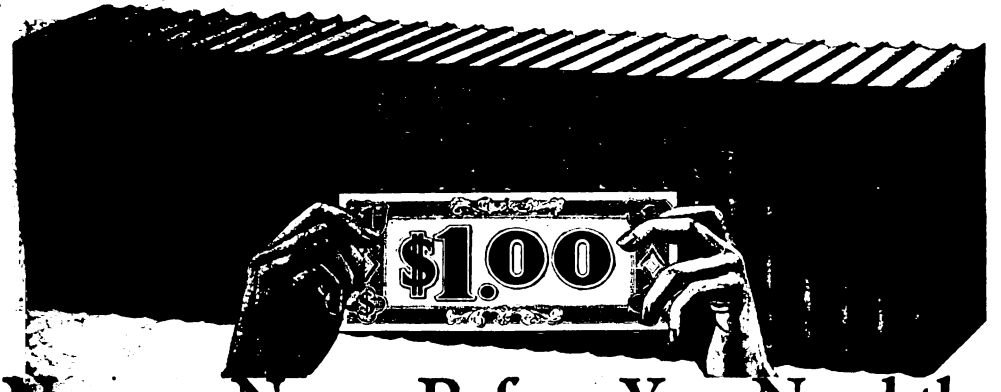

Now as Never Before You Need the Encyclopaedia Britannica

HANDY VOLUME ISSUE

War awoke this great land of ours and set the stage for a tremendous industrial, spiritual and social awakening. There probably is not a man, woman or child among the more than 100,000,000 inhabitants of the United States upon whom the past five years has not had a profound effect. Great reforms are being hastened and this will be a better and cleaner world after the ordeals of fire through which it has passed. The participation of the United States as never before in the world's affairs has brought to the people new interests not limited to the neighborhood, town or city in which they live, but interests that are world wide. A miracle has been wrought in men's minds, a miracle in which there is a tremendous thirst for knowledge, a knowledge which is absolutely necessary today, as never before. Where can people find correct, authoritative and comprehensive information on the many different subjects in which they are interested, as a consequence of this awakening? They naturally turn to the wonderful storehouse of knowledge—the world's greatest guide to correct and authoritative information—The Encyclopaedia Britannica. The Britannica furnishes practical, detailed and authoritative articles of great value to the business man, to the manufacturer, to the importer, to the worker in the industries. The Britannica will give a foundation for study of subjects which will be uppermost in our minds for years to come. It is the book for Americans today who are waking up to new thoughts, new work and new interests.

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What Is Before Us?

There are many serious post-war problems confronting us. Do you understand the tendencies in our industrial life? Why are the prices of commodities high? Will wages go still higher or down? Will the cost of living gradually drop? Is there likely to be some great cataclysm that will serve to send prices and wages tumbling downward? Are you inclined to be stampeded with fear of what is before us? Are you sitting down and studying the facts of past cases that were somewhat similar? Are you familiar with what has happened after other wars? In England after the Napoleonic campaigns; in the United States after the Civil War; to France, to Germany and to Neutrals after the Franco-Prussian war?

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The war has changed the status of women industrially and politically. The mother must keep abreast of the great thoughts and movements that are taking place throughout the world, that are vitally affecting her. Woman today in her greater and more important place in the world needs the Encyclopaedia Britannica as never before—she needs it to teach her how to fulfill her new status as a citizen—how to make her more efficient in the business world and, as a mother, to make herself broader and a bigger woman so she can teach her children wisely and correctly.

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I MEAN just what I say. There's no trick or catch about it. Give me five days and I'll prove that I can get your pay raised for you. I'll do it on a "show you" basis. You get the proof before you pay me a cent.

You've probably heard of me. My name is Pelton. Lots of people call me "The Man Who Makes Men Rich." I don't deny it. I've done it for thousands of people—lifted them up from poverty to riches. There's no sound reason why I cannot do it for you. So let's try.

Now, follow me carefully. I'm going to tell you exactly how to do it. I'm the possessor of a "secret" for which men have been searching since Time began.

There's no need to discuss the whys and the wherefores of this "secret." Suffice it to say that *It Works*. That's all we care about—*It Works*. Over 400,000 men and women the world over have proved it for themselves.

Among them are such men as Judge Ben B. Lindsay; Supreme Court Justice Parker; Governor McKelvie of Nebraska; Wu Ting Fang, ex-U. S. Chinese Ambassador; Governor Ferris of Michigan; E. T. Meredith, Secretary of Agriculture, and thousands of others of equal prominence.

Some of the things this "secret" has done for people are astounding. I would hardly believe them if I hadn't seen them with my own eyes. Adding ten, twenty, thirty or forty dollars a week to a man's income is a mere nothing. That's merely playing at it. Listen to this:

A young man in the East had an article for which there was a nation-wide demand. For twelve years he "puttered around" with it—barely eking out a living. Today this young man is worth $200,000. He is building a $25,000 home—and paying cash for it. He has three automobiles. His children go to private schools. He goes hunting, fishing, traveling whenever the mood strikes him. His income is over a thousand dollars a week.

In a little town in New York lives a man who two years ago was pitied by all who knew him. From the time he was 14 he had worked and slaved—and at sixty he was looked upon as a failure. Without work, in debt to his charitable friends, with an invalid son to support, the outlook was pitchy black.

Then he learned the "secret." In two weeks he was in business for himself. In three months his plant was working night and day to fill orders. During 1916 the profits were $20,000. During 1917 the profits ran close to $40,000. And this genial 64-year-young man is enjoying pleasures and comforts he little dreamed would ever be his.

I could tell you thousands of similar instances. But there's no need to do this as I'm willing to tell you the "secret" itself. Then you can

put it to work and see what it will do for you. I don't claim I can make you rich over night. Maybe I can—maybe I can't. Sometimes I have failures—everyone has. But I do claim that I can help 90 out of every 100 people if they will let me.

The point of it all, my friend, is that you are using only about one-tenth of that wonderful brain of yours. That's why you haven't won greater success. Throw the unused nine-tenths of your brain into action and you'll be amazed at the almost instantaneous results.

The Will is the motive power of the brain. Without a highly trained, inflexible will, a man has about as much chance of attaining success in life as a railway engine has of crossing the continent without steam. The biggest ideas have no value without will-power to "put them over." Yet the will, although heretofore entirely neglected, can be trained into wonderful power like the brain or memory and by the very same method—intelligent exercise and use.

If you held your arm in a sling for two years, it would become powerless to lift a feather, from lack of use. The same is true of the Will—it becomes useless from lack of practice. Because we don't use our Wills—because we continually bow to circumstance—we become unable to assert ourselves. What our wills need is practice.

Develop your will-power and money will flow in on you. Rich opportunities will open up for you. Driving energy you never dreamed you had will manifest itself. You will thrill with a new power—a power that nothing can resist. You'll have an influence over people that you never thought possible. Success—in whatever form you want it—will come as easy as failure came before. And those are only a few of the things the "secret" will do for you. The "secret" is fully explained in the wonderful book "Power of Will."

A FEW EXAMPLES

Personal Experiences

Among over 400,000 users of "Power of Will" are such men as Judge Ben B. Lindsay; Supreme Court Justice Parker; Wu Ting Fang, Ex-U. S. Chinese Ambassador; Assistant Postmaster General Britt; Gov. McKelvie of Nebraska; General Manager Christeson of Wells-Fargo Express Co.; E. St. Elmo Lewis, of Detroit; Gov. Ferris of Michigan; E. T. Meredith, Secretary of Agriculture, and many others of equal prominence.

$300 Profit from One Day's Reading

"The result from one day's study netted me $300 cash. I think it a great book and would not be without it for ten times the cost."—Colonel S. W. Wilkie, Roscoe, So. Dakota.

Worth $15,000 and More

"The book has been worth more than $15,000 to me."—Oscar B. Sheppard.

Would be Worth $100,000

"If I had only had it when I was 20 years old, I would be worth $100,000 today. It is worth a hundred times the price."—S. W. Taylor, The Santa Fe Ry., Milans, Tex.

Salary Jumped from $150 to $800

"Since I read 'Power of Will' my salary has jumped from $150 to $800 a month."—J. F. Gibson, San Diego, Cal.

From $100 to $3,000 a Month

"One of our boys who read 'Power of Will' before he came over here jumped from $100 a month to $3,000 the first month, and won a $250 prize for the best salesmanship in the state."—Private Leslie A. Still, A.E.F., France.

How You Can Prove This at My Expense

I know you'll think that I've claimed a lot. Perhaps you think there must be a catch somewhere. But here is my offer. You can easily make thousands—you can't lose a penny.

Send no money—no, not a cent. Merely clip the coupon and mail it to me. By return mail you'll receive, not a pamphlet, but the whole "secret" told in this wonderful book, "POWER OF WILL."

Keep it five days. Look it over in your home. Apply some of its simple teachings. If it doesn't show you how you can increase your income many times over—just as it has for thousands of others—mail the book back. You will be out nothing.

But if you do feel that "POWER OF WILL" will do for you what it has done for over four hundred thousand others—if you feel as they do that it's the next greatest book to the Bible—send me only $3.50 and you and I'll be square.

If you pass this offer by, I'll be out only the small profit on a three and a half-dollar sale. But you—you may easily be out the difference between what you're making now and an income several times as great. So you see you've a lot—a whole lot—more to lose than I.

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54-H Wilcox Block, Meriden, Conn.

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54-H Wilcox Block, Meriden, Conn.

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WANTED—REPRESENTATIVES 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, Mallers Bldg., Chicago.

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YOUNG MAN, WOULD YOU ACCEPT A TAILOR-MADE SUIT just for showing it to your friends? Then write Banner Tailoring Co., Dept. 400, Chicago, and get beautiful samples, styles and a wonderful offer.

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MISCELLANEOUS

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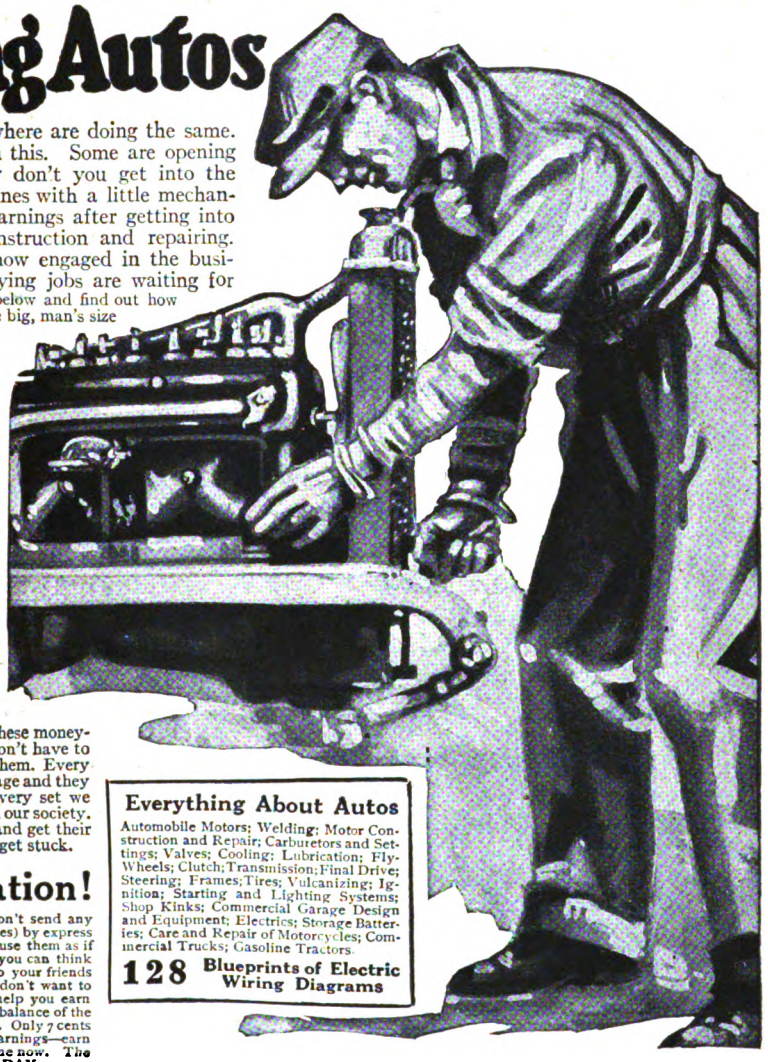

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THE ARGOSY

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Lonesomeness*

by George Washington Ogden

Author of "The Duke of Chimney Butte," "The Listener," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A LONESOME SONG.

SO John Mackenzie had put his foot upon the road.

This after he had reasoned it out as a mathematical problem, considering it as a matter of quantities alone. There was nothing in school-teaching at sixty dollars a month when men who had to carry a rubber-stamp to sign their names to their checks were making fortunes all around him in sheep.

That was the way it looked to John Mackenzie the morning he set out for Poison Creek to hunt up Tim Sullivan and strike him for a job. Against the conventions of the country, he had struck out on foot. That also had been reasoned out in a cool and calculative way:

A sheepherder had no use for a horse, in the first place. Secondly and finally, the money a horse would represent would buy at least twelve head of ewes. With questioning eyes upon him when he left Jasper, and contemptuous eyes upon him when he met riders in his dusty journey, John Mackenzie had pushed on, his pack on his back.

There was not a book in that pack. John Mackenzie, schoolmaster, had been a bond-slave of books in that country for four obscure, well-nigh profitless years, and he was done with them for a while. The less a sheepman knew about books, the more he was bound to know about sheep, for sheep would be the object and aim of his existence.

Mackenzie knew plenty of sheepmen who never had looked into any kind of a book but a bank-deposit book in their lives. That seemed to be education enough to carry them very nicely along, even to boost them to the State Legislature, and lift one of them to the United States Senate. So, what was the use of worrying along on a mission of enlightenment at sixty dollars a month?

Mackenzie had not come into the West in a missionary spirit at the beginning. He had not believed the youth of that section to be in any greater depths of ignorance than elsewhere in this more or less favored land. But from his earliest years he had entertained romantic notions, adventurous desires. With his normal school certificate in his breast pocket, tight trousers on his rather long legs, a short vest scarcely meeting them at the waistband, he had traveled

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into the West, seeking romance, alert for adventure.

When he arrived at Jasper, which was only the inter-mountain west, and far from the golden coast of his most fervid dreams, he found that adventure and romance apparently had packed up and gone elsewhere years ahead of him. There was nothing nearer either of them in Jasper than a tame gambling joint in the back end of a saloon, where greasy, morose sheepherders came to stake quarters on roulette and faro, where railroaders squandered away their wages, leaving the grocerymen unpaid. And there was no romance for John Mackenzie in any such proceeding as that.

Simple, you will see he was; open-faced and guileless as the day. Farm-bred, raw-boned, slow of speech, clear of eye, no vices, no habits that pulled a man down, unless a fondness for his brier-root pipe might be so classed. But in the way Mackenzie smoked the pipe it was more in the nature of a sacrifice to his gods of romance than even a mild dissipation.

In the four years of his school-teaching at Jasper, Mackenzie slowly grew out of his extreme rawness of appearance. His legs hardened from long rambles over the hills, his face browned like an outdoor man's, his rustic appearance, his clabber-days shyness, all slowly dissolved away.

But the school board was not cognizant of any physical or mental strengthening in him. He was worth sixty dollars a month to that slow-thinking body when he came to Jasper; he was worth no more than sixty dollars when he threw up the job and left.

Romance and adventure had called him away to the road at last, but the romance of sheep-riches, the adventure of following a flock over the sage-gray hills. Maybe he would find it too late even to glimpse them when he arrived in the heart of the sheep-lands; perhaps times had shifted since the heavy-jowled illiterates whom he had met in Jasper began their careers with a few pounds of dried apples and uncommon endurance for hardships in the open fields.

Simple, they thought him down in Jasper, in the mild simplicity of a preacher or any man who would not fight. In their classification he was a neutral force, an emasculated, mild, harmless creature who held the child's view of life from much association with children. He often had heard it said.

A man never could advance to notability in a community that rated him as mildly simple; he would have a hard time of it even to become notorious. Only one man there had taken an interest in him as man to man, a flockmaster who had come into that country twenty years before, a school-teacher like himself.

This man had kicked up the golden dust before Mackenzie's eyes with his tales of the romance of the range, the romance of sheep-riches, the quick multiplication of a band run on the increase-sharing plan. This man urged Mackenzie to join him, taking a band of sheep on shares. But his range was in sight of Jasper; there was no romance on his hills. So Mackenzie struck out for the head-waters of Poison Creek, to find Tim Sullivan, notable man among the sheep-rich of his day.

It was a five-day journey on foot, as he calculated it—nobody in that country ever had walked it, as far as he could learn—to Tim Sullivan's ranch on Poison Creek. Now, in the decline of the fifth day he had come to Poison Creek, a loud, rapid, and boisterous stream which a man could cross in two jumps. It made a great amount of noise in its going over the boulders in its bed, as a little water in a vast arid land probably was justified by its importance in doing. It was the first running water Mackenzie had met since leaving the Big Wind, clear as if it came unpolluted by a hoof or a hand from its mountain source.

But somewhere along its course Tim Sullivan grazed and watered forty thousand sheep; and beyond him were others who grazed and watered many times that number. Poison Creek might well enough merit its name from the slaver of so many flocks, the schoolmaster thought, although he knew it came from pioneer days, and was as obscure as pioneer names usually are obscure.

And some day he would be watering his thousands of sheep along its rushing vein. That was John Mackenzie's intent and purpose as he trudged the dusty miles of gray hills, with their furze of gray sage, and

their gray twilights which fell with a melancholy silence as chilling as the breath of death. For John Mackenzie was going into the sheeplands to become a master. He had determined it all by mathematical rule.

There was the experience to be gained first, and it was cheaper to do that at another man's expense than his own. He knew how the right kind of a man could form a partnership with a flockmaster sometimes; he had heard stories of such small beginnings leading to large ownership and oily prosperity. Jasper had examples of its own; he was familiar with them all.

Some of them began as herders on the basis of half the increase from a stated number of sheep not more than ten years past. Now they looked upon a sixty-dollars-a-month school-teacher with the eyes of superiority, as money always despises brains which it is obliged to hire, probably because brains cannot devise any better method of finding the necessary calories than that of letting themselves out by the month.

Tim Sullivan needed herders; he had advertised for them in the Jasper paper. Besides, Tim had the name of a man who could see the possibilities in another. He had put more than one young fellow on the way of success in the twenty years he had been running sheep on the Poison Creek range.

But failing to land a partnership deal with Sullivan, Mackenzie was prepared to take a job running sheep by the month. Or, should he find all avenues to experience at another man's expense closed to him, he was ready to take the six hundred dollars saved out of his years of book bondage and buy a little flock of his own. Somewhere in that wide expanse of government-owned land he would find water and grazing, and there his prosperity would increase.

Sheep had visited the creek lately at the point where Mackenzie first encountered it, but there were no dusty flocks in sight billowing over the hills. Tim Sullivan's house was not to be seen, any more than sheep, from the highest hill in the vicinity. It must be several miles ahead of him still, Mackenzie concluded, remembering that Poison Creek was long. Yet he hoped he might reach it by nightfall, for his feet were growing weary of the untrodden way they had borne him for a hundred and fifty miles, more or less.

He pushed on, now and again crossing the broad trail left by bands of sheep counting two or three thousand, feeling the lonesomeness of the unpeopled land softened by these domestic signs. Sunset, and no sight of a house; nightfall, and not the gleam of a light to show him either herder's camp or permanent domicil of man.

Mackenzie lingered beside the clamoring water in a little valley where the uncropped grass was lush about his feet, considering making camp there for the night. It was a pleasant place for a land so bleak, even in summer, as that country of high table lands and rolling gray hills. As he started to unsling his pack he caught the dim note of somebody's voice raised in song, and stood so, hand on the strap, listening.

The voice was faint, broken by the distance, yet cheering because it was a voice. Mackenzie pressed up the hill, hoping to be able to thread the voice back to its source from that eminence. As he neared the top the voice came clearer; as he paused to listen, it seemed quite close at hand. It was a woman singing, and this was the manner of her song:

> "Na-a-fer a-le-e-one, na-a-fer a-lone,
> He promise na-fer to leafe me,
> Na-fer to leafe me a-lone."

The valley whence came the song was quite dark below him, and darker for the indefinite blotch of something that appeared to be trees. In that grove the house that sheltered the melancholy singer must be hidden, so completely shrouded that not even a gleam of light escaped to lead him to the door. Mackenzie stood listening. There was no other sound rising from that sequestered homestead than the woman's song, and this was as doleful as any sound that ever issued from human lips.

Over and over again the woman sang the three stanzas, a silence after the last long, tremulous note which reached to the traveler's heart, more eloquent in its expression of poignant loneliness than the hopeless repe-

tition of the song. He grinned dustily as he found himself wishing, in all seriousness, that somebody would take a day off and teach her the rest of the hymn.

Mackenzie's bones were weary of the road, hard as he tried to make himself believe they were not, and that he was tough man, ready to take and give as it might come to him in the life of the sheeplands. In his heart he longed for a bed that night, and a cup of hot coffee to gladden his gizzard. Coffee he had not carried with him, much less a coffee-pot; his load would be heavy enough, he rightly anticipated, before he reached Tim Sullivan's without them. Nothing more cheering than water out of the holes by the way had passed his lips these five days.

He could forgive the woman her song if she would supply some of the comforts of those who luxuriated in houses for just this one night. He went on, coming soon to barbed wire along the way, and presently to a gap in it that let him in among the trees which concealed the house.

It was a small, low cabin, quite buried among the trees, no light showing as Mackenzie drew near, although the voice of the woman still rose in the plaintive monotony of her song.

Mackenzie put as much noise into his arrival as was possible by walking heavily, knowing very well that a surprise by night is not a good beginning for a claim of hospitality. The woman must have heard, for her song ceased in the middle of a word. At the corner of the house Mackenzie saw a dim light falling through an open door, into which the shadow of the woman came.

A little way from the door Mackenzie halted, hat in hand, giving the woman good-evening. She stood within the threshold a few feet, the light of the lantern hanging in an angle of the wall over her, bending forward in the pose of one who listened. She was wiping a plate, which she held before her breast in the manner of a shield, stiffly in both hands. Her eyes were large and full of a frightened surprise, her pale yellow hair was hanging in slovenly abandon down her cheeks and over her ears.

She was a tall woman, thin of frame, worn and sad, but with a faded comeliness of face, more intelligence apparent in it than commonly shown by Norwegian women of the peasant class who share the labors and the loads of their men on the isolated homesteads of the Northwest.

She stood so, leaning and staring, her mouth standing open as if the song had been frightened out so quickly that it had no time to shut the door.

"Good evening, madam," said Mackenzie again.

She came out of her paralysis of fright and surprise at the assuring sound of his voice. He drew nearer, smiling to show his friendly intention, the lantern light on the close, flat curls of his fair hair, which lay damp on temples and forehead.

Tall after his kind was this traveler at her door, spare of flesh, hollow of cheeks, great of nose, a seriousness in his eyes which balanced well the marvelous tenderness of his smile. Not a handsome man, but a man whose simple goodness shone in his features like a friendly lamp. The woman in the door advanced a timid step; the color deepened in her pale and melancholy face.

"I thought it was my man," she said, her voice soft and slow, a labored effort in it to speak without the harsh dialect so apparent in her song.

"I am a traveler, Mackenzie is my name, on my way to Tim Sullivan's sheep ranch. My grub has run low; I'd like to get some supper if you can let me have a bite."

"There is not much for a gentleman to eat," said she.

"Anything at all," Mackenzie returned, unslinging his pack, letting it down wearily at his feet.

"My man would not like it. You have heard of Swan Carlson?"

"No; but I'll pay for it; he'll have no right to kick."

"You have come far if you have not heard of Swan Carlson. His name is on the wind like a curse. Better you would go on, sir; my man would kill you if he found you in this house."

She moved a step to reach and lay the plate on a table close at hand. As she lifted her foot there was the sharp clink of metal, as of a dragging chain. Mackenzie had heard it before when she stepped near-

er the door, and now he bent to look into the shadow that fell over the floor from the flaring bottom of the lantern.

"Madam," said he, indignantly amazed by the barbarous thing he beheld, "does that man keep you a prisoner here?"

"Like a dog," she said, nodding her untidy head, lifting her foot to show him the chain.

It was a common trace-chain from a plow harness; two of them, in fact, welded together to give her length to go about her household work. She had a freedom of not more than sixteen feet, one end of the chain welded about her ankle, the other set in a staple driven into a log of the wall. She had wrapped the links with cloths to save her flesh, but for all of that protection she walked haltingly, as if the limb were sore.

"I never heard of such inhuman treatment!" Mackenzie declared, hot to the bone in his burning resentment of this barbarity. "How long has he kept you tied up this way?"

"Three years now," said she, with a weary sigh.

"It's going to stop, right here. What did you let him treat you this way for? Why didn't some of your neighbors take a hand in it?"

"Nobody comes," she sighed, shaking her head sadly. "The name of Swan Carson is a curse on the wind. Nobody passes; we are far from any road that men travel; your face is the first I have seen since Swan put the chain on me like a wolf."

"Where does he keep his tools?"

"Maybe in the barn—I do not know. Only there never is anything left in my reach. Will you set me free, kind stranger?"

"If I can find anything to cut that chain. Let me have the lantern."

The woman hesitated, her eyes grown great with fright.

"My man, he is the one who choked two sheepherders with his hands. You must have read in the paper—"

"Maybe it was before my time. Give me down the lantern."

Swan Carlson appeared to be a man who got along with very few tools. Mackenzie could not find a cold-chisel among the few broken and rusted odds and ends in the barn, although there was an anvil, such as every rancher in that country had, fastened to a stump in the yard, a hammer rusting beside it on the block. As Mackenzie stood considering what could be done with the material at hand, the woman called to him from the door, her voice vibrant with anxious excitement:

"My man will come soon," she said.

Mackenzie started back to the house, hammer in hand, thinking that he might break the chain near her foot and give her liberty, at least. A pile of logs lay in the dooryard, an ax hacked into the end of one. With this tool added to the hammer, he hurried to the prisoner.

"I think we can make it now," he said.

The poor creature was panting as if the hand of her man hung over her in threat of throttling out her life as he had smothered the sheepherders in the tragedy that gave him his evil fame. Mackenzie urged her to a chair, giving her the lantern to hold and, with the edge of the ax set against a link of her chain, the pole on the floor, he began hammering the soft metal against the bit.

Once she put her hand on his shoulder, her breath caught in a sharp exclamation of alarm.

"I thought it was Swan's step!" she whispered. "Listen—do you hear?"

"There's nobody," he assured her, turning his head to listen, the sweat on his lean cheek glistening in the light.

"It is my fear that he will come too soon. Strike fast, good young man," she said, "strike fast!"

If Swan Carlson had been within half a mile he would have split the wind to find out the cause of such a clanging in his shunned and proscribed house, and that he did not appear before the chain was severed was evidence that he was nowhere near at hand.

When the cut links fell to the floor Mrs. Carlson stood the lantern down with gentle deliberation, as if preparing to enter the chamber of some one in a desperate sickness to whom had come a blessed respite of sleep. Then she stood, her lips apart, her breath suspended, lifting her freed foot with a joyous relief in its lightness.

Mackenzie remained on his knees at her

feet, looking up strangely into her face. Suddenly she bent over him, clasped his forehead between her hands, kissed his brow as if he were her son. A great hot tear plashed down upon his cheek as she rose again, a sob in her throat that ended in a little, moaning cry. She tossed her long arms like an eagle set free from a cramping cage, her head thrown back, her streaming hair far down her shoulders. There was an appealing grace in her tall, spare body, a strange, awakening beauty in her haggard face.

"God sent you," she said. "May He keep his protecting hand over you wherever you go."

Mackenzie got to his feet; she picked up the ax and leaned it against the table close to her hand.

"I will give you eggs, you can cook them at a fire," she said, "and bread I will give you, but butter I cannot give. That I have not tasted since I came to this land, four years ago, a bride."

She moved about to get the food, walking with awkwardness on the foot that had dragged the chain so long, laughing a little at her efforts to regain a normal balance.

"Soon it will pass away, and I will walk like a lady, as I once knew how."

"But I don't want to cook at a fire," Mackenzie protested. "I want you to make me some coffee and fry me some eggs, and then we'll see about things."

She came close to him, her great gray eyes seeming to draw him until he gazed into her soul.

"No; you must go," she said. "It will be better when Swan comes that nobody shall be here but me."

"But you! Why, you poor thing, he'll put that chain on you again, knock you down, for all I know, and fasten you up like a beast. I'm not going; I'll stay right here till he comes."

"No," shaking her head in sad earnestness, "better it will be for all that I shall be here alone when he comes."

"Alone!" said he, impatiently. "What can you do alone?"

"When he comes," said she, drawing a great breath, shaking her hair back from her face, her deep grave eyes holding him again in their earnest appeal, "then I will stand by the door and kill him with the ax!"

CHAPTER II.

SWAN CARLSON.

MACKENZIE found it hard to bend the woman from this plan of summary vengeance. She had suffered and brooded in her loneliness so long, the cruel hand of Swan Carlson over her, that her thoughts had beaten a path to this desire. This self-administration of justice seemed now her life's sole aim. She approached it with glowing eyes and flushed cheeks; she had lived for that hour.

Harshly she met Mackenzie's efforts at first to dissuade her from this long-planned deed, yielding a little at length, not quite promising to withold her hand when the step of her savage husband should sound outside the door.

"If you are here when he comes, then it will do for another night; if you are gone, then I will not say."

That was the compromise she made with him at last, turning with no more argument to prepare his supper, carrying the ax with her as she went about the work. Often she stood in rigid concentration, listening for the sound of Swan's coming, such animation in her eyes as a bride's might show in a happier hour than hers. She sat opposite her visitor as he made his supper on the simple food she gave him, and told him the story of her adventure into that heartless land, the ax-handle against her knee.

A minister's daughter, educated to fit herself for a minister's wife, she had learned English in the schools of her native land, as the custom is, and could speak it fairly when family reverses carried her like a far-blown seed to America. She had no business training, for what should a minister's wife know of business beyond the affairs of the parish and the economy of her own home? She found nothing open to her hands in America, therefore, save menial work in the households of others.

Not being bred to it, nor the intention or thought of it as a future contingency, she suffered in humbling herself to the services

of people who were at once her intellectual and social inferiors. The one advantage in it was the improvement of her English speech, through which she hoped for better things in time.

It was while she was still new to America, its customs and social adjustments, and the shame of her menial situation burned in her soul like a corrosive acid, that she saw the advertisement of Swan Carlson in a Swedish newspaper. Swan Carlson was advertising for a wife. Beneath a handsome picture of himself he stated his desires, frankly, with evident honesty in all his representations. He told of his holdings in sheep and land, of his money in the bank.

A dream of new consequence in this strange land came to Hertha Jacobsen as she read the advertisement, as she studied the features of Swan Carlson, his bold face looking at her from the page. She had seen men, and the women of such men, who had risen from peasants to Governors and Senators, to positions of wealth and consequence in this strange land with all the romance of a tale out of a book. Perhaps fate had urged her on to this unfriendly shore only to feed her on the bitter herbs for her purification for a better life.

The minister of her church investigated Swan Carlson and his claims, finding him all that he professed to be. Hertha wrote to him; in time Swan came to visit her, a tall, long-striding man, handsomer than his picture in the paper, handsome as a Viking lord with his proud foot on the neck of a fallen foe.

So she married him, and came away with him to the sheeplands, and Swan's hand was as tender of her as a summer wind. It was shearing time when they reached home; Swan was with her every day for a little while, gathering his flocks from the range into the shearing sheds. He was master of more than fifteen thousand sheep.

When the shearing was done, and Swan had gone with his wagons to ship the clip, returning with his bank-book showing thousands in added wealth, a change came into her life, so radiant with the blossoms of a new happiness. Swan's big laugh was not so ready in his throat any more; his great hand seemed forgetful of its caress. He told her that the time of idling now was over; she must go with him in a sheep-wagon to the range and care for her band of sheep, sharing the labors of his life as she shared its rewards.

No; that was not to her liking. The wife of a rich man should not live as a peasant woman, dew in her draggled skirts to her knees, the sun browning her skin and bleaching her hair. It was not for his woman to give him no, said Swan. Be ready at a certain hour in the morning; they must make an early start, for the way was long.

But no; she refused to take the burden of a peasant woman on her back. That was the first time Swan knocked her senseless. When she recovered, the sheep-wagon was rocking her in its uneasy journey to the distant range. Swan's cruelties multiplied with his impatience at her slowness to master the shepherd's art. The dogs were sullen creatures, unused to a woman's voice, unfriendly to a woman's presence. Swan insisted that she lay aside her woman's attire and dress as a man to gain the good will of the dogs.

Again she defied his authority, all her refinement rising against the degradation of her sex; again Swan laid her senseless with a blow. When she woke her limbs were clad in overalls, a greasy jumper was buttoned over her breast. But the dogs were wiser than their master; no disguise could cover her from the contempt of their shrewd senses. They would not obey her.

Very well, said Swan; if she did not have it in her to win even the respect of a dog, let her do a dog's work. So he took the collies away, leaving her to range her band of sheep in terrible labor, mind-wrenching loneliness, over the sage-gray hills. Wolves grew bold; the lambs suffered. When Swan came again to number her flock, he cursed her for her carelessness, giving her blows which were kinder than his words.

With the first snow she abandoned her flock and fled. Disgraceful as it was for a woman to leave her man, the frenzy of loneliness drove her on. With his companionship she could have endured Swan's cruelty, but alone her heart was dead. Three days she wandered. Swan found her after she had fallen in the snow.

His great laugh woke her, and she was home in this house, the light of day in her eyes. Swan was sitting beside her, merry in the thought of how he had cheated her out of her intention to die like an old ewe among the mountain drifts.

She was good for nothing, he said, but to sit at home like a cat. But he would make sure that she sat at home, to be there at his coming, and not running away from the bounty of a man who had taken a beggar to his bosom. Then he brought the chain and the anvil, and welded the red-hot iron upon her limb. He laughed when the smoke of her burning flesh rose hissing; laughed when he mounted his horse and rode away, leaving her in agony too great to let her die.

This summer now beginning was the fourth since that melancholy day. In the time that had passed, Swan had come into the ways of trouble, suffering a great drain upon his hoarded money, growing as a consequence sullen and somber in his moods. No more he laughed; even the distress of his chained wife, the sight of her wasting face and body, the pleading of her tortured eyes, could not move his loud gales of merriment again.

Swan had killed two of his sheepherders, as she had mentioned before. It grew out of a dispute over wages, in which the men were right. That was the winter following her attempt to run away, Swan being alone with them upon the stormy range. He declared both of them set upon him at once like wolves, and that he fought only to defend his life. He strangled them, the throat of each grasped in his broad, thick hand, and held them from him so, stiff arms against their desperate struggles, until they sank down in the snow and died.

Only a little while ago the lawyers had got him off from the charge of murder, after long delays. The case had been tried in another county, for Swan Carlson's neighbors all believed him guilty of a horrible crime; no man among them could have listened to his story under oath with unprejudiced ear.

The lawyers had brought Swan off, for at the end it had been his living word against the mute accusations of two dead men. There was nobody to speak for the herders; so the lawyers had set him free. But it had cost him thousands of dollars, and Swan's evil humor had deepened with the drain.

Crazy, he said of his wife; a poor mad thing bent on self-destruction in wild and mournful ways. In that Swan was believed, at least. Nobody came to inquire of her, none ever stopped to speak a word. The nearest neighbor was twelve or fifteen miles distant, a morose man with sour face, master of a sea of sheep.

All of this Swan himself had told her in the days when he laughed. He told her also of the lawyers' drain upon his wealth, starving her days together to make a pebble of saving to fill the ruthless breach.

"To-night Swan will come," she said. "After what I have told you, are you not afraid?"

"I suppose I ought to be," Mackenzie returned, leaving her to form her own conclusion.

She searched his face with steady eyes, her hand on the ax-helve, in her face an expression of effort to read his heart.

"No, you are not afraid," she said. "But wait; when you hear him speak, then you will be afraid."

"How do you know he is coming home to-night?"

She did not speak at once. Her eyes were fixed on the open door at Mackenzie's side, her face was set in the tensity of her mental concentration as she listened. Mackenzie bent all his faculties to hear if any foot approached. There was no sound.

"The fishermen of my country can feel the chill of an iceberg through the fog and the night," she said at last. "Swan Carlson is an iceberg to my heart."

She listened again, bending forward, her lips open. Mackenzie fancied he heard the swing of a galloping hoof-beat, and turned toward the door.

"Have you a pistol?" she inquired.

"No."

"He is coming; in a little while he will be at the door. There is time yet for you to leave."

"I want to have a word with your man; I'll wait."

Mrs. Carlson got up, keeping the ax in hand, moved her chair to the other side of the door, where she stationed herself in such position as Swan must see her first when he looked within. She disposed the ax to conceal it entirely beneath her long apron, her hand under the garment grasping the helve.

"For your own sake, not his, I ask you not to strike him," Mackenzie pleaded, in all the earnestness he could command.

"I have given you the hour of my vengeance," she replied. "But if he curses me, if he lifts his hand!"

Mackenzie was more than a little uneasy on the probable outcome of his meeting with the tempestuous Swan. He got out his pipe and lit it, considering the situation with fast-running thoughts. Still, a man could not go on and leave that beaten, enslaved woman to the mercies of her tyrant; Swan Carlson must be given to understand that he would be held to answer to the law for his future behavior toward her.

"If I were you I'd put the ax behind the door and get his supper ready," said he.

Mrs. Carlson got up at the suggestion, with such readiness that surprised Mackenzie, put the ax back of the open door, stood a moment winding up her fallen hair.

"Yes, he is my man," she said.

Swan was turning his horse into the barn; Mackenzie could hear him talking to the animal, not unkindly. Mrs. Carlson put fresh fuel in the stove, making a rattling of the lids which must have sounded cheerful to the ears of a hungry man. As she began breaking eggs into a bowl she took up her song again, with an unconscious air of detachment from it, as one unwittingly follows the habit that has been for years the accompaniment to a task.

As before, the refinement of accent was wanting in her words, but the sweet melancholy of her voice thrilled her listener like the rich notes of an ancient violin:

> "Na-a-fer a-lo-o-ne, na-a-fer a-lone,
> He promise na-fer to leafe me,
> Na-fer to leafe me a-lone."

Mackenzie sat with his elbow on the table, his chair partly turned toward the door, just within the threshold and a little to one side, where the flockmaster would see him the moment he stepped into the light. The traveler's pack lay on the floor at the door jamb; the smoke from his pipe drifted out to tell of his presence in the honest announcement of a man who has nothing to hide.

So Swan Carlson found him as he came home to his door.

Swan stopped, one foot in the door, the light on his face. Mrs. Carlson did not turn from the stove to greet him by word or look, but stood bending a little over the pan of sputtering eggs, which she shook gently from side to side with a rythmic, slow movement in cadence with her song.

Swan turned his eyes from one to the other, his face clouding for a moment as for a burst of storm, clearing again at once as Mackenzie rose and gave him good evening in cheerful and unshaken voice.

Mrs. Carlson had spoken a true word when she described Swan as a handsome man. Almost seven feet tall, Mackenzie took him to be, so tall that he must stoop to enter the door; lithe and sinewy of limbs, a lightness in them as of an athlete bred; broad in the shoulders, long of arms. His face was stern, his red hair long about the ears, his viking mustache long-drooping at the corners of his mouth.

"I thought a man was here, or my woman had begun to smoke," said Swan, coming in, flinging his hat down on the floor. "What do you want, loafin' around here?"

Mackenzie explained his business in that country in direct words, and his presence in the house in the same breath. Mollified, Swan grunted that he understood and accepted the explanation, turning up his sleeves, unfastening the collar of his flannel shirt, to wash. His woman stood at the stove, her song dead on her lips, sliding the eggs from the pan onto a platter in one piece.

Swan gave her no heed, not even a curious or questioning look, but as he crossed the room to the wash-bench he saw the broken chain lying free upon the floor.

A breath he paused over it, his eyes fastened on it in a glowering stare. Mackenzie braced himself for the storm of wrath which seemed bursting the doors of Swan Carlson's gloomy heart.

But Swan did not speak. He picked up the chain, examined the cut link, threw it down with a clatter. At the sound of its fall Mackenzie saw Mrs. Carlson sart. She turned her head, terror in her eyes, her face blanched. Swan bent over the basin, snorting water like a strangling horse.

There were eight eggs on the platter that Swan Carlson's woman put before him when he sat down to his supper. One end of the great trencher was heaped with brown bacon; a stack of bread stood at Swan's left hand, a cup of coffee at his right. Before this provender the flockmaster squared himself, the unwelcome guest across the table from him, the smoke of his pipe drifting languidly out into the tranquil summer night.

Swan had said no word since his first inquiry. Mackenzie had ventured nothing more. Mrs. Carlson sat down in the chair that she had placed near the door before Swan's arrival, only that she moved it a little to bring her hand within reach of the hidden ax.

Swan had brushed his long, dark-red hair back from his broad, deep forhead, bringing it down across the tips of his ears in a savage fashion admirably suited to his grave, harsh, handsome face. He devoured his food noisily, bending low over his plate.

"You want to learn the sheep business, huh?" said he, throwing up his eyes in quick challenge, pausing a moment in his champing and clatter. Mackenzie nodded, pipe raised toward his lips. "Well, you come to the right country. You ever had any work around a ranch?"

"No."

"No, I didn't think you had; you look too soft. How much can you lift?"

"What's that got to do with sheep?" Mackenzie inquired, frowning in his habitual manner of showing displeasure with frivolous and trifling things.

"I can shoulder a steel rail off of the railroad that weighs seven hundred and fifty pounds," said Swan. "You couldn't lift one end."

"Maybe I couldn't," Mackenzie allowed, pretending to gaze out after his drifting smoke, but watching the sheepman, as he mopped the last of the eggs up with a piece of bread, with a furtive turning of his eye. He was considering how to approach the matter which he had remained there to take up with this great, boasting, savage man, and how he could make him understand that it was any of society's business whether he chained his wife or let her go free, fed her or starved her, caressed her, or knocked her down.

Swan pushed back from the table, wringing the coffee from his mustache.

"Did you cut that chain?" he asked.

"Yes, I cut it. You've got no right to keep your wife, or anybody else, chained up. You could be put in jail for it; it's against the law."

"A man's got a right to do what he pleases with his own woman; she's his property, the same as a horse."

"Not exactly the same as a horse, either. But you could be put in jail for beating your horse. I've waited here to tell you about this, in a friendly way, and warn you to treat this woman right. Maybe you didn't know you were breaking the law, but I'm telling you it's so."

Swan stood, his head within six inches of the ceiling. His wife must have read an intention of violence in his face, although Mackenzie could mark no change in his features, always as immobile as bronze. She sprang to her feet, her bosom agitated, arms lifted, shoulders raised, as if to shrink from the force of a blow. She made no effort to reach the ax behind the door; the thought of it had gone, apparently, out of her mind.

Swan stood within four feet of her, but he gave her no attention.

"When a man comes to my house and monkeys with my woman, him and me we've got to have a fight," he said.

CHAPTER III.

THE FIGHT.

MACKENZIE got up, keeping the table between them. He looked at the door, calculating whether he could make a spring for the ax before Carlson could grapple him. Carlson read in the glance an intention to retreat, made a quick stride to the door,

closed it sharply, locked it, put the key in his pocket. He stood a moment looking Mackenzie over, as if surprised by the length he unfolded when on his feet, but with no change of anger or resentment in his stony face.

"You didn't need to lock the door, Carlson; I wasn't going to run away—I didn't wait here to see you for that."

Mackenzie stood in careless, lounging pose, hand on the back of his chair, pipe between his fingers, a rather humorous look in his eyes as he measured Carlson up and down.

"Come out here in the middle and fight me if you ain't afraid!" Swan challenged, derision in his voice.

"I'll fight you, all right, after I tell you what I waited here to say. You're a coward, Swan Carlson, you're a sheepman with a sheep's heart. I turned your woman loose, and you're going to let her stay loose. Let that sink into your head."

Carlson was standing a few feet in front of Mackenzie, leaning forward, his shoulders swelling and falling as if he flexed his muscles for a spring. His arms he held swinging in front of him full length, like a runner waiting for a start, in a posture at once unpromising and uncouth. Behind him his wife shuddered against the wall.

"Swan, Swan! O-o-oh, Swan, Swan!" she cried, crying it softly, as if she chided him for a great hurt.

Swan turned partly toward her, striking backward with his heavy hand. His great knuckles struck her across the eyes, a cruel, heavy blow that would have felled a man. She staggered back a pace, then sank limply forward on her knees, her hands outreaching on the floor, her hair falling wildly, her posture that of a suppliant at a barbarian conquerer's feet.

Mackenzie snatched the heavy platter from the table and brought Carlson a smashing blow across the head. Carlson stood weaving on his legs a moment as the fragments of the dish clattered around him, swaying like a tree that waits the last blow of the ax to determine which way it will fall. Mackenzie threw the fragment that remained in his hand into Carlson's face, laying open a long gash in his cheek. As the hot blood gushed down over his jaw Carlson steadied himself on his swaying legs and laughed.

Mrs. Carlson lifted her face out of the shadows of the floor at the sound. Mackenzie glanced at her, the red mark of Swan's harsh blow across her brows, as he flew at Swan like a desert whirlwind, landing heartily on his great neck before he could lift a guard. The blow staggered Carlson over upon his wife, and together they collapsed against the wall, where Carlson stood a breath, his hand thrown out to save him from the fall. Then he shook his haughty, handsome, barbarian head, and laughed again, a loud laugh, deep and strong.

There was no note of merriment in that sound, no inflection of satisfaction or joy. It came out of his wide-extended jaws with a roar, no facial softening with it, no blending of the features in the transformation of a smile. Mrs. Carlson struggled to her knees at the sound of it, lifting her moaning cry again at the sight of his gushing blood. Swan charged his adversary with bent head, the floor trembling under his heavy feet, his great hands lifted to seize and crush.

Mackenzie backed away, upsetting the table between them, barring for a moment Swan's mad onrush. In the anger-blind movements of the man he could read his intention, which was not to strike foot to foot, knee to knee, but to grapple and smother, as he had smothered the sheep-herders in the snow.

Across the overturned table Mackenzie landed another blow, sprang around the barrier out of the pocket of corner into which Carlson was bent on forcing him, hoping by nimble foot-work to play on the flockmaster for a knockout.

Swan threw a chair as Mackenzie circled out of his reach with nimble feet, knocking down the stovepipe, dislodging a shower of tinware from the shelves behind. Carlson had him by the shoulder now, but a deft turn, a sharp blow, and Mackenzie was free, racing over the cluttered floor in wild uproar, bending, side-stepping, in a strained and terrific race. Carlson picked up the table, swung it overhead until it struck the ceiling, threw it with all his mighty strength

to crush the man who had evaded him with such clever speed. A leg caught Mackenzie a glancing blow on the head, dazing him momentarily, giving Carlson the opening he desired.

In the next breath Mackenzie was down, Carlson's hand at his throat. Mackenzie could see Swan's face as he bent over him, the lantern light on it fairly. There was no light of exultation in it as his great hand closed slowly upon Mackenzie's throat, no change from its stony harshness save for the dark gash and the flood of blood that ran down his jaw and neck.

Mackenzie writhed and struggled, groping on the floor for something to strike Carlson with and break his garroting grip. The blood was singing in his ears, the breath was cut from his lungs; his eyes flashed a thousand scintillating sparks and grew dark. His hand struck something in the débris on the floor, the handle of a table knife, it seemed, and with the contact a desperate accession of life heaved in him like a final wave.

He struck, and struck at Swan Carlson's arm, and struck again, at his wrist as he felt the tightening band of his fingers relax, heard him curse and growl. A quick turn and he was free, with a glimpse as he rolled over at Swan Carlson, pulling a table fork out of his hairy wrist.

Mackenzie felt blood in his mouth; his ears were muffled as if he were under water, but he came to his feet with a leg of the broken table in his hand. Swan threw the fork at him as he rose from his knees; it struck the lantern, breaking the globe, cutting off more than half the dim light in which the undetermined battle had begun.

Over against the door Mrs. Carlson stood with the ax in her hands, holding it uplifted, partly drawn back, as if she had checked it in an intended blow. Swan tore a broad plank from the table top, split it over his knee to make it better fit his hand, and came on to the attack, bending in his slouching, bearish attitude of defiant strength. Mackenzie gave way before him, watching his moment to strike the decisive blow.

This maneuver brought Mackenzie near the door, where the wild-eyed woman stood, an ally and a reserve, ready to help him in the moment of his extremity. He believed she had been on the point of striking Swan the moment his fingers closed in their convulsive pang of death over the handle of the fork.

Swan followed, warily now, conscious of this man's unexpected strength and agility, and of his resources in a moment of desperation, making feints with his board as a batter does before the ball is thrown. Mackenzie passed Mrs. Carlson, backing away from Swan, sparring for time to recover his wind and faculties after his swift excursion to the borderland of death.

He parried a swift blow, giving one in return that caught Swan on the elbow and knocked the plank out of his hand. Mackenzie sprang forward to follow up his advantage with a decisive stroke, when, to his amazement, Mrs. Carlson threw himself between them, the ax uplifted in her husband's defense.

"No, no!" she screamed. "He is my man!"

Swan Carlson laughed again, and patted her shoulder, stooping to recover his board. But he flung it down again, taking the ax in its place, pushing his woman, not without some tenderness in his hand, back into the corner, throwing himself in front of her, his wild laugh ringing in the murky room, stifling from the smoke of lantern and stove.

Mackenzie felt his hope break like a rope of straw at this unexpected turn of the woman. With those two mad creatures—for mad he believed the isolation and cruelty suffered by the one, the trouble and terror of the law by the other, had driven them—leagued against him, it seemed that he must put down all hope of ever looking again upon the day.

If there was any chance for him at all, it lay in darkness. With this thought Mackenzie made a quick dash past Carlson, smashing the lantern with a blow.

There was one window in the room, a small, single-sash opening near the stove. Even this was not apparent for a little following the plunge in the dark; Mackenzie stood still, waiting for his eyes to adjust themselves to the gloom. No sound but Carlson's breathing came from the other

side of the kitchen. The square of window appeared dimly now, a little to Mackenzie's left. He moved cautiously away from it, yet not without noise for all his care. Swan let drive with his board at the sound of movement. His aim was good; it struck Mackenzie's shoulder, but fortunately with its flat surface, doing no hurt.

Mackenzie threw himself down heavily, getting cautiously to his feet again instantly, hoping to draw Carlson over in the belief that he had put him out of the fight. But Carlson was not so rash. He struck a match, holding it up, peering under it, blinking in the sudden light.

Mackenzie was not more than eight feet away. He closed the distance in a bound, swung the heavy oak table-leg, and stretched Carlson on the floor. Mrs. Carlson began wailing and moaning, bending over her fallen tyrant, as Mackenzie could gather from her voice.

"You've killed him," she said. "You've killed my man!"

"No, but I will kill him if you don't get the key out of his pocket and open the door!"

Mackenzie stood by Carlson as he spoke, feeling his body with his foot. He bent over Carlson, feeling for his heart, fearing that he had killed him, indeed. His first efforts to locate a pulse were not assuring, but a feeble throbbing at last announced that the great ruffian's admirable machinery was stunned, not broken.

"Open the door; he'll be all right in a little while," he said.

Mrs. Carlson was moaning in a sorrow as genuine as if the fallen man had been the kindest husband that fate could have sent her, and not the heartless beast that he was. She found the key and threw the door open, letting in a cool, sweet breath of the night. Under it Carlson would soon revive, Mackenzie believed. He had no desire to linger and witness the restoration.

Mackenzie had a bruised and heavy feeling about him as he shouldered his pack and hurried from that inhospitable door. He knew that Swan Carlson was not dead, and would not die from that blow. Why the feeling persisted as he struck off up the creek through the dew-wet grass he could not tell, but it was strong upon him that Swan Carlson would come into his way again, to make trouble for him on a future day.

CHAPTER IV.

KEEPER OF THE FLOCK.

JOHN MACKENZIE, late schoolmaster at Jasper, marched through the cool of the night, regretting that he had meddled in the domestic arrangements of Swan Carlson, the Swede. The outcome of his attempted kindness to the oppressed woman had not been felicitous. Indeed, he was troubled greatly by the fear that he had killed Swan Carlson, and that grave consequences might rise out of this first adventure that ever fell in his way.

Perhaps adventure was not such a thing to be sought as he had imagined, he reflected, hand to his swollen throat. There was an ache in his crushed windpipe, a dryness in his mouth, a taste of blood on his tongue. That had been a close go for him, there on the floor under Swan Carlson's great knee; a few seconds longer, and his first adventure would have been his last.

Yet there was a vast satisfaction in knowing what was in him. Here he had stood foot to foot with the strong man of the sheeplands, the strangler, the fierce, half-insane terror of peaceful men, and had come off the victor. He had fought this man in his own house, where a man will fight valiantly, even though a coward on the road, and had left him senseless on the floor. It was something for a school-teacher, counted a mild and childlike man.

It had been many a year since Mackenzie had mixed in a fight, and the best that had gone before was nothing more than a harmless spat compared to this. The marvel of it was how he had developed this quality of defense in inactivity. There must have been some psychological undercurrent carrying strength and skill to him through all the years of his romantic imaginings; the spirits of old heroes of that land must have lent him their counsel and might in that desperate battle with the Norse flockmaster.

Adventure was not dead out of the land, it seemed, although this was a rather sordid and ignoble brand. It had descended to base levels among base men who lived with sheep and thought only of sheep-riches. Violence among such men as Swan Carlson was merely violence, with none of the picturesque embellishments of the olden days when men slung pistols with a challenge and a hail, in those swift battles where skill was all, bestial strength nothing.

Mackenzie hoped to find Tim Sullivan different from the general run of sheep-rich men. There must be some of the spice of romance in a man who had the wide reputation of Tim Sullivan and who was the hero of so many tales of success.

It was Mackenzie's hope that this encounter with the wild sheepman might turn out to his profit with Tim Sullivan. He always had believed that he should win fortune fighting if it ever fell to his portion at all. This brush with Swan Carlson confirmed his old belief. If there was any good luck for him in the sheep country, it would come to him through a fight.

Mackenzie considered these things as he marched on away from Swan Carlson's homestead, thinking the safe plan would be to put several miles between himself and that place before lying down to rest. At dawn Swan would be out after him with a gun, more than likely. Mackenzie had nothing of the sort in his slender equipment.

Imagine a man going into the sheep country carrying a gun! The gun days of the West were done; he had seen only one cowboy wearing one in his four years at Jasper.

Past midnight Mackenzie came to a little valley where somebody had been cutting hay. The late-risen moon discovered the little mounds of hay thick around him, the aroma of the curing herbage was blowing to him an invitation to stop and sleep. Let Swan Carlson come when he might, that was the place prepared for the traveler's repose.

Romance or no romance, riches or poverty, he was through with a woman's work, he told himself. Once there had been ideals ahead of him in educational work, but the contempt of men had dispelled them. If he could not find his beginning in the sheep country, he would turn elsewhere. A man who had it in him to fight giants wasn't cut out for teaching school.

Mackenzie sat with his back to a haycock thinking in this vein. The sound of running water was near; he went to the creek and bathed his throat, easing its burning with a deep swig. Back again to the hay, still building new victories, and nobler ones, on the foundation of this triumph over Swan Carlson, the red giant who choked men to death in the snow.

Morning discovered no habitation in reach of the eye. That little field of mown hay stood alone among the gray hills, unfenced, unfended, secure in its isolation, a little patch of something in the wilderness that looked like home. Mackenzie must have put many miles behind him since leaving Carlson's door. Looking back, he could follow the course of the creek where it snaked through the hills, dark green of willow and cottonwood fresh among the hemming slopes of sage; but no trace of Carlson's trees could he see.

Mackenzie had no flour to mix a wad of dough, and but a heel of a bacon side to furnish a breakfast. It was so unpromising in his present hungry state that he determined to tramp on a few miles in the hope of lifting Tim Sullivan's ranch-house on the prominent hilltop where, he had been told, it stood.

Two or three miles beyond the hay-field Mackenzie came suddenly upon a sheep camp. The wagon stood on a green hillside, a pleasant valley below it, where the grass was abundant and sweet. The camp evidently had been stationed in that place but a little while, for a large band of sheep grazed just below it, no bedding ground being worn bare in the unusual verdure. Altogether, it was the greenest and most promising place Mackenzie had met in his journey, gladdening at once to the imagination and the eye.

The shepherd sat on the hillside, his dogs beside him, a little smoke ascending straight in the calm, early sunshine from his dying fire. The collies scented the stranger while he stood on the hilltop, several hundred yards above the camp, rising to question his presence with bristling backs. The shep-

herd rose to inquire into the alarm, springing up with amazing agility, such sudden and wild concern in his manner as provoked the traveler's smile.

Mackenzie saw that he was a boy of fifteen or thereabout, dressed in overalls much too large for him, the bottoms turned up almost to his knees. Hot as the morning was beginning, the lad had on a duck coat with sheepskin collar, but in the excitement of beholding a visitor approaching his camp so early in the day, he took off his hat, standing so a moment. Then he cut out a streak for the wagon, a few rods distant, throwing back a half-frightened look as he disappeared around its side.

This was a very commodious wagon, familiar to Mackenzie from having seen many like it drawn up for repairs at the blacksmith shops in Jasper. Its heavy canvas top was stretched tightly over bows, made to withstand wind and rough weather, a stovepipe projecting through it, fended about with a broad tin, and a canvas door with a little window in it, a commodious step letting down to the ground. Its tongue was cut short, to admit coupling it close behind the camp-mover's wagon, and it was a snug and comfortable home on wheels.

The dogs came slowly to meet Mackenzie as he approached, backs still bristling, countenances unpromising. The boy had disappeared into the wagon; Mackenzie wondered if he had gone to fetch his gun.

But no. Instead of a gun, came a girl, neither timidity nor fear in her bearing, and close behind her came the boy, hat still in his hand, his long, straight hair down about his ears. Mackenzie had stopped a hundred yards or so distant, not confident of a friendly reception from the dogs. The girl waved her hand in invitation for him to come on, and stood waiting at the wagon-end.

She was as neatly dressed as the lad beside her was uncouth in his man-size overalls, her short corduroy skirt belted about with a broad leather clasped with a gleaming silver buckle, the tops of her tall laced boots lost beneath its hem. Her gray flannel waist was laced at the bosom like a cowboy's shirt, adorned at the collar with a flaming scarlet necktie done in a bow as broad as a hand. Her brown sombrero sat a little to one side of her rather pert and independently carried head.

At a word from her the dogs left the way unopposed, and as greetings passed between the sheepgirl and the stranger the wise creatures stood beside her, eying the visitor over with suspicious mien. Mackenzie told his name and his business, making inquiry in the same breath for Tim Sullivan's ranch.

"Do you know Mr. Sullivan?" she asked. And as she lifted her eyes Mackenzie saw that they were as blue as asters on an October morning, and that her hair was a warm reddish-brown, and that her face was refreshingly pure in its outline, strong and haughty and brown, and subtly sweet as the elusive perfume of a wild rose of the hills.

"No, I don't know Mr. Sullivan; I've never even seen him. I've heard a lot about him down at Jasper—I was the schoolteacher there."

"Oh, you're up here on your vacation?" said she, a light of quick interest in her eyes, an unmistakable friendliness in her voice. It was as if he had presented a letter from somebody well and favorably known.

"No, I've come up here to see about learning the sheep business."

"Sheep business?" said she, looking at him with surprised eyes, and again: "Sheep business?"—this time with a shading of disgust. "Well, if I had sense enough to teach school I'd never want to see another sheep!"

Mackenzie smiled at her impetuous outburst in which she revealed in a word the discontent of her heart.

"Of course you know Mr. Sullivan?"

"He's my father," she returned. "This is my brother Charley; there are eight more of us at home."

Charley grinned, his shyness still over him, but his alarm quieted, and gave Mackenzie his hand in a manly way.

"The ranch is about thirteen or fifteen miles on up the creek from here," she said. "You haven't had your breakfast, have you?"

"No; I just about finished my grub yesterday."

"I didn't see any grease around your gills," said the girl, in quite a matter-of-fact

way, no flippancy in her manner. "Charley, stir up the fire, will you? I can't offer you much, Mr. Mackenzie, but you're welcome to what there is. How about a can of beans?"

"You've hit me right where I live, Miss Sullivan."

The collies came warily up, stiff-legged, with backs still ruffled, and sniffed Mackenzie over. They seemed to find him harmless, turning from him presently to go and lie beside Charley, their faces toward the flock, alert ears lifted, white breasts gleaming in the sun like the linen of fastidious gentlemen.

"Do you want me to get any water, Joan?" Charley inquired.

Joan answered from inside the wagon that no water was needed, there was coffee enough in the pot. She handed the smoke-blackened vessel out to Mackenzie as she spoke, telling him to go and put it on the fire.

Joan turned the beans into the pan after cooking the bacon, and sent Charley to the wagon for a loaf of bread.

"We don't have to bake bread in this camp, that's one blessing," she said. "Mother keeps us supplied. Some of these sheep-herders never taste anything but their cold-water biscuits for years at a time."

"It must get kind of tiresome," Mackenzie reflected, thinking of his own efforts at bread-making on the road.

"It's too heavy to carry around in the craw," said Joan.

Charley watched Mackenzie curiously as he ate, whispering once to his sister, who flushed, turned her eyes a moment on her visitor, and then seemed to rebuke the lad for passing confidences so impolitely.

Mackenzie guessed that his discolored neck and bruised face had been the subject of the boy's conjectures, but he did not feel pride enough in his late encounter to speak of it even in explanation. Charley opened the way to it at last when Joan took the breakfast things to the wagon.

"Have you been in a fight?" the boy inquired.

"Not much of a one," Mackenzie told him, rather wishing that the particulars might be reserved.

"Your neck's black like somebody's been chokin' you, and your face is bunged up some, too. Who done it?"

"Do you know Swan Carlson?" Mackenzie inquired, turning slowly to the boy.

"Swan Carlson?" Charley's face grew pale at the name; his eyes started in round amazement. "You couldn't never 'a' got away from Swan; he choked two fellers to death, one in each hand. No man in this country could whip one side of Swan."

"Well, I got away from him, anyhow," said Mackenzie in a manner that even the boy understood to end the discussion.

But Charley was not going to have it so. He jumped up and ran to meet Joan as she came from the wagon.

"Mr. Mackenzie had a fight with Swan Carlson—that's what's the matter with his neck!" he said. There was unbounded admiration in the boy's voice, and exultation as if the distinction were his own. Here before his eyes was a man who had come to grips with Swan Carlson, and had escaped from his strangling hands to eat his breakfast with as much unconcern as if he had no more than been kicked by a mule.

Joan came on a little quicker, excitement reflected in her lively eyes. Mackenzie was filling his pipe, which had gone through the fight in his pocket in miraculous safety—for which he was duly grateful—ashamed of his bruises, now that the talk of them had brought them to Joan's notice again.

"I hope you killed him," she said, coming near, looking down on Mackenzie with full commendation; "he keeps his crazy wife chained up like a dog!"

"I don't think he's dead, but I'd like to know for sure," Mackenzie returned, his eyes bent thoughtfully on the ground.

"Nobody will ever say a word to you if you did kill him," Joan assured. "They'd all know he started it—he fusses with everybody."

She sat on the ground near him, Charley posting himself a little in front, where he could admire and wonder over the might of a man who could break Swan Carlson's hold upon his throat and leave his house alive. Before them the long valley widened as it reached away, the sheep a dusty brown splotch in it, spread at their grazing, the

sound of the lambs' wailing rising clear in the pastoral silence.

"I stopped at Carlson's house after dark last night," Mackenzie explained, seeing that such explanation must be made, "and turned his wife loose. Carlson resented it when he came home. He said I'd have to fight him. But you're wrong when you believe what Carlson says about that woman; she isn't crazy, and never was."

That seemed to be all the story, from the way he hastened it, and turned away from the vital point of interest. Joan touched his arm as he sat smoking, his speculative gaze on the sheep, his brows drawn as if in troubled thought.

"What did you do when he said you had to fight him?" she inquired, her breath coming fast, her cheeks glowing.

Mackenzie laughed shortly. "Why, I tried to get away," he said.

"Why didn't you, before he got his hands on you?" Charley wanted to know.

"Charley!" said Joan.

"Carlson locked the door before I could get out." Mackenzie nodded to the boy, very gravely, as one man to another. Charley laughed.

"You didn't tear up no boards off the floor tryin' to git away!" said he.

Joan smiled; that seemed to express her opinion of it, also. She admired the schoolmaster's modest reluctance when he gave them a bare outline of what followed, shuddering when he laughed over Mrs. Carlson's defense of her husband with the ax.

"Gee!" said Charley, "I hope dad'll give you a job."

"But how did you get out of there?" Joan asked.

"I took an unfair advantage of Swan and hit him with a table-leg."

"Gee! dad's *got* to give you a job," said Charley; "I'll make him."

"I'll hold you to that, Charley," Mackenzie laughed.

In the boy's eyes Mackenzie was already a hero, greater than any man that had come into the sheeplands in his day. Sheep people are not fighting folks. They never have been since the world's beginning; they never will be to the world's end. There is something in the peaceful business of attending sheep, some appeal in their meekness and passivity, that seems to tincture and curb the savage spirit that dwells in the breast of man. Swan Carlson was one of the notorious exceptions in that country.

Joan advised against Mackenzie's intention of returning to Carlson's house to find out how badly he was hurt. It would be a blessing to the country, she said, if it should turn out that Carlson was killed. But Mackenzie had an uneasy feeling that it would be a blessing that he could not share. He was troubled over the thing, now that the excitement of the fight had cooled out of him, thinking of the blow he had given Carlson with that heavy piece of oak.

Perhaps the fellow was not dead, but hurt so badly that he would die without surgical aid. It was the part of duty and humanity to go back and see. He resolved to do this, keeping the resolution to himself.

Joan told him much of the sheep business, and much about the art of running a big band over that sparse range, in which this green valley lay like an oasis, a gladdening sight seldom to be met with among those sulky hills. She said she hoped her father would find a place for him, for the summer, at least.

"But I wouldn't like to see you shut yourself up in this country like the rest of us are," she said, gazing off over the hills with wistful eyes. "A man that knows enough to teach school oughtn't fool away his time on sheep."

She was working toward her own emancipation, she told him, running that band of two thousand sheep on shares for her father, just the same as an ordinary herdsman. In three years she hoped her increase and share of the clip would be worth ten thousand dollars, and then she would sell out and go away.

"What would you want to leave a good business like this for?" he asked, rather astonished at her cool ejaculation upon what she believed to be freedom. "There's nothing out in what people call the world that you can turn your hand to that would make you a third of the money."

"I want to go away and get some education," she said.

"But you are educated, Miss Sullivan."

She turned a slow, reproachful look upon him, a shadow of sadness over her wholesome young face.

"I'm nearly nineteen; I don't know as much as a girl of twelve," she said.

"I've never met any of those precocious twelve-year-olds," he told her, shaking his head gravely. "You know a great deal more than you're conscious of, I think, Miss Sullivan. We don't get the best of it out of books."

"I'm a prisoner here," she said, stretching her arms as if she displayed her bonds, "as much of a prisoner in my way as Swan Carlson's wife was in hers. You cut her cabin; nobody ever has come to cut mine."

"Your knight will come riding over the hill some evening. One comes into every lady's life, sooner or later, I think."

"Mostly in imagination," said Joan. And her way of saying it, so wise and superior, as if she spoke of some toy which she had outgrown, brought a smile again to her visitor's grave face.

Charley was not interested in his sister's bondage, or in the coming of a champion to set her free. He went off to send the dogs after an adventurous bunch of sheep that was straying from the main flock. Joan sighed as she looked after him, putting a strand of hair away behind her ear. Presently she brightened, turning to Mackenzie with quickening eyes.

"I'll make a bargain with you, Mr. Mackenzie, if you're in earnest about learning the sheep business," she said.

"All right; let's hear it."

"Dad's coming over here to-day to finish cutting hay. I'll make a deal with him for you to get a band of sheep to run on shares if you'll agree to teach me enough to get into college—if I've got brains enough to learn."

"The doubt would be on the side of the teacher, not the pupil, Miss Sullivan. Maybe your father wouldn't like the arrangement, anyway."

"He'll like it, all right. What do you say?"

"I don't think it would be very much to my advantage to take charge of a band of sheep under conditions that might look as if I needed somebody to plug for me. Your father might think of me as an incompetent and good-for-nothing person."

"You're afraid I haven't got it in me to learn—you don't want to waste time on me!" Joan spoke with a sad bitterness, as one who saw another illusion fading before her eyes.

"Not that," he hastened to assure her, putting out his hand as if to add the comfort of his touch to the salve of his words. "I'm only afraid your father wouldn't have anything to do with me if you were to approach him with any such proposal. From what I've heard of him he's a man who likes a fellow to do his own talking."

"I don't think he'd refuse me."

"It's hard for a stranger to do that. Your father—"

"You'll not do it, you mean?"

"I think I'd rather get a job from your father on my own face than on any kind of an arrangement or condition, Miss Sullivan. But I pass you my word that you'll be welcome to anything and all I'm able to teach you if I become a pupil in the sheep business on this range. Provided, of course, that I'm in reaching distance."

"Will you?" Joan asked, hope clearing the shadows from her face again.

"But we might be too far apart for lessons very often," he suggested.

"Not more than ten or twelve miles. I could ride that every day."

"It's a bargain, then, if I get on," said he.

"It's a bargain," nodded Joan, giving him her hand to bind it, with great earnestness in her eyes.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

You'll be glad to meet

"THAT KIND OF A MAN"

By Kenneth MacNichol

MAY 8

KERN stopped abruptly, his right foot off the sidewalk. He was in a hurry and had intended to breast the traffic stream on Fifth Avenue. As he drew back, his retreat was momentarily blocked by the knot of people marking time for the crossing to reopen. Through the moving vehicles he caught sight of the man, marooned in the middle of the street between the opposing lines of cars, whose presence had caused the balk.

Kern elbowed his way back onto the sidewalk. Although satisfied that he had no reason to fear such an encounter at the moment, he nevertheless had no desire to talk with the man who had smiled across at him; nor with any of this man's ilk. He cursed himself for not having taken a cab; but he had figured he could make better time afoot from Grand Central to Madge's apartment on Forty-Fifth Street because of the traffic delays to which a cab is subjected. Having been under cover for a year so far as New York City was concerned—that is, out of sight of the New York City police—he had believed that he could make the few blocks without attracting attention.

But no. At this climactic juncture he had to get gummed up at a crossing so that the detective there in the middle of the street had a good, full minute to stare at him face to face. Had they met in a crowd, briefly as folks do in passing, Kern believed that he would have got by with the mustache that had been added to his appearance since the New York cops had known him too well. Instead, when his luck had seemed to be running so good, he had walked slam-bang into a situation which gave a detective an age to study and "make" him.

Wherefore, swearing under his breath, Kern pressed back against the stream of people. And the instant he did so he damned himself more pungently as he realized that he had made a serious tactical mistake. They had nothing on him—nothing; no reason even to "rap" him unless their everlasting assumption that a man once crooked is always crooked could be termed a reason.

He should have gone straight ahead—spoken to the cop and breezed on. He saw that now. But, like a fool, he had run—run when they had nothing on him—when he hadn't made a move except leave a New York City telephone number for a man at Atlantic City to call.

Kern had just arrived from the latter resort. True, he had departed in a hurry, but he had done nothing while there that the police could single out. He had left the phone number for Rickey Temple because he had every ground to believe that Rickey Temple would be interested.

As proof of that interest, Kern had a bruise on the side of his face—a bruise created by Rickey Temple's fist. When he had fled from the battle started by Temple, he had laughed over the delightfully solicitous interference with which Madge had impeded Temple's pursuit. Madge had got away with that because she was in Rickey Temple's company on the beach—away up in a secluded corner.

Kern had laughed then and he proposed to laugh louder very soon..

Rickey Temple was to be married in another month. That telephone number would cause him to chase right on to New York. Kern was confident that Rickey would lose no time in trying to catch up for he knew that Temple wanted that marriage to come off.

That was why Kern was in such a hurry to get to Forty-Fifth Street. The phone call might already have been made and he was anxious to conclude negotiations with Rickey Temple.

Meanwhile he hadn't done a thing—they had nothing on him aside from the fact that he had a record.

Bucking the sidewalk crowd, Kern glanced over his shoulder. The detective was coming on through the traffic wave. He caught Kern's eye and beckoned. A cab shut him off from view.

Disregarding the signaled invitation to halt, Kern shoved onward. Before the detective navigated the mass of motors and reached the sidewalk, his quarry was scurrying thirty yards away and hugging the buildings.

The entrance to a fashionable department-store yawned beside Kern. He sidled into it. A big store is a good place in which to hide if you move smartly. Also, there was the possibility that his pursuer had failed to pick him up again in the street throng; that he had not been seen entering the place.

Kern had the layout of the store before the door had swung shut behind him. He turned sharply to a stairway on the left. Another went up at the right. At the rear were the elevators. He had three ways to descend.

Rounding the landing half-way to the second floor Kern looked down. The detective was standing just inside the door, but his gaze was turned to the right. Before he looked the proper way Kern was out of sight.

Kern paused at the top of the stairs, facing a wonderland of millinery with another composed of gowns and cloaks beyond. He grinned at the surroundings. Then his brows wrinkled as he absorbed a detail that had escaped him on his hurried passage over the ground floor. The store did not give the refuge of cover that he had anticipated; it was almost deserted.

Had Kern been a woman or had he had time to inquire, he would have known that this was normally a period of lull in a shop of this caliber—the end of the luncheon hour, the beginning of the matinée. He had figured on the presence of enough people to make himself inconspicuous. He found that a dozen saleswomen without customers to attend were watching him; that two floorwalkers were on their way to relieve his apparent indecision.

Kern swore softly. Why the devil had he run away? They had nothing on him.

Habit—that was why. Habit—although he had been on the good books for a long while—so far as the records could show. Which raised the logical question: Why continue to run?

He smiled at the approaching floorwalkers and shook his head. They took that to mean that he did not require their services. He was answering his own query. He would run no farther.

Not more than twenty seconds had elapsed since he ascended the stairs. Scarcely time enough for a detective to get his bearings! Kern waited for his pursuer to show himself.

Watching a woman try on a cloak he stood there. He would kid the sleuth about the short chase; say he had wondered whether the cop could stick as close as in the old days.

The woman's right hand sought the left cuff of the cloak. Without paying especial attention Kern noted that she was consulting a slip of cardboard suspended from a button.

Unconsciously he commented to himself that she was looking at the price-tag—only Kern called it price-ticket and the word "ticket" jarred him. With a jerk his shoulders straightened and his indolence vanished. His head pivoted, eyes darting to locate the detective.

He swore again. He knew now what had impelled him to avoid the policeman. Not habit, but instinct! It had taken a woman trying on a cloak to remind him—a woman

squinting at a price-tag which Kern called a ticket!

Instinct, from long practise, had told him what to do better than had his mind. His mind had said that they had nothing on him. That was true; they hadn't. But he had on himself a ticket—a pawn-ticket which the police might investigate to his confounding should this detective as a matter of policy take Kern in to look him over. Instinct had urged him not to submit to the probability that he would be called upon to give an account of himself.

Kern dropped the idea of dallying until the detective came up-stairs. He no longer thought to do any kidding. The joke was too likely to turn upon him.

It was a sure bet that if the detective caught up with him now he would be taken to headquarters. His flight would be regarded as suspicious enough to warrant that. Everything he had in his clothes would be examined. And the police, out of dirty curiosity, frequently went to the trouble of examining pawned articles the tickets for which were in the possession of known or suspected criminals. He sure had pulled a bone by fleeing.

With that thought it came to him that he had made another foolish break by entering the store. Without a crowd to mingle in he was at a greater disadvantage than ever.

Furthermore, he comprehended the delay in the appearance of his pursuer. The detective was taking steps to bar the exits—quietly and unostentatiously, doubtless, out of respect for the hatred that stores have of fuss which may agitate their patrons. Once that was accomplished, they would comb the building until the fugitive was flushed.

Kern determined to make for the roof; he had gone over roofs before.

Steering for the elevators he was out of the millinery display and on the fringes of the jungle of cloaks and gowns when the gates of an elevator opened and the detective peered out. He waved good-naturedly to Kern, who retired toward the stairs. To avoid a scene as he had promised the management while stationing policemen at the doors, the sleuth backed into the car. As the solid gates shut, Kern saw that it was going down.

He fathomed the intention. They would come up both stairs and crowd him to the top. And, he cursed himself for having wasted so much time, if they had any brains they would operate also from the top—which must shut him off from the roof.

Starting for the next floor he conceded that probably they had brains enough to think of that. He might as well consider himself already blocked—deep in a hole which was rapidly filling in about him.

On the third floor he walked into an ocean of lingerie, banked with corsets exhibited on modish shapes. There were only two women in the region near him, aside from those who displayed and sold. He had about a minute more ere the narrowing process of the pursuit would drive him upward or force his surrender.

The acuteness of the dilemma prodded Kern's resourcefulness. His problem now was to get rid of the pawn-ticket; to put it where the police would not see it.

If he could do that they still would have nothing on him. He wasn't sure they would have though they did investigate that ticket. He was merely taking the utmost precaution because he had exposed himself to the unmerciful police spotlight by his latest actions. They might fail to go far enough into it, but he could not bank on any such slight hope.

The ticket was the only thing that could get him in wrong. Once it was out of his possession and where it could not be connected with him, he didn't care a hoot about the police.

From his letter-case he extracted everything except the pawn-ticket. No one seemed to notice him. The two shoppers were busy with their purchases; the saleswomen were pottering with the stock.

Rounding an angle of a long display-table, he dropped the letter-case. There was nobody close at hand. He kicked the case under the table and walked briskly to the stairs.

At the landing before the second floor he met the detective, whose intrusion had interrupted his progress across Fifth Avenue.

"Hello!" he greeted the sleuth affably. "How's tricks?"

"I wonder!" The detective didn't respond as effusively. "What's the rush, Kern?"

"Rush!" Kern affected surprise. He moved to continue down-stairs—some one might discover the letter-case and follow to learn if it was his. He wanted to put space between himself and it.

"Rush!" repeated Kern. "I'm not rushing—just lost my nerve."

The detective eyed him up and down.

"So? What 'd you run for?"

Kern laughed and tapped the other confidentially on the chest.

"You'd run yourself," he chuckled, "if you stacked against a bunch of stuff like you'll find on the next floor. Say, don't ever go to buy anything frilly for a woman. I was going to—but she can get 'em herself! Takes more nerve than I've got to face one of these haughty dames and ask for thing-a-ma-call-ems and—"

"Lay off, Kern—lay off." The detective spoke wearily. "Y' sound like you're stalling for time. Got a partner up there? Let's look—and then we'll walk."

"Gee!" Kern protested, hurt showing in his countenance. "You wouldn't do anything like that. If you're looking for me you've got me wrong. I haven't done a thing since I came down the river, and you know it. And I haven't any partner. You saw me come in alone—"

"Why'd you run, then, when I met you?" the detective caught up the admission. He was unmoved by Kern's theatricals. He pursed his lips and delivered an opinion: "You've been good too blamed long, Kern—it's two years, isn't it? Where've you been the last year that we haven't seen you in town?"

"Up-State," said Kern sulkily, which was partly true.

An interruption came from the head of the stairs.

"Got him?" asked another man. Kern sized him up as a store-detective.

"O. K.," replied his captor. "Come on up, Kern, till we see what you were after."

Mumbling complaint about the police never giving a man a chance to go straight, the old song, Kern reascended to the third floor. The saleswomen gave him a clean bill so far as his visit there was concerned.

"That's what I told you," he exclaimed aggrievedly. "I came in to buy—"

The detective sighed. "Come on—" He tugged Kern's arm. "Let's go talk it over."

Still objecting, Kern obeyed. Inwardly he chortled. He'd recover the pawn-ticket in a couple of hours—after the police had checked him up. He flattered himself on having drawn out of a snag. All that was necessary to beat the police was a nimble wit when you got into a jam. He had been slow-witted in the first place when he had bolted, again when he had projected himself into the store to be cornered. But he had made up for these slips.

Some stunt to throw away a thing for safekeeping! No cop would ever dream of anybody pulling a stunt like that!

They could buzz him all they pleased. He hadn't done a thing—they hadn't anything on him. Not even though they did come into contact with Rickey Temple. Rickey didn't want the police bustin' in on this; no more than did Kern. He could bank any amount that Rickey Temple wouldn't talk—not with his marriage scheduled for a month hence.

Standing at the counter waiting for a saleswoman to show her some of the frilly affairs which Kern had advised the sleuth never to attempt to purchase, the woman from the beginning observed Kern's uncertainty. His backward glance, his quick scrutiny of the place and its occupants, made her covertly mark his movements.

Seemingly devoting herself to the garments before her, she saw him clear the letter-case of its contents and deliberately "lose" it. It did not require great intellect to divine that there must be some compelling motive for such behavior. And it was doubly unfortunate for Kern that this observer was of his own kind—that she lived by her wits, principally exercised in the passing of spurious checks and genteel swindling.

The return of Kern under escort of the detectives intensified her interest. She did not miss his look toward where the case

lay, nor that he maneuvered away from that neighborhood while they questioned the saleswomen.

The shopper—for the time being known as Therese Burley—asked to be shown some other goods. While the girl was accommodating her, Miss Burley strayed over to where Kern had dropped the case. Looking at the silks on the table she let her purse fall. In retrieving it she tucked Kern's letter-case inside her blouse.

Thereupon, like Kern, she became anxious to leave the store. She had no way of knowing how soon he would return to claim his property. She had to be gone before he did so.

Not until she was aboard a taxi did she dip into her find. The pawn-ticket puzzled her. Why had he left that? The information on the ticket was meagerness itself. The article pledged was so trivial; on the face of things it hardly appeared to justify all the movie motions that surrounded it.

Therese frowned at the description written on the ticket:

"Camera—$1.50." That was all, except a notation: "Extra care—12 cents," and the name given by the pawner, "Jones." The date was that same day.

While the cab jolted on with many stops and starts, jockeying to gain a yard or two here and there, she turned the case over and over. It bore no distinguishing mark; contained no scrap besides the pawn-ticket.

Why, she wondered, hadn't this man taken some step to insure that the letter-case would be returned to him? She comprehended that his action had been prompted by the necessity of keeping it out of the hands of the detectives, but why hadn't he left a card in it? If there was an address to which it could be sent, any ordinary person finding it surely would forward it there.

The answer to that made her laugh. For here was a ludicrous exhibition of faith in the honesty of the average person. A crook—the detectives had labeled him—a crook hazarding his chance of a stake on the belief that whoever found the letter-case would turn it in at the store office to await a claimant.

Therese Burley's innocent-looking eyes, so helpful in her profession, glinted thoughtfully. To her sharp senses it became increasingly plain that this insignificant camera, pawned for a dollar fifty, meant something worth while. She decided to get in on it.

Redirecting the taxi-driver she went to the pawn-shop on Park Row and redeemed the thing. There was a roll of film in it, and the number 4, showing through the little celluloid circle on the back of the box, indicated that some of it had been exposed.

Without delay she proceeded to a photographer's and had the film developed. In half an hour it was in her hands. She smiled over the prints and began to understand better what was doing.

The first picture was good—of a man and a woman on the beach. The woman's bathing costume was daring—and their embrace was compromising, to say the least, if there were any one who cared how either of them behaved. The second negative was blurred, as though the camera had been jogged. The third was slightly more intimate and compromising than the first and contained additional interest through the fact that it provided a full-face view of the man.

The fourth and last exposure revealed only the head and shoulders of an indistinct, hazy, unrecognizable figure—because Kern had jumped and lost the focus when Rickey Temple had perceived and gone after him.

In doping it all out, Therese made only one mistake. She supposed that the person being blackmailed had called in the police. That reasoning explained Kern's haste to get rid of this evidence. Had she identified the man as Rickey Temple she would have seen her error. Like Kern she would have assumed the impossibility of Rickey permitting himself to become involved almost on the eve of his marriage; as matters stood he had enough of a history for any one bride to overlook, though she did love both him and his dollars to the ultimate!

Not recognizing the man in the snapshots, however—nor knowing whether the man or the woman was the blackmailer's victim—Therese decided that she also would

play safe. She didn't abandon the idea of cutting in on the spoils. Not that. But she could not run the risk of keeping the negatives. If found in her possession they would link her up with the blackmail.

To play safe both ways she returned to the pawn-shop. She lingered till the place was bare of customers. A ten-dollar bill twirling in her fingers she opened the conversation:

"I want to put this camera back in pawn," tentatively.

The pawnbroker stared at her. He had no objection to that. His keen eyes contracted—he scented a proposition.

Therese leaned over the counter. She help up the ten dollars.

"It would be worth this if I could get the same ticket for it—the ticket I surrendered an hour ago."

He also hitched closer and smiled—appraisingly. If she said it was worth ten—

"That 'd be irregular—illegal," he demurred. "I couldn't do that."

"Who'd know?" Therese noted the greedy light in his face. She adopted a persuasive manner while she realized that he was merely haggling to increase the ante. "It—it's a joke we're playing," she explained rather feebly. "We've switched the pictures in the camera and—ah—"

She paused in an attitude of please-help-me, with all her innocent, appealing way.

"It's irregular," he repeated. "We have to be careful in this business—of stolen goods." He looked from the ten-dollar bill to Therese suggestively.

"But this isn't stolen," she persisted. "Oh—" She seemed just to understand—and produced another ten.

He showed signs of interest. Without further parley she extended the camera. He took it and the twenty dollars.

"I gotta change the books, y' know that?" he objected. "I'm takin' chances monkeyin' with the books. The police look 'em over. Y' should gimme twenty-five."

While he regretted not having doubled the amount the bargain was closed.

The original ticket again in her purse, Therese sought a near-by public telephone and talked with her partner at their flat in the Seventies.

"I expect a phone call," she explained. "If it comes before I arrive tell the man to come out. I don't know his name—maybe it's Jones. I'll be there ahead of him anyhow, I guess."

Next she phoned the store in which she had picked up the letter-case.

"I forgot to turn it in," she said. "I'll mail it to your manager. No—" She seemed abruptly to change her mind. "Have the claimant call at my place for it." She gave her phone number, name and address, and added with a laugh that she always saw a—a—yes, a romantic interest in lost articles! Therese was a plausible dissembler, not to say liar!

Five o'clock passed before the police were done with Kern. He was sweating when they let him go, but he had made good—forced them to admit that they had nothing on him.

He was departing with a sneer when a lazily spoken command halted him.

"Drop in day after to-morrow, Kern—about noon."

His sneer changed to a snarl as his neck pivoted.

"What for?"

The officer turned away. "You never can tell," he replied. "But drop in—drop in and save us the trouble of looking you up."

"Ye-eh," said Kern. He slammed the door. Like Hades he would! Day after to-morrow he'd be on his way—after he'd shaken down Rickey Temple.

Making sure he was not followed he sped to the department-store. He swore aloud when they gave him Therese Burley's message.

He phoned Madge's apartment. His fellow blackmailer was there, having also returned from Atlantic City immediately after the successful enmeshing of Rickey. The latter, she reported, had not yet telephoned.

"He will," said Kern grimly. He was worried about the finder of the letter-case holding it out. "Tell him—tell him to call later—with his mind made up that there'll be no rough stuff. I've got to go up-town."

By the time he reached Therese's apartment he was mad and beset by a consum-

ing anxiety. Even before he saw her he knew that he was up against an extreme complication. When she admitted him and stood waiting for him to speak, his misgiving was wholly confirmed.

Kern's eyes narrowed as he surveyed her. He didn't like her innocent gaze—there was too much hint of danger behind it. Her full lips, too, reflected strength in the way they set at the corners—a set that carried down into the chin.

The situation was bad—evidently. He had calculated that some ordinary person would find the case and hand it in at the office. An extraordinary person had come across it—and that she had retained it perturbed him as greatly as had the prospect of the pawn-ticket exciting police curiosity.

"Bryan is my name," he introduced himself sharply as she maintained silence. "I lost a letter-case this afternoon in a store. They tell me that you found it."

"Yes." Therese motioned him to a chair. She seated herself, an elbow resting on the table.

When she added nothing to the monosyllable, Kern spoke.

"Can I have it, please? There can be no question about identification. It contained," he smiled deprecatingly, "only a pawn-ticket."

He gathered himself involuntarily as her eyes ranged over him. She made him uncomfortable. Her point-blank inquiry jarred him—

"Why were you arrested?"

He denied it, but she insisted.

"You were arrested—I saw the officers take you."

"No; I wasn't," he smiled viciously. That was the truth; he had merely been "in custody." He thought it better to admit that. "It was a mistake. That I'm here proves so, doesn't it?"

"You might be on bail."

"I'm not," he answered as promptly. "You can ask—the police, if you like." He held his breath. That was a bluff. He would be in a worse fix than when the detective had overhauled him if she queried the police, for not only would they get the camera, but the fact that he had used an alias in seeking to recover it would advise them that he was mixing again in his old games.

Therese noticed his increased tension. She passed by his proposal.

"I see no need," she said. "It's none of my business."

"Thanks—" He was sarcastic. "And the letter-case—may I have that now?"

Her brows rose in surprise.

"Why ask me for it?"

"You have it." His voice became sharper, his face harder. The smiling veneer was gone under the tautened jaw muscles, the drooping lids. He was the Kern that the police would best have recognized, come back from the days when he had been nipped right and had fought with all his resource and cunning to escape that four years up the river. "You have it. They told me at the store that you have it."

Therese watched him with the indolent watchfulness of the cat ready to unsheath claws.

"They must have misunderstood," she shrugged. "I found it—yes—but—didn't they tell you that I had mailed it to the office?"

"They did not." He half crouched as he ripped out the words. "They said—"

"I'm sorry," she interrupted. Her tone implied that the interview was at an end. "I'm sorry, but—it is impossible to get the pawn-ticket to-night. It's almost seven o'clock; the store is closed."

Kern raged. He had beaten the police only to strike against what appeared to be an equally disastrous rock. Recalling how he had gloated over the quick wit that had saved the pawn-ticket from the trap into which he had wandered, he wished that he had taken a chance with the authorities. He did not relish a contest with Therese.

"It is an offense, Miss Burley," he warned her, "to retain property that you find." By that he conveyed his disbelief of her intimation that she had returned the case to the store. "I hope it won't be necessary to ask the aid of the police."

She laughed frankly at the threat.

"For one so recently arrested—pardon me, temporarily detained through a foolish police mistake," she mocked, "you speak readily of calling for their assistance. It

won't matter to me if you do, Mr.—did you say Bryan?

"That pawn-ticket," she went on succinctly, "if it has not reached the store manager, is where you cannot get it—tonight. And," she nodded positively, "if ever it does reach him, the police will be there when you claim it."

His features drawing harshly, he started to rise from the chair. Her hand slipped inside her blouse.

"Sit down!"

Their eyes clashed, his dilated and wavery, hers steady and confident. He lost his temper.

"Where's the camera?" he snarled. "Come across—quick!"

"Sit down!" she commanded again. Her hand withdrew from her blouse and from it poked the nose of a baby automatic.

Kern shrank back. Over the gun she smiled. He noted her uncompromising countenance, the rigidity of her wrist. He sat.

"Now!" Therese leaned forward. Her eyes no longer bore that innocent gentleness. "Now tell me exactly how far you've gone."

Sullenly he kept his mouth shut.

She pouted. "No? Then I'll have to give the camera to the police after all. I don't want to do that because"—she nodded engagingly—"because I thought we might go—fifty-fifty!"

Kern regarded her suspiciously. He wasn't going to walk into another hole as he had done in the store. She might be operating with the police.

Therese pressed her proposition:

"I play the same game—sometimes." Her manner was friendly, but the gun was not. "Sometimes—although I hate to have it called by the proper name—blackmail."

Kern stirred uneasily. He couldn't quite solve her.

"Where is the camera?" he asked.

"In pawn where you left it. I'll let you see the ticket," she promised when he shook his head. "I could go through with this alone, you know, but it's really out of my line. And I'm not a hog. You've taken your chances"—he fingered the bruise on his cheek—"worked for what you'll get. I'm not a hog," she repeated, "so I'm going to let you finish the job—on a fifty-fifty basis."

"How generous!" he sneered. "Where's the ticket?"

"In a minute," said Therese. She called her partner, whose prompt arrival demonstrated that she had not been far from the door. Her gaze fixed on Kern, she addressed the other woman: "Maudie, you remember that this man obtained admission here by representing himself as a—an insurance-agent will do. Yes? You heard him say that was his business—fire-insurance. All right. If he makes the least move," she enunciated each word carefully, "I'm going to shoot him—and you will be a witness that he attacked me! You heard him threaten, didn't you, as you came in just now?"

Maudie grinned and patted her hair. Usually she did as Therese directed; Therese was the brains of the team.

"Sure," she agreed. "I came when you called for help!"

"That's it." Therese smiled once more at Kern. "You know now where you stand?"

Kern sputtered helplessly. He sat deathly still, instantly dropping all thought of making any motion that might attract a bullet.

The unquestioning acquiescence of Maudie in the cold-blooded plan to kill or, anyway, seriously wound him, appalled Kern. More than ever he regretted the method he had taken to fool the police. He had been too blamed quick-witted! Before a woman who placidly stated that she would shoot him and another who as placidly agreed to swear that he had been the aggressor, he was scared. The sweat broke out on him and he strove to prevent even the trembling of his hands, fearful that as slight a motion as that might cause her to press the trigger.

"You get the idea?" asked Therese pleasantly.

Kern wet his lips and they framed acknowledgment that he got it.

"Very well." From her pocket Therese took the pawn-ticket. She stepped to within a pace of him and held it up. "I said

I'd let you see this. Look! You recognize it—the shop and perhaps the number? Keep still!"

She retreated before he could summon courage to spring for her pistol-arm. She waved Maudie over and gave her the ticket.

"Now, listen, Mr. Bryan, or whatever your name is." Her tone was crisp and she remained standing, the gun never shifting from him. "I'll give you a new deal. Instead of fifty-fifty I'll take five thousand dollars cash on delivery of that ticket. Five thousand! And you have until ten thirty to-morrow morning—till after the banks open—to produce it. Can you get it? Think fast!"

Kern glanced at Maudie, who remained for further instructions. He wondered whether Rickey Temple had phoned—wondered whether the woman who was holding him up knew that Rickey was the subject of the blackmail. She was so infernally confident—and she had said that she could finish the deal without him.

"I might," he grunted. He knew he could. And at five thousand dollars it would be cheap—cheaper than having to split fifty-fifty. He aimed to get twenty-five thousand. The photos were worth that to Rickey Temple.

"Does that mean you will?" Therese pinned him down.

He hesitated, realized that he was up against it—"Yes."

Therese doused the gleam in his eye.

"There's one condition," she stipulated. "I want to know just how far your negotiations have gone?"

"What's that matter so long as you get your end?" Kern shied. He wasn't going to talk before two witnesses.

Therese refused to enter into debate.

"Telephone for the police, Maudie," she drawled.

"Wait!" Kern's hoarse shout was ignored by the woman leaving the room.

"Maudie!" At Therese's call the other turned.

Kern wriggled a finger under his collar. She was bluffing about the police, of course, as he had done. But though she was, it wouldn't do him any good to call her. He was in wrong either way.

What difference could it make whether he talked before these two women and they turned witness against him; or whether he was given over to the police now along with the camera? Better to accept whatever terms she dictated. If they did not break confidence, he would be twenty thousand to the good after deducting the five thousand that this—this blackmailer demanded!

"I've a date with him," said Kern grudgingly; "expect to meet him to-night."

Therese masked the flicker in her eyes at this news that the man was the victim. She fished warily: "How do you know so certainly that he'll come through?"

Again Kern paused with the thought that she didn't know as much as he had supposed. Then replied, since to come clean was his only chance.

"He's to be married soon."

"U-m!" Therese chuckled. "Frame-up?"

He didn't answer and she didn't press the superfluous question.

"Why did you pawn the camera?" she asked.

"Safest place in the world to keep it," he replied.

Therese completed her instructions to Maudie:

"Take that pawn-ticket, Maudie," she said blithely, "somewhere into this great big city—anywhere at all—and at ten thirty-five in the morning phone me. If Mr. Bryan has shown up I'll tell you to bring the ticket home. If I don't answer the phone right away, hurry here with the police and at the same time have them send out an alarm for the man they arrested to-day in Merritt's store. They'll know who he is—this man. Get me?"

"Sure—I got you—like you got him. But look out for birdie here," she warned; "he don't look a bit happy."

For fifteen minutes after the departure of Maudie, Kern sat, furiously impotent, staring at the gun. Then Therese saw him off the premises with a cheery "Good night!" to which he did not respond.

Madge greeted Kern with obvious excitement.

"Temple's been calling every five minutes for the last hour," she exclaimed. "He seems to be reasonable—laughed at the way we put it over on a rounder like him. Acts like a good sport. He—what's the matter?"

Her face darkened as Kern told her. "You—you don't think she'll beat you to it?" she asked fearfully.

Kern shook his head. "She doesn't even know who he is," he declared disgustedly, "though she holds all the cards. Oh, hell!"

He broke off to answer the telephone.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said to Rickey Temple. The wire might be tapped, with the police listening in. "Of course I remember seeing you at the beach. Come see me if you want to. I'll wait." He hung up while Temple was still talking.

"That's what I told him," said Madge, "that I didn't know what he was talking about. He's safe, though, isn't he?"

"As the United States," answered Kern. "You stay out of sight when he comes—in that room. He may be ugly." He got a gun from her and put it in his coat-pocket.

Rickey Temple, however, was not disposed to be ugly. He understood when he was licked; and while he condemned himself for having fallen for Madge's beach flirtation he was willing to pay for his indiscretion. There was nothing else to do, because he was actually in love—in love as he knew it—with his bride-to-be and had had a hard job persuading her that the tales they told of him were no more than good-humored fiction, popular and of wide circulation because he was Rickey Temple!

He squinted at the bruise on Kern's cheek. "Got in one wallop anyway," he grinned. "Where's friend Madge?"

His attitude relieved Kern. As Madge had remarked, the victim took a reasonable view of the affair.

"She's around," he said and got down to business with an attempted joke: "You collect pictures, don't you?"

"That depends," said Rickey. "If they're good—"

"They are," Kern assured him. "The light was fine when they were taken. I'll show you some by the same camera—its lenses are great."

"Never mind." Rickey Temple stopped him. "Show me those you want to sell."

"Not now—later." Kern studied him. He concluded that Temple's surrender was complete. "There are four," he stated bluntly. "The price is twenty-five thousand dollars."

"Whew!" Temple whistled. This was coming higher than he had anticipated. He pursed his lips, frowned, and began to shake his head.

"Some folks pay more than that to have the wedding-bells ring," said Kern.

"Leave the wedding-bells out of your talk," retorted Temple coldly, his right fist folded. Head bent slightly, he considered Kern from under lowering brows. He looked at his fist—at Kern again. He wanted to maul this blackmailer—but he didn't dare. It would end all chance of his marriage and—here was the prime deterrent—the scandal would bring humiliation to his fiancée.

"You needn't hang onto that gun," he said contemptuously. The lines of the weapon were clearly defined in the pocket in which Kern had his hand. "I wouldn't care a damn whether you had a machine gun if it wasn't for—" He didn't finish the sentence for that would necessitate reference to the girl he had warned Kern to keep out of the conversation.

"Let's get it over," he continued. "How soon can we get away from each other—I don't like your company."

Kern flushed. "As soon as you turn over the cash," he snapped.

"How do I know you won't keep on coming up with prints of these pictures?" countered Temple.

"There aren't any prints. There won't be unless you make them. I'll deliver the undeveloped film."

Rickey Temple laughed at him. "Maybe there's nothing on it," he said. "You expect me to pay twenty-five thousand blind—without a look?"

"It's a good camera, I tell you," retorted Kern. "The pictures are there. We'll develop them, if you want to, before you pay."

Rickey Temple put on his hat. "Let's do that. When?"

"Here—to-morrow noon." Kern's eyes

bored into him. "No tricks," he challenged. "You bring the cash and you'll get the film. You'll play square?"

The demand made Temple gasp. His shoulders quivered; he laughed outright.

"You poor crook!" he ejaculated. "Where do you get off to talk about playing square? Agh—" He swung out of the apartment. The atmosphere was bad.

Madge came in.

"A good sport," she sighed. "It's too bad—"

Temple's parting exclamation itching under his skin, Kern shut her off irritably.

"Wait till we get the goods back to trade for his dough before you slobber over him."

At ten twenty in the morning Kern arrived at Therese's apartment. He was in better humor after having had the night to think it over, but it was with some trepidation that he kept the appointment.

There was no sign of treachery, however. Therese was alone.

"I have the money," he stated shortly.

Therese looked at him, smilingly apologetic.

"I do hate to cut in on you," she gibed, "but—"

Kern's teeth showed in a sour grin.

"About as much as I hate to take the money," he grated. "Where's the ticket?"

"We'll hear from Maudie in a few minutes—I don't imagine she's far away."

Therese chatted inconsequentially until the phone buzzed. She told Maudie to hold the line and addressed Kern.

"You don't mind if I make sure you're not armed? You might—try to turn the tables."

"Go ahead." He stood up, stretching his arms. The possibility of again being picked up by the police had killed his thought of attempting what the woman was now guarding against. They'd send him away for a gun and be glad of the opportunity.

She ran her hands over him and went back to the phone.

"Come on along, Maudie," she instructed.

Within half an hour her partner arrived. Therese again covered Kern with her gun.

"The same rules apply as last night," she said. "If anything unfortunate happens, I shoot. Give Maudie the money." She couldn't let him approach too close to herself.

Kern counted fifty one-hundred-dollar bills. In the act of passing them over he stopped for a moment and looked at Therese searchingly.

"How do I know you're not double-crossing me?"

"The ticket ought to tell you that," she returned lightly. "If you think you're being double-crossed, let's quit the deal now. I'll wind it up without you."

Five thousand for nothing if she was crooking him. Five thousand for twenty-five thousand if she was not. The pawn-ticket seemed to prove that she was on the level with him—he had noted the number and knew it was the ticket he had received for the camera.

Therese read his thought:

"Where's your gambler's blood—a how-many-to-one shot!" she goaded. "And—you remember that thing about honor among thieves!"

"Honor among hell!" said Kern coarsely. "It was a squealer who sent me away six years ago. Lemme see the ticket."

"Cash first," said Therese firmly.

He gave the money to Maudie and at a nod from Therese she handed over the ticket.

Kern's face brightened. It had been a hard pull, but he was out of the mire. A couple more hours and he would take Rickey Temple into camp!

He headed for the door.

"Your letter-case," said Therese sweetly.

"Keep it," said Kern.

"Thanks!" She smiled at his back. "Hope you make out as well as you expect!"

Kern had a red electric bulb in a socket in a darkened room when Rickey Temple entered Madge's flat at noon. A bath of developer was ready. The camera remained as he had received it from the pawnbroker, the number 4 showing through the celluloid disk on the back.

"You stand over there," he ordered Temple. "I'll keep tab on you with this," he

produced a revolver, "while Madge brings out the pictures. That money isn't marked? I've got your word for that?"

"You have," said Temple dryly. "Speed up your goods."

"Go ahead, Madge." Kern placed her between himself and Temple so that he could watch both his victim and the coming to life of the pictures on the film.

Nervously Madge opened the camera and took out the roll. She bent over it, washing the film back and forth. Her eyes puckered, then widened as she looked up at Kern. Taking his glance off Temple an instant, he caught her perplexed gaze.

The quick change in Kern's expression apprized Temple that something was wrong. His hand reached backward to the table against which he stood and closed on a bronze book-end.

Kern leaned toward Madge, peering at the film. His lips thinned to a line. His query was a bare whisper:

"What is it?"

Madge trembled, holding up the film. "Nothing!" she whispered back. "Nothing!"

Cursing, Kern grabbed the reel. In his anger he forgot about Rickey Temple.

While his amazed eyes contemplated the blank film, the presence of Rickey was brought painfully to his attention. The pound and a half of bronze, wielded with all Rickey's strength, smashed the gun from Kern's hand. With one motion Temple picked the gun from the floor and snatched the film.

"Nothing is right," he proclaimed, "and that's what you get—nothing, you—you dirty crooks!"

And as Kern staggered, clutching at his broken wrist, too near fainting to reply—as Madge swayed terror-stricken when the gun jabbed her way, Rickey Temple crushed the film into his pocket and backed out of the apartment.

"All packed, Maudie? Here's the taxi." Therese Burley looked at her watch. "Hurry up. It's after twelve. No knowing when he'll come waltzing in looking for blood."

Maudie appeared carrying two grips.

"Ready," she announced. "Where we going?"

Therese yawned. "The coast. Come on." She gathered her own grips. Their trunks already had gone. "Nothing in this palace you care about?" Their flat was rented furnished.

"Nope. Say," Maudie paused. "What you doing with the pictures? Going to cash in on them?"

Therese passed on. "I burned them," she said and grew indignant, echoing Rickey Temple's characterization. "What *do* you know about a dirty crook that 'd try to break up a fellow's wedding?"

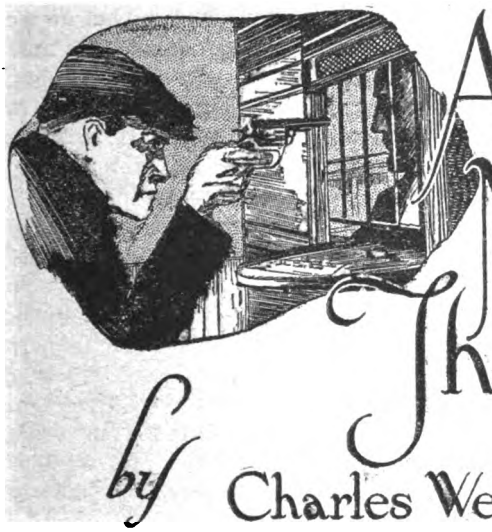
SPRING AND DAN CUPID

SPRING and Dan Cupid met one day
Down by the shining river,
He being blind, the naughty elf
Stole arrows from his quiver.

For every arrow, honey tipped,
With magic bound together,
She from a love-bird's tender breast,
In mischief filched a feather.

She saw the small god's tragic face;
Then laughed and called him "stupid,"
And ever after Spring has been
In partnership with Cupid.

Cora Lapham Hazard.



A Habit of Noticing Things

by Charles Wesley Sanders

Author of "Fugitives," etc.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I.

ROMANCE IN THE BUD.

ALICE JONES was a product of workaday America. Her father had been a roller in the mills for nearly thirty years. At the end of that time he had opened a cash grocery store. He was practically retired, and he did not make of his store everything he could have made of it. He did not advertise or deliver goods or carry any charge accounts. His trade was just sufficient to keep him busy without the aid of a clerk. He had to do something, he said.

He had married a country girl rather late in his life, and Alice was the only child. She inherited from her father Welsh blood, and from her mother American. Behind those two was a long line of American and Welsh men and women who had always worked.

"The person that don't work, money or no money, is no good," was the creed of both father and mother.

Alice, a little because she was dutiful and a great deal because she was healthy, earnest and energetic, accepted the creed for her own. But as youth often is, she was more advanced in her ideas than either her father or her mother. She saw that there were opportunities in the business world for a girl like her.

Leaving high school, she went to a business college in a neighboring city and mastered the intricacies of bookkeeping and stenography. She could have got a good job in the city, but she was not too advanced to be fond of her home and her parents, and she came back to Ironwood to accept a position in the Ironwood Savings and Trust Company. Old Eli Speaks was president of that.

Speaks had founded the bank thirty years before. The town had been a village then, and Speaks had managed the bank himself till he engaged Alice. Two new national banks had located in town in the last ten years, and Speaks was keen enough to see that he would have to become a little more energetic if his bank was to hold its place.

Speaks had known Alice all her life. He had known that she was getting a business education, and she didn't need any outside recommendation when she applied for a job. Her salary was to be seventy dollars a month.

Alice, like a good business woman, insisted on paying her board at home—twenty dollars a month. Out of the remaining fifty she banked thirty-five with

Speaks. The rest she spent on clothing and little things dear to the feminine heart.

Now at twenty-two she was one of the best-gowned and best-groomed young women in Ironwood. She was a tallish girl with big Welsh brown eyes and a lot of hair that was as near black as brown. Even old Speaks knew that she was a stunning figure of a girl and no mean asset for the bank. In fact, Speaks could directly trace a number of deposits to the fact that Alice was his employee.

Of course Alice had suitors. No girl in Ironwood had more. They were of all kinds and degrees—young men and middle-aged men and some who had passed middle-age. The young men made ardent love, and Alice sighed about them sometimes, though she knew very well that their hearts were not broken, as they professed. About the other men she didn't worry. She had a notion that they wanted housekeepers.

She had considered marriage, but inasmuch as the divine emotion had never been roused in her she had come to think that possibly she was not the kind of girl that marries. Well, it didn't matter, for she knew her worth as a working girl. She'd never have any financial worries, at least.

And then one summer noon Joe House came into the bank. Alice was busy over her books when Joe presented himself at the wicket before which customers stood to transact their business. Alice looked over her shoulder, holding certain figures in her mind.

As her eyes met those of Joe House, the figures scattered and fled. Alice blushed. Joe said afterward that that was the first thing he noticed about Alice—how beautifully she blushed. For a long time Alice denied that she had blushed. She said the day had been warm. That was all.

As she slid down from her stool, Joe noticed how supple and graceful she was, and then he was looking straight into her brown eyes as she came to the wicket.

"That's what did the business for me," Joe often told her. "Your eyes were so clear and kind and sort of smiling that my heart started hippity-hop."

That might have been true, but for a fact Joe was given to that sort of talk just to tease Alice. It is a further fact that he gave no evidence of interrupted heart functioning as he faced Alice. He was a tall, well-set-up young fellow, with "college" showing plainly enough in the cut of his clothes and in his general bearing.

"What can I do for you, Mr. House?" Alice asked.

Joe stared at her. How'd she know him? he wondered. He hadn't been in Ironwood in four years, and certainly he had never known this charming girl when he had lived there prior to those four years.

But he bluffed a little. He wanted to.

"Er," he said, "I ought to know you, Miss—Miss—"

"Alice Jones," said Alice. "But you don't know me, and you ought not to know me, from any acquaintance we ever had."

It was rather unconventional, but Alice didn't think she should stand on ceremony with old Doc House's boy. Of course, the doctor had been the town's aristocrat in his day, but that was no sign that Joe was any better than anybody else.

Times had changed since the old doctor had gruffly lorded it over his patients, forgetting in about seven cases out of ten to render a bill, or, if he did render one, to charge for more than half his visits. Joe, according to Alice's idea now, was just a boy out of college. She was a business woman.

"Alice Jones, of course," said Joe, extending his hand, which Alice took but relinquished before Joe was ready to relinquish hers. "I knew I knew you. We were in high school together."

"We were not in high school together," Alice denied. "You were a year ahead of me, and you didn't know I was on earth."

"I know it now," Joe said boldly.

Well, the talk was going a little further than a business woman should let it go, so that Alice straightened up to her full height and asked Joe again in her best banking tone what she could do for him.

"I wanted to see Speaks," Joe said. "I'm looking for a job."

He folded his arms and leaned them on the window ledge.

"I thought I'd come back to the old town to get my start," he said confidentially. "Dad was known and liked here, and I ought to make some friends easily. Not that I want to trade on dad's reputation, but I thought I'd get along faster in the old burg than in a strange place."

"Just what had you thought of doing?" Alice asked.

"Well," said Joe, "I don't know. 'Most anything, I guess. It occurred to me that old Speaks might need a man in the bank."

"He could use one," Alice said. "There's work enough, but whether he will put another name on his pay-roll is a question. He's—"

"Close," said Joe.

"Very," Alice agreed.

"I'll wait and see him, anyhow," Joe said.

"I must go back to work," Alice declared. "You can go into the back room and sit down. Mr. Speaks will be here any time now."

"I'd rather stand here," Joe said significantly.

Alice gave him a direct, calm glance. She had been informal with him, but he mustn't get the idea that he could be a familiar.

"Just as you like," she said, trying to make her voice frigid.

Joe laughed. Alice blushed some more.

"Where do you live?" Joe asked. "I'll be dropping in to call on you some evening."

"Some one has invited you?" Alice queried.

"Not yet. Here's hoping."

He was smiling, but he wasn't exactly impudent. And Alice saw that he would not drop in on her without an invitation. He was merely fishing for one. Well, he'd have to fish a little longer.

As she turned back to her work, Speaks appeared in the doorway.

"There's Mr. Speaks," Alice said.

"I saw him first," Joe said, and Alice saw that he was not in the least afraid of the banker or of any one else, for that matter.

"Well, Joe House," Speaks said, as he came into the bank, "you're back from college, are you?"

He extended a thin, bony hand, and Joe shook it.

"Come in and sit down," Speaks said.

He went into the back room, and Joe followed him. Alice was astonished. Speaks didn't invite everybody into that back room. It has to be confessed that she listened to hear what Speaks would have to say to Doc House's boy, but the banker closed the door leading from that room into the banking-room proper.

Speaks was a rather astute person, but he was given to deceiving himself. Years before when Dr. House had been the leading practitioner of Ironwood, Speaks had been dangerously ill. He had gone down into the Valley and he had not liked the view. House had fought for his patient indefatigably and had brought Speaks to the uplands of life. Speaks had always supposed that he was duly grateful.

When Joe told him his errand, the banker pondered it earnestly. He told himself he ought to do something for Doc House's boy. He owed that much to the memory of the old doctor. Then he had studied Joe shrewdly. He knew that Joe ought to be an asset to the bank, just as Alice was one. Doc House had had a multitude of friends. If Joe could draw a half of them to the bank as patrons, he would be worth a mint of money.

"I do need a man," Speaks conceded. "My time is so taken up that I ought to have some one as teller. That would leave Miss Jones free for her other work. How would you like the job at fifty a month?"

Dr. House had left no fortune. He had often told Joe that Joe must have a college education, no matter what; and Joe had followed his wishes after his death. Pretty nearly all of the slim inheritance was gone now. Fifty a month looked good to Joe. What the doctor had left had kept him and the high cost of living from forming any close acquaintanceship.

"I'd like it fine," Joe said, "and thank you, Mr. Speaks."

Though Speaks was never polite or courteous to any one, he pointed out to Joe that he would have to be polite and

courteous to every one. And he must think of nothing, hardly talk of anything, except the bank, bank, bank.

Joe promised all that readily enough. He didn't know that Speaks was asking a good deal for fifty dollars a month. But Speaks was in the habit of asking a good deal for a little.

Joe shook hands with Speaks again and passed into the front room. Alice looked over her shoulder again, and Joe jerked his head back in an invitation to her to come to the wicket. Alice, wondering at herself a little, slid down from her stool for the second time and went over there.

"Congratulate me," Joe said. "I've got a job right here in the bank. Be back as soon as I get a bite of lunch."

He put out his hand again, but Alice ignored it. It was one thing to be a little bit chummy with Doc House's boy; it was another thing to be chummy with a new employee of the bank. Business was business in Alice's life. From eight in the morning till five in the evening friendship had to stand aloof.

But when she saw that hurt look in Joe's eyes, she made up her mind she would, after a proper interval, give him the invitation he had fished for. She didn't like to hurt a nice boy's feelings. Oh, no!

So Joe came to work in the bank. He got his invitation from Alice on the third day, and he made rapid progress with her. His progress with Speaks was not so rapid. He didn't seem to bring any new customers to the bank. He followed Speaks's hints about politeness because he was polite by nature. If Speaks had been paying him sixty dollars a month instead of fifty, Speaks would have fired him. But the banker didn't see how he could do any better.

As for Alice, she knew in a week that she was growing very fond of Doc House's boy. He was the gayest, kindest, cleanest man she had ever known. In his presence Alice was likely to forget she was a business woman.

But away from him she knew that she must not be swayed by him too strongly. He would have to wake up and become more energetic before he traveled very far in the world of finance. Fifty a month would be far too little to think of marrying on.

And then one lovely summer night she forgot altogether that she was a business woman. She became just a woman, as elemental as any woman had ever been.

She and Joe had taken a walk down by the river. Usually Joe was an animated and incessant talker. To-night he was silent and a little grave. He stole looks at Alice that made her heart beat fast.

They had turned to come home. Joe took a step and stopped. There were shadows flecked by moonlight where they stood.

"Alice," Joe whispered.

"Joe," Alice whispered back.

And he put his arms about her and kissed her, and she kissed him.

He spoke of immediate marriage, and Alice listened all the way from the river to her home—listened in a kind of ecstasy, not considering for the time the hard facts that she and Joe would have to face. On her porch her native sense returned.

"Ah, Joe," she said, "we can't marry for a long, long time, not till you make much more than fifty dollars a month. Why, Speaks is paying me seventy a month."

"I'll make good for you, Alice," Joe declared.

"You'll have to work hard, Joe," Alice said.

"You just watch me," Joe promised.

Next day at the bank he was an extremely busy person. He did all his own work and offered to help Alice with hers. But Alice didn't want any help, didn't need any help.

"But the more I learn, the faster I'll get along," Joe said.

"That's right," Alice agreed, and in odd minutes she initiated him into some of the mysteries of keeping books.

When Speaks came back from lunch, they were bent over one of Alice's thick books. Their heads were pretty close together, and a moment before Joe had squeezed Alice's hand. Alice knew that he shouldn't do that in business hours, but it wasn't at all disagreeable.

When Joe caught sight of Speaks, he went over to the wicket. Speaks looked at him quizzically. He had noticed that Joe had been fast in his work that morning. Perhaps Joe was waking up.

"Miss Jones was showing me how she keeps her books," Joe said. "I want to learn all about the banking business."

"That is most certainly commendable," Speaks said, and passed on into the rear room.

A big idea came to Joe. He would strike while the iron was hot. He seemed to have pleased Speaks. With a significant glance at Alice, he went into the rear room and closed the door.

Alice waited for him with hope beating high in her breast. It seemed hardly possible, but Speaks *might* give Joe a raise that would make an early marriage possible. Alice was sure that she could manage on less than any housewife had ever managed on before.

She was eager to marry Joe. She was giving herself to him with an abandon which she would not have thought possible a little while ago. A little home of her own looked mighty good to her. And it was queer that her business training sent her further in this direction than she would have gone if she had not had that business training.

She had fallen into the habit of going at things directly. In business, she saw, no roundabout route served. You had to take the straight path. She loved Joe. Therefore the thing to do was to marry him with all the speed and directness possible. She was a newfashioned maid.

Joe was in Speaks's room for quite a while. When he came out, Alice looked at his face and was puzzled. He looked as if he were in a fighting mood. He hadn't, Alice perceived, gained what he had gone after, but it was just possible that he had gained something more valuable.

"What happened, Joe?" she whispered as he came over to her.

With his usual thoughtfulness Joe had closed the door between the other rooms. He looked into Alice's eyes, and Alice saw there was a new light of stubbornness in his own.

"I asked the old miser for a raise, and he wouldn't give it to me," he said. "He told me he had given me a job here because my father had once saved his life. He asked me if I wanted to trade on that in order to get a raise. I told him I should say not. I asked him if he thought I was a parasite. I put a few right over the plate to him, and I don't care what he thinks."

"That's what you need to do, Joe," Alice said, for she liked that stern expression in his usually placid eyes.

"What?" Joe asked.

"To put a few more right over the plate."

Joe grinned.

"With plenty of speed on them," he said.

CHAPTER II.

THE HOLD-UP.

ALICE and Joe were having a spat. A week had passed since Speaks had refused to give Joe a raise and had insulted Joe in the bargain, as Joe repeatedly declared. In that time Joe and Alice had had three spats, one on each of the nights on which he had called on her. Of course, they had made up before Joe had gone home, but both of them had developed hair-trigger tempers in the short time.

Alice, out of the deep, sweet places of her heart, and prompted also, as she thought, by a highly developed business sense, had evolved a plan for their immediate marriage. The plan had been founded on her womanly faith in the man she loved.

She had been shocked that the plan had only made Joe angry. Joe's anger made her angry, so that she did not recognise that his objection was well founded—founded, in fact, on something as fine and precious in him as her faith was in her. It was founded on Joe's pride, and that was not a wilful but a manly pride.

"Joe," Alice had said, "I've figured out a way that will enable us to be married at once."

It was perhaps not a maidenly proposal,

but that was because it was sprung from a maternal feeling which Joe had stirred in her. She felt that he was a boy who needed to be taken in hand. He had gifts, but he didn't know how to use them. He was of fair seeming, honest, and full of stored energy. Alice had an idea that the kind of wife she would make could send Joe rapidly up the pathway of success.

"Well, tell me how," Joe had said.

If she had been looking at him, Alice would have seen that there as a glimmer of suspicion in his eyes. Joe had his own notions about marriage. When he married, he was going to place his wife in a little home and surround her with every comfort. He had come to that decision the more fully the longer he had known Alice. He had taken long walks along the river evenings when he had left Alice and he had thought things out very clearly.

"We can be married right away and can go on working in the bank," Alice had said. "Our joint salaries will give us an income of a hundred and twenty dollars a month. Ample to start with, Joe!"

Then Joe laughed, and Alice lost her temper.

"I know I'm a fool," she said.

"You're nobody's fool, dear girl," Joe said. "But I'm sorry I can't fall in with your plan. Wouldn't I look fine leading you up to the altar and promising to love, honor, and protect you, or whatever it is a fellow promises, and then some fine morning telling you to get a hustle on you or you'd be late for work? When I marry you, I'll be able to provide for you, or I'll never marry you."

It was a rather ambiguous statement, but it was plain enough to Alice.

"You're not very keen about marrying me," she said. "You're just satisfied to go along in the bank and let Speaks pay you what he will."

"Didn't I ask him for a raise?" Joe demanded.

"Asked him, pooh," said Alice.

"How would you go about getting a raise yourself?" Joe asked.

"I wouldn't go to him and say, 'Please, Mr. Speaks, won't you gimme a raise?'"

"Just what would you say?"

"Why, I'd hang a bluff on him. I'd say I'd quit if he didn't give me more."

The spat went on for half an hour, and at the end of it Joe had his arm about Alice's waist and kissed her.

"I haven't got your gumption, Alice, and that's a fact," he said. "But just wait a bit and give me a chance. I'll stir up something."

"I know you will, Joe," Alice said contritely.

"I haven't been in the game very long, you know," Joe said. "I've got a lot to learn. I'm not as competent as you are, you know. Why, I forgot to tell you that when I asked Speaks for my raise he said that if anybody got one it ought to be you. He said you were worth two of me in the bank."

"Oh, is that so?" said Alice, and a gleam came into her eyes.

They had a pleasant hour after that and dwelt in love's dreamland till it was time for Joe to go. When he left Alice he went down to the river and walked moodily along the bank. Gosh, how he wished he could start something.

If you can't start something, the next best thing is to have something started for you. Something was started for Joe that night along the river's bank, but he didn't know it. He wouldn't have profited by it if he hadn't had that habit of his of noticing things.

He was still moody when he turned homeward. Alice's proposal had hurt him more than she could possibly guess. He certainly must be a rank incompetent if his girl thought it necessary to make an offer like that.

When Joe had gone, Alice on her part sat down again and thought things over. So old Speaks was using her for a foil against Joe, was he? Well, she'd show Speaks a thing or two. If she ought to have a raise, she was going to get it.

"By jingoes," she said to herself, "I'll take him up on that. If he calls my bluff, I can get a job at the First National. They'd pay me what I'm getting, at least. I'll find out if what I told Joe is right or not. I'll see how Mr. Speaks will take a little strong medicine.

"It's only ten o'clock. I'll try him now. Why didn't I think of this before? If I can hold him up for a hundred a month, I can save thirty a month more than I'm saving. That 'd be three-sixty a year.

"Not to be sneezed at, for Joe and I will inevitably marry some time. It 'll all be in the firm."

She called Speaks's home on the telephone. Luck was with her. Just as the bell rang, Speaks was sitting on the side of the bed, taking off his shoes. The extension phone was at his elbow.

One shoe on and one shoe off, he answered the call in that dignified way he had. Any one calling him at this time of night would be seeking a favor. Somebody wanting a loan, perhaps. Though he had to make loans if his bank was to continue doing business, Speaks was always icy about them. No borrower ever escaped having it impressed upon him that Speaks was doing him a great favor.

"Mr. Speaks?" said Alice. "Yes? Well, I'm calling you up to tell you that I'm resigning. If you want me to, I'll work for a week while you look about for some one else. Otherwise, I'll not be down to the bank to-morrow."

Speaks squared round to the phone. His eyes had popped out and he opened and closed his mouth twice before he spoke.

"Why, Miss Jones—Alice," he said, "what's the matter? I don't want you to quit. I can't spare you."

Surprise had forced the truth out of him. The suddenness of Alice's attack and the hour had taken him off his feet—and a man's likely to be clumsy when he's taken off his feet with one shoe on and one shoe off.

"Insufficient salary," said Alice. "Insufficient salary, and high cost of living."

"High cost of living," Speaks repeated. "Why, you've been making money, Alice. You've got quite a tidy bank account right now."

"I need more," Alice declared, and there was finality in her tone.

Speaks was too old a hand, so to say, to stay off his feet for long.

"Well," he rasped out, his dignity sneaking back, ashamed at having been scared away, "can't we discuss this matter at the bank in the morning? This is hardly the hour and the manner. We should talk such matters as these over together, face to face, privately."

"That wouldn't do any good," Alice replied, with a dignity which matched his own at its best. "I've made my decision."

Speaks would just as soon, almost, have lost his good right arm as to lose his efficient bookkeeper and stenographer. He rubbed his stockinged foot against the shoe on the other foot.

"Will an increase in salary keep you?" he asked, seeing pretense would avail nothing.

"Of course," Alice replied.

"How much do you want?"

"Hundred a month."

"Great Scott!" Speaks gasped. "That's a thirty-dollar increase."

"That's it," Alice agreed.

"Too steep. I'll make it eighty-five."

"No."

"Ninety."

"One hundred. I can get it elsewhere."

She didn't know that she could get it at the First National, but she felt that when she bluffed she might as well bluff hard.

"Very well," said Speaks weakly, his forehead bedewed with sweat. "A hundred it will have to be. Good night!"

That "Good night" is hardly worthy of an exclamation point. Speaks meant to be emphatic, but he was all out of punches. No mere man had ever held him up like that. It was prostrating to permit a woman to do it.

The banker wondered if there was a conspiracy in the bank. He didn't think it was just a coincidence that both of his employees had asked for an increase in salary almost simultaneously. He'd have to talk to Alice first thing in the morning.

He looked at her suspiciously when he did call her into the rear room immediately on her arrival, but Alice, having gained her point, was altogether demure.

"You haven't said anything to House about that matter, have you?" Speaks asked.

"Certainly not," Alice said.

"He asked me for a raise the other day. I didn't give it to him. Did he mention it to you?"

"Yes."

"That's what prompted you to ask for one?"

"Yes."

"He put you up to it?"

Alice's first impulse was to be angered by the imputation that she was not paddling her own canoe. But she checked the retort that rose to her lips. She saw that Speaks was worried. He could be bluffed. She thought that was a good thing to know. A little later Joe might be able to use the knowledge.

Alice had a feeling now that she had got into a game that was worth playing to the end. The thing for Joe to do was to make himself so invaluable to Speaks that Speaks couldn't get along without him any more than he could get along without Alice. She'd treasure that.

"Oh, no, Mr. Speaks," she said. "He didn't put me up to it. No one put me up to it."

"Well, don't say anything to him about it; particularly, don't say anything to him about how you—you bluffed me. You did bluff me, now, didn't you?"

"I can get a job at the First National at any time," Alice said, her dignity promptly returning. "The cashier told me so."

"You're going to stay here, though, aren't you?" Speaks asked.

"I'm satisfied—for the present," Alice said, and terminated the interview.

She said nothing to Joe about her raise. Indeed, she and Joe talked together very little during business hours, except as Alice initiated him more and more into the mysteries of banks and banking.

At half past eleven Joe put on his hat and coat and Alice put on her hat, and they went out into Main Street together. Speaks took Joe's place behind the wicket. Joe and Alice went to luncheon daily at this hour. Speaks went at half past twelve, when they returned, and returned himself at half past one.

At twenty-five minutes past twelve Joe and Alice came back along Main Street. It was a bright, sunshiny day, and they walked slowly, talking pleasantly and not reverting to the matter which had caused their spats. In fact, Joe thought Alice had definitely given up her plan. There was an air of contentment about her today. Joe even went so far as to congratulate himself on having brought her to his point of view. It was quite a feat, he knew, to switch her to his view-point.

Ahead of them presently Joe noticed a man who wore a cap pulled down over his eyes and a baggy suit of clothing. As Alice and Joe came up to him, he stepped to the side of the walk to let them pass. He gave them a quick, keen look. Alice did not return the look, but Joe, as was his habit, stared into the fellow's eyes.

"Gee, that's a hard-looking customer!" he said. "He's got a face like a ferret's, and blinky eyes. I'd hate to meet him in an alley after dark."

As they crossed the last street west of the bank, a red automobile sped past them. Three men were in it, two in the rear seat and one at the wheel. Like the man on the sidewalk, they all wore down-pulled caps and rumpled clothing.

"What do you think of that?" Joe asked. "Three rummies like those can ride in a car, while we have to walk. Did you notice the face on that driver?"

"I didn't," Alice answered. "Why?"

"Ugliest face I've ever seen," Joe said. "He had a scar on his left cheek just below his eye. He had funny, staring eyes, too."

"You certainly notice things, Joe," Alice said. "Maybe you were born to be a great detective."

"Puh!" Joe laughed, and neither of them knew that Alice had planted a little seed in his brain.

They had come to the bank now, and as they went inside Joe gave Alice's hand a little pat. She certainly was a brick! He'd never have another spat with her.

Alice blushed beautifully and looked at him tenderly. He was so nice—most of the time. If he'd only listen to reason!

They were just due by the bank clock. Immediately upon their arrival Speaks departed.

Alice took off her hat and hung it on a nail behind the door, covering it with a newspaper against the dust from the street. She'd have to be careful of that hat. Probably she wouldn't be able to afford a new one next year.

Joe hung his hat and coat beside Alice's hat and pulled a pair of sleeves over the sleeves of his shirt. He had to save on laundry bills. Dog-gone, he had to save on all kinds of bills, he told himself bitterly as he turned to his work.

Two thousand dollars were to be sent to a bank in the city by express that day, and Joe got the money from the vault.

"Just think of all the money in that vault," he complained, "and here we are as poor as church mice."

"Why, Joe," Alice said, "you mustn't talk like that. That's a terrible frame of mind to get into. It shows covetousness."

"I'm no pig," Joe said. "I only covet about a couple of thousand of it, just about what I've got in these two packets."

"Hush!" said Alice severely.

As Joe returned to his place a man appeared in the street door. Joe glanced at him quickly.

He was the man whom they had overtaken on the sidewalk.

The man paused in the doorway. As he stood there, appearing to be undecided as to whether he would enter or retreat, an automobile stopped at the curb. Three men descended from it.

"There's that red car," Joe said. "Those men are coming in here."

The man who had paused at the door came in. Joe watched him as he advanced to the wicket. The other three men followed him slowly and grouped themselves back of him.

The man stopped in front of the wicket and smiled at Joe. Joe remembered for the first time that he still held the packets of money in his hands. He kept his hands below the counter. He hesitated to put the money where these evil-looking customers could see it. He didn't suppose they really had any crooked intention, but he acted on his impulse to secrecy.

"I was wonderin' if you could cash this check for me," the man said.

He pushed a slip of blue paper beneath the wicket.

At Joe's feet there was a waste-basket. Without knowing just why he did so, Joe dropped the money into the basket. The noise it made as it struck the papers in the basket seemed loud in his ears, but the man outside seemed not to have heard it.

Joe took up the check and examined it.

"Me and my friends find ourselves in a strange town without no funds," the fellow said. "We're on an auto tour, and we need a little ready cash for gas and such expenses."

Joe saw that the check was drawn on a bank in the city. It was for fifty dollars, and was in favor of Thomas Jones, and signed by Henry B. Smith.

"I'm very sorry," Joe said, "but of course I couldn't cash this unless you could get some one here in town to vouch for you. No bank would cash a check for a stranger, you know."

He raised his head and pushed the check back toward the man. The fellow moved an arm as if he intended to lift his hand to take the check. But when the hand came up above the counter it held a revolver.

The muzzle of the revolver was pointed straight at Joe's chest.

"Mebbe you'll cash on this, then," the man said. "Stick up your hands, and stick 'em up damn quick. We ain't got no time to lose."

CHAPTER III.

JOE FAILS TO REMEMBER.

As the first man gave his command, Joe saw the others run through the door leading into the rear room of the bank. In front of Joe there was a drawer with a revolver in it. While he took one deep breath he debated whether he could get that revolver out before the man shot him.

He looked straight into the man's eyes to see whether he could discover any sign of indecision there, but he could not. The eyes were steady and dark with lust. Joe saw that the man would not hesitate to

kill if that would further the purpose of himself and his companions. They were after what money they could swiftly lay their hands on, and they were going to stop at nothing to get it.

"Your hands up—quick!" the fellow ordered, and the muzzle of the revolver moved forward an inch.

Joe put up his hands. He felt a white-hot anger stab through him. He would have given anything almost if he could have struck the weapon from the robber's hand. His fingers itched to close about the man's throat. He'd bet, man to man, he'd give him a scrap worth while.

The other men had come to the door which led from the rear room into the room in which Alice and Joe were standing. They, too, now had revolvers in their hands. One of them leveled his weapon at Alice.

She did not scream. At the command to Joe to throw up his hands she had turned from her work and stood petrified in silence while Joe obeyed. Her petrifaction seemed to extend to her brain. She did not think; she did not feel. As she thought afterward, she scarcely seemed to *be* at all. The whole drama had the quality of some hideous dream.

Then, as the other men moved toward the vault, she had only one fear. That was that the sinister person outside the wicket would shoot Joe. She took one trembling step toward him.

"Just stay where you are," the man who was menacing her with the revolver said. "Stay where you are, and you won't be hurt. But we won't stand no monkeyin'."

Alice put out a groping hand, found the counter, and steadied herself against it.

The two men continued to keep her and Joe covered with their revolvers. Once in a while the man in front of the wicket shot a glance outside. But Main Street was deserted at this noonday time. Customers came to the bank almost never at this hour.

Alice understood that the men must have known that. They had chosen their time well. All their plans had been as carefully laid. Alice could hear the engine of their car still running out at the curb.

The men who now knelt in front of the open vault had brought a bag with them and they began to dump the vault's contents into this. Alice gasped as package after package of bank-notes were transferred from the vault to the bag. What a blow this would be to poor Speaks!

"Hustle," the man outside urged. "We can't stay here all day, y' know. We got to 'getaway' while the gettin's good."

"A little bit more and she'll be full," one of the men inside chuckled. "Boy, but this is easy."

In a moment he snapped the bag shut, and Alice saw that its sides bulged. The two men stuffed their pockets and rose from in front of the vault.

They ran to the outer room where the first man was, and the man who had been guarding Alice followed them. The first man swept his revolver from Joe to Alice in a slow movement.

"We're going," he rasped. "Don't you try to follow us, young fellow, and don't you phone to the police. If you do, we'll come back another time and kill you. Get me?"

"I get you," said Joe, and Alice wondered that his voice was so steady.

She saw that his eyes were traveling from the face of one man to the faces of the others. He was using his habit of noticing things to its utmost now, in spite of threats and peril. Alice was sure that pictures of those ugly faces would be forever graven on his brain.

"Right-o, and good-by," the robber said maliciously.

Without appearance of haste the three men walked out to the automobile and dropped the bag into it. One man took the wheel. The others got into the rear seat.

"No phonin'," the last man said, and he backed out of the door.

As he reached the street, he dropped his revolver into his pocket and leaped up beside the driver of the car. The car started, and passed out of view.

Joe pulled open the drawer and took out the revolver that lay there. He ran to the street door, but the machine was not in sight. He sped back to the phone and snatched the receiver from the hook.

"Joe," Alice gasped, "you're surely not going to telephone. They said they'd come back and kill you."

Joe already had the receiver to his ear and his lips to the transmitter. He reached out a hand to Alice, and she took it and stood close to him.

"Don't you worry, honey," he said. "They'll never come back. That was just a bluff. They couldn't take a chance on coming back. Hello, central! Police headquarters, on the jump!"

He stood holding Alice's hand for a moment, and then he began to speak into the transmitter quietly and without haste:

"Police headquarters? Give me the chief quick, please. Robbery." A pause, and he went on in that same even tone: "Hello, chief. Ironwood Savings and Trust. House, teller, talking. We've just been held up. Four men in a machine. Don't know exactly. Cleaned out the vault. Red car. Went south on the fly. Yes, sir. All right."

He clicked the receiver on the hook, waited an instant, and took it down again. "Main 2698," he said.

While he waited for Speaks to answer he turned to Alice.

"Don't be scared, honey," he said with a smile. "There wasn't anything we could do, you know. Hello, Mr. Speaks. House talking. The bank's just been robbed. Vault cleaned. I've notified the police."

There was silence at the other end of the wire. Then Joe said to Alice:

"I think he's choking to death—from the noises he's making. Yes, Mr. Speaks, I'm still here. Yes, sir, they cleaned the vault. Stop 'em? Good Lord, they had guns on both of us before we knew what was going to happen. Yes, sir. All right."

"Speaks says he'll be right down," he said, turning from the phone. He glanced through the window and saw that no one was in sight. He put his arms about Alice and kissed her.

"I'm sorry you had to go through this," he said, "but I didn't see any way of stopping it."

"I was scared," Alice said.

He released her, and started for the vault.

"Don't touch anything," Alice warned. "You know how suspicious Speaks is."

"That's right," Joe said.

Speaks's house was not far away, and his car stopped out in front within five minutes. He stumbled down from it and staggered into the bank. Breathing like a spent runner, he stopped outside the wicket and stared in at Joe.

"Good God," he cried, just as if he had no information, "what's happened?"

"Sorry, Mr. Speaks," Joe said, "but we've been robbed."

"They've cleaned the vault?"

"Just about, I guess. They took all they could carry."

For a moment Speaks stood staring at Joe stupidly. Then he said:

"In Heaven's name, why didn't you stop them? What did I hire you for?"

"You didn't hire me to be a target for a gunman's bullet," Joe said dryly. "One of them had me covered before I could stir."

"Oh, my God!" said Speaks, and there was as much wo in his tone as if some one he had loved had died.

Walking like a weak old man, he came round into the room where the vault was. He knelt before it, and took out what the robbers had not been able to carry away. He sorted out papers and a few packets of money.

"Robbed," he muttered—"robbed!"

He got heavily to his feet, clutching the money and the papers up to his breast, and staggered into the rear room.

Joe and Alice followed him.

"Don't take it so hard, Mr. Speaks," Alice said. "Joe has phoned the police, and perhaps they will catch the men."

"Joe, Joe," Speaks squealed. "Damn Joe! He came whining to me for a job, and all he's done for me has been to let me get robbed like this. Damn Joe!"

"He did all he could—he did his best," Alice defended.

Joe threw up his head, and Alice saw a blaze of angry light come into his eyes.

"I didn't whine when I came to you for a job, Speaks," he said. "I asked you if there was an opening, and you said there was."

"And you'd been here about a minute when you wanted a raise," said Speaks, who was somewhat recovering himself. "I suppose you still think you have a raise coming to you."

"I don't think anything about it," Joe retorted. "I don't have to stay here. I can get more money cleaning streets than you're paying me."

"Oh, there's the chief's car!" Alice interrupted.

"I'm glad somebody's getting on the job," Speaks snarled.

The chief hastened into the bank. He was not excited. He even smiled at Alice, whom he had known all her life.

"What 'd they get, Speaks?" he asked in his deep voice.

"More than twenty-five thousand dollars," Speaks said. "They took nearly everything that was in the vault."

"They might have taken everything," the chief said. "Cheer up!"

He went into the banking-room, and they followed him.

"Who was in the bank at the time?" he asked.

"Just Miss Jones and myself," Joe answered. "Mr. Speaks had gone to lunch."

"What 'd the men do? Make it brief."

Joe described what had taken place.

The chief sat for a moment in frowning silence.

"What 'd the men look like?" he asked without raising his eyes.

Joe gave Alice a quick glance. She had been watching him, and she saw now that he was cautioning her to be silent.

"Well, everything was pretty much of a blur to me," Joe said. "It happened all of a sudden, and that fellow had a gun pointed at me. You must know how that is yourself, chief. I was busy wondering if he would shoot me."

"Can't you tell me anything about how they looked?" the chief asked.

Joe was silent for a moment, his eyes on the floor. He perceived that the chief was pretty keen. He would be a hard man to deceive.

"I'll pay two thousand dollars for the arrest of the men that did this thing," Speaks announced.

Joe could not repress a start. Two thousand dollars looked as big as the contents of a government mint to him. Why, that much money would put him and Alice on Easy Street.

"Oh," Alice broke out, "Joe saved something for you, Mr. Speaks."

She stooped over the waste-basket and fished out the packets of currency which Joe had dropped into it. She handed them to the banker.

"What does this mean?" he demanded, suspicion glowing in his eyes. "How did these happen to be in the waste-basket?"

"I had taken them out to make up an express package," Joe said. "I had them in my hand when that fellow covered me with the gun. I dropped them into the basket."

"Look here," Speaks said, "this doesn't look right to me. Were you in collusion with those men?"

Joe wheeled round on him. His right fist was clenched.

"Why, you—you—" he ground out.

"Easy, youngster," said the chief. "That won't get you anything. You're making a mistake, Speaks. If he was in cahoots with the robbers, he wouldn't throw money into the waste-basket, would he?"

"Unless he was double-crossing his pals," Speaks said.

"He wouldn't do it," the chief said. "He isn't that kind."

"Just the same, he wants money," Speaks argued. "He asked me for a raise a while ago. I guess he wants to get married."

The chief turned to Alice a humorous glance.

"Well, if it's Alice Jones he's wanting to marry, he's no thief," he said. "Alice wouldn't even let a man like that *want* to marry her. Come, my boy, what did those fellows look like?"

Alice, in astonishment and some dismay, heard Joe give a halting and inadequate description of the four men. She knew that he was making believe. If he had wanted to do so, he could have described the men to the last detail. She didn't understand what he was trying to do.

"Well, you and Alice come down to the office with me and look at our rogues' gallery," he ordered. "It ain't a very extensive gallery, but we got some pictures. Mebbe a short drive in the open air will freshen up your memory."

"It might," Joe agreed.

He turned around to Speaks.

"I'm going with the chief, Mr. Speaks," he said, "and I'll not be back. I don't need a job badly enough to stand for what you've said to me."

"You can suit yourself," Speaks said. "I can get somebody else that 'll do as much for me as you've done."

Joe walked over to where his hat was hanging. Alice came to his side and stood there hesitant.

"We've throwed out a drag-net for these fellows," they heard the chief tell Speaks. "I don't see how they can get away. We've phoned every farmer within a radius of ten miles. The whole countryside will be on the lookout for them."

Joe bent so that his lips were at Alice's ear.

"Remember," he whispered. "Don't tell the chief a thing. If he shows us a picture of one of those fellows, say you don't recognize him.

"I'll feel like a criminal," Alice remonstrated.

"You'll feel like a million dollars if I land that two thousand," Joe said. "Besides, our identifying those men wouldn't help the chief just now. All the roads are watched, but the men may slip through. That gives me my chance. You know you said I ought to be a detective. If those fellows aren't caught to-day, you watch me."

"I'm afraid," Alice said.

"There's nothing to be afraid of. Don't worry."

Alice thought his talk of apprehending the robbers was rather ridiculous. He didn't remotely resemble any detective she had ever read about. He was like an open book.

But, glancing at him, she saw that just now there was a little difference in him. He had an assurance which he had never had before.

"Well, I'll do what you say," she agreed.

"Good girl," he whispered.

"What's all the whisperin' about?" the chief called to them.

"Miss Jones is rather unnerved," Joe said, facing him.

The chief squinted at him.

"That so?" he said. "I never knew she had any nerves."

Joe saw that he would have to be careful. The chief didn't half believe him. It would be bad business if the chief became innoculated with Speaks's suspicion.

"Come along—if you have got Alice composed enough," the chief said.

They went out to his car and he drove them to the station. In his office he summoned a policeman, who took the place of a Bertillon man. The town had not yet arrived at the dignity of having an expert in charge of the rogues' gallery.

"Trot out some pictures, Bill," the chief said. "I want to see if these youngsters can find anybody that looks like the bank robbers."

The policeman trotted out pictures till the top of the chief's table was covered. Joe and Alice looked at them, and shook their heads. The policeman removed them and produced others. Joe felt the chief's eyes on his face.

Joe took up a picture and looked at it keenly. The face that stared out at him was in no respect like the faces of any of the men.

"Now, this one—" he began.

"I thought you'd spring something like that," the chief said. "But you made a bad guess. That fellow is in the pen—been there for the last ten years."

"Now, look here, my boy. If you recognize any of these fellows I want you to say so. There is such a thing as being an accessory after the fact, you know. Bill, show him the Hawley gang."

The policeman took four pictures from an envelope and spread them out on the table. Joe recognized them. They were pictures of the robbers. It was all he could do to repress an exclamation, and he momentarily expected Alice to cry out.

But Alice did not cry out. In fact, she

recognized the men slowly, for their pictures were not so vividly stamped on her memory as they were on Joe's. The slowness of her recognition prevented her from being startled.

Joe felt the chief's eyes on him. He knew he must look at the chief at once and enter his denial. He braced himself to meet the chief's eyes.

But a saving interruption came. The chief's phone rang. He wheeled round and answered the call. For several minutes he listened.

"Well, keep going," he said at last.

"The robbers have abandoned their car," he said. "Our men found it over on the Ridge Road. We'll get those fellows before night. They can't get away. Every farmer in the township is on the job with a shotgun ready for quick use."

"Oh, boy!"

Joe breathed the words. They did not reach the ears of the policeman or the chief. Alice heard them and wondered.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EMBRYO SLEUTH.

THE chief hurried across the room and put on his hat. He seemed now to be wholly absorbed in the telephonic report he had received.

"I'm going out to where those fellows left their car," he told the policeman. "You stay here in the office and answer any phone calls that come in."

"A' right," the policeman said, gathering up the photographs.

The chief had reached the door. There he appeared to remember what he had brought Joe and Alice to his office for.

"Oh, how about those pictures?" he asked.

Joe had been thinking swiftly. He saw no reason for keeping the identification from the chief now. If the chief captured the men, Joe's game was up. If he didn't capture them, an identification would not interfere with Joe's plans.

"Those are the men, chief," Joe said.

"The last four, eh?" the chief said. "I thought so, but I had a notion, youngster, that for some reason of your own you weren't going to say so. I'm glad you came clean.

"I was pretty sure those were the men. We got those pictures from the city just the other day. That gang has pulled off half a dozen of these robberies through the State. This is where they stop for good and all."

He hurried out, and Joe and Alice followed him. In the street Alice laid her hand on Joe's arm.

"I'm so glad you told the truth, Joe," she said.

"So am I," Joe said; "but I did it, I guess, only because it didn't make any difference. I might have kept the identification from the chief if it had served my purpose."

"I don't believe it," Alice said stoutly. "When the right moment came you told the truth, and I think that's what you meant to do all the time."

"Let it go at that," said Joe. "Anyhow, I'm after that two thousand. That's the main issue."

Alice stopped and stepped around in front of her lover.

"See here, Joe House," she asked, "what are you planning? You're not going on some wild-goose chase and rush into danger just because I said you were a born detective, are you?"

"I'm going to get those robbers," Joe declared.

Alice studied his face. She expected to find it flushed with excitement, but it wasn't. In fact Joe seemed to be unusually cool. He smiled down at her.

"You'll just have to leave this business to me, Alice," he said. "I know you're the brains of this firm on most occasions, but I have a hunch now, and I'm going to play it to the limit. If I have to run a little risk I'll run it. You wouldn't have me back out when two thousand dollars are dangling before my eyes, would you?"

"No-o," Alice said, for she saw that argument would be useless. "When shall I hear from you again?"

"I'll be waiting for you at quitting time," Joe promised.

Alice went along to the bank, and Joe

turned down the road which led to the river. It took him in an opposite direction from that in which he had gone when he had sought the river's solitude after his spat with Alice.

When he came to the river he walked along the bank for a quarter of a mile. At the end of the walk there was a cottage on the bluff above him. He climbed the bank and knocked on the door.

It was opened by a big, red-bearded, red-headed man. The man had a fistful of cards, and glancing beyond him, Joe saw that three other men were seated at a table inside.

"Well, I'll be dang-cussed if it ain't Doc House's boy," the man at the door said. "Come in, son, and set down. Is they something I can do for you at last?"

Joe followed him inside and sat down. The men threw their cards on the table and looked at him curiously.

"This is old Doc House's boy," the first man said. "I ain't saw him sence he went away to college. When did you get back, son?"

"A bit ago, Dugan," Joe said. "I've been working in Speaks's bank. It was robbed of twenty-five thousand dollars at noon to-day. Speaks has offered two thousand dollars for the arrest of the men. Do you want to get in on that reward? I've got something up my sleeve. If you'll help me catch the robbers I'll split the reward with you."

"I'd sooner take two thousand dollars from old Speaks than a million from anybody else," Dugan said. "Tell us about it. You can bank on my help even if I don't get a cent out of it."

"I'll split with you," Joe promised, and he leaned forward in his chair and talked for ten minutes.

"It sounds reasonable," Dugan said, when he had finished. "It sure does. When do you want to start, Joe?"

"I'll be back here so we can start as soon as it's dark," Joe said.

"You want to come heeled," Dugan said. "Four bank robbers ain't no nice folks to deal with on a dark night. We may have to do some shootin' and do it darnation quick."

Joe remembered that he had slipped the revolver he had taken from the drawer into his pocket, and he produced it now.

"I'll leave this with you," he said. "Have you fellows got guns?"

"Oh, we got guns," Dugan said.

Joe left the cottage and went back to town. He was standing outside the bank when Alice came out at five o'clock. She looked at him questioningly. Joe smiled.

"Well," Joe said, "I've got my friends rounded up."

"Dear," Alice asked, "what do you mean? Rounded up for what? Are you engaging in some crazy adventure because of what I've said?"

She had worried about him a good deal during the afternoon. He was such a boy that he might hazard anything in a wild effort to get the reward.

"It's not a crazy adventure," he said. "It's got as solid a foundation as any effort to catch a crook could have. The chief is going it blind. I've got my eyes wide open. I know just what I'm doing."

Alice stood looking at him. She saw that a change had come over him. He had evidently been thinking deeply about something, for there was a pucker between his eyes. He wasn't quite so boyish as he had been. Some strong current of feeling was running through him. She perceived that it was not born of excitement but of a definite purpose. It dawned upon her that she must not stand in his way. He had, in some mysterious manner, risen to an emergency, and that was a good deal.

She drew herself up and took a deep breath. Joe's eyes gleamed.

"That's what I've been waiting for, honey," he said. "Just you play the game for a little while and I think I'll show you something."

"I'll play the game, Joe," she promised resolutely.

"I must be going now," he said. "I told my friends I'd be back there by dark. I want to be there by six o'clock, so that they won't have any chance to change their minds."

"Do you really think you have a chance to get that reward?" Alice asked.

"Half of it," Joe answered. "I'll have

to split it with the other men. Yes, I'm pretty sure I'll have a thousand dollars before to-night has passed."

"Well, go to it," Alice said, though she had a shivery feeling inside of her.

She went directly home and sought out her father.

"Father," she said, "you aren't married to your grocery store, are you?"

"Oh, no," her father said.

"Would you sell if you had a chance?" Alice asked.

"I might. Why? Who wants to buy?"

"I'll make a proposition to you," said Alice.

She talked about the grocery store all through the meal.

Meantime Joe had gone back to the cabin. Dugan, who was a fisherman in summer and a trapper in winter, was frying fish in a pan on a battered oil stove.

"Draw up, son," he ordered.

Joe drew up to the table where the other men were seated. Dugan supplied them with fish and coffee and bread.

When they had finished the meal, they sat in front of the cottage till the sun went down.

"Well," said Dugan, "le's go."

They went down the bank till they came to the river's edge.

"Where you headed for, son?" Dugan asked. "That is, if it's any of my business."

"You know where Carson's ravine is, don't you?" Joe asked.

One of the other men laughed.

"Does he know?" he asked. "Why, kid, he can walk down this river bank clean to Lake Erie with his eyes shut and tell you every foot of it. Same with the lake shore for fifty miles east and west. Does he know? I guess!"

"I want to go up the ravine for about twenty miles," Joe said. "Then I want to go halfway up the bank. Maybe you'd better lead, Dugan."

Dugan led for twenty minutes.

"If you're looking for a spot halfway up the bank, the best way is to go to the top of it right here and then climb down into the ravine as far as you want to go," Dugan said then.

"Go ahead," said Joe.

They climbed the bank and started toward the edge of the ravine.

It was a moonless night, and the sky was overcast with thickening clouds, so that under the trees and among the second-growth stuff, the darkness was heavy. But Dugan proved that he knew where he was. He parted the bushes and held them back while the others followed him through them. They gained the brink of the ravine without having made a sound save for a slight rustle and swish as the released branches slipped back into place.

Dugan started down the bank toward the spot which Joe had indicated. There was a big tree at the edge of the bank and its roots were exposed on the slope. One of Dugan's feet caught in a root, and he tumbled.

"Hell," he said, "if them fellows was about I guess they'd think an elephant was after them."

Joe had a thrill of satisfaction. Dugan had spent his life along this river bank and yet he had made a slip. Joe, a novice at this sort of business, had moved as silently as any trained sleuth could have done. He guessed right now that he was, as Alice had said, a detective born. He believed he was getting a start in the kind of work he was cut out for.

Dugan got noiselessly to his feet. He led the way partly down the bank and stopped.

"About here?" he whispered.

"About here," said Joe.

He went down on his hands and knees and felt all about. But there was only the grass-grown bank that he could feel beneath his hands.

"I got a flashlight," Dugan said. "Want to use it? It'd be safe enough. Them fellows won't be showin' up here till midnight. Wherever they are, they won't make a move till then."

"Let's have it," said Joe.

Dugan took the flashlight from his pocket and played its light on the spot where Joe was searching.

"Nothing doing here," Dugan declared. "There hasn't been anybody up or down this bank in a long time. There ain't a

broken twig of a crushed blade of grass. You got to search some place else, son."

"Where would a man be likely to hide anything in here?" Joe asked.

"If it was anything he was goin' to take out in a hurry, he'd hide it down in the bottom of the ravine," Dugan said. "You see, he could come along the river bank and dodge into the ravine and out again in a minute if he knowed just where his stuff was hid. He wouldn't fix it so's he'd have to climb no bank."

"Let's go down there, then," Joe said.

His heart was like lead in his breast now. He perceived that the clue he was following was very slender. Almost anyone might come to the ravine at night. He himself had been near it after his spat with Alice. Dugan and his friends had doubtless been here often. He felt his cheeks burn as he thought of the disappointment he would bring to Alice. Why hadn't he kept his fool mouth shut and not have filled her with false hope. A thousand dollars, indeed! He'd probably wake up in the morning jobless and practically penniless.

At the bottom of the ravine Dugan played his light all about, his trained eyes looking for a sign that the place had been recently visited. To Joe there was no such sign. The traveling light revealed nothing. The bank presented the same aspect wherever the light played.

But suddenly the light stopped and shone on a spot in the bank which a man could comfortably reach with outstretched hands. Joe heard Dugan take a deep breath of satisfaction.

"If I was you, son," Dugan said, "I'd do a little digging just where the light is. What you're looking for may not be there, but some gent has been disturbing things thereabouts quite recent."

Joe reached out and felt the bank. In one place it gave a little beneath his hand.

"Just take it by the hair, and lift," Dugan suggested.

Joe seized a handful of grass and lifted. The sod came away in a square chunk, revealing a hole. Joe thrust his hand into the hole. He gasped. Then, with quick emphasis:

"Dugan," he said, "it's here!"

"Sure it's there," Dugan said. "And a clumsy piece of hiding, too, I'd say.

CHAPTER V.

THE RENDEZVOUS.

DUGAN turned his flash on the suitcase which Joe had dug out of the bank. Joe tried to spring the lock, but it wouldn't spring.

"Never mind," said Dugan. "We can take a cold chisel to it when we get up to my place. You're sure it's the one, son?"

"Positive," Joe answered. "I'd know it any place. I noticed it particularly while those fellows were piling the currency into it."

"How much is there in it?" Dugan asked.

"In the neighborhood of twenty-five thousand dollars if it's all there," said Joe.

"Ch-e-e-e," said Dugan, "an' we got to turn it all back to that ol' stiff Speaks."

"All but two thousand of it. Don't forget that ol' two thousand."

"I'm not forgettin' it," Dugan sighed. "But it's a danged small percentage, I'll say. Well, son, I got to hand it to you for bein' smart. The hull countryside has been huntin' for that swag, an' here you just tumble down a bank and dig it out of the earth. I'd say you had all them farmers and the hull police force backed off the map."

"I'd say so, too," Joe agreed. "Well, I guess it's a kind of a gift with me, Dugan."

"What do you want to do now?" Dugan asked. "What time is it?"

Joe looked at his watch in the light of Dugan's flash.

"Only a little past eight," Joe said. "What time do you think those fellows will be showing up here."

"Not before midnight at the earliest," Dugan said. "They won't be stirrin' till they are sure folks has all gone to bed and the hunt has died down. You can be sure of that."

"I want to take this stuff up to Speaks," Joe said. "I want to get it off my hands. Suppose we leave the other boys here and you and I take it up."

"Le's go," said Dugan. "I want to see that ol' fish gasp when you hand him his jack."

Leaving the three other men to await the return of the robbers if Dugan's calculation as to the time they would show up should prove to be incorrect, Joe and Dugan went out of the ravine and along the river bank till they came to the latter's cottage. Inside Dugan produced a chisel and a hammer and chiseled the lock off the suitcase. Joe took out the money and counted it as Dugan looked eagerly on. One of the packages of currency was broken, so that the total was somewhat under twenty-five thousand dollars.

"They took a little change," Dugan said, "but not enough so's they'd have a roll on them if they was caught."

They left the cottage and went up-town.

"I want to go up to Miss Jones's first," Joe said. "She'll be waiting up for me to see what has happened."

Alice opened her front door in answer to his ring. She stared at the suitcase.

"Joe, you didn't get it," she cried. "You never did."

"You bet I did," Joe said. "I'm on my way now to give it back to Speaks."

"Wait a minute," Alice said. "I'm going with you."

"You don't need to bother, Alice," Joe said. "It won't take a minute."

She got her hat and joined them on the porch, and they went over to Speaks's house.

"I just want to hear what Speaks has to say," Alice said. "I've known him longer than you have, Joe."

As they went up on Speaks's front porch, they could see him sitting in the front room. A telephone was at his elbow and his head was bowed in his hands. He looked the picture of misery. Joe rang the bell, and looking through the window, he could see Speaks lift his head. He sprang up and fairly ran to the door and threw it open.

"Good evening, Mr. Speaks," Joe said. "I've got a suitcase here that you might want to have a look at."

Speaks stared into Joe's smiling face and then his eyes wandered to the suitcase in Joe's hand. His eyes clung to the suitcase in a fascinated stare. He tried to speak, but his mouth opened and closed, "just like a fish out of water," as Dugan said afterward.

"I've got your money, Mr. Speaks," Joe said.

Speaks shivered, and stood there staring.

"Shall I bring it in?" Joe asked.

"Co-come in," Speaks managed to gasp, stepping back from the door.

They entered the hall, and Speaks backed into the sitting-room. He would not turn around, for that would have taken his eyes from the suitcase.

Joe had fastened the suitcase together after Dugan's rough operation on it, but as he put it down on the floor it gaped open, revealing the packages of currency inside. Speaks knelt beside it and grabbed at the packages.

He knelt there for ten minutes, little moans and clucking sounds coming from him as he made a loving inventory of his stolen wealth.

"All here," he mumbled at last. "All here but—"

He held the broken package in his hand and got unsteadily to his feet. Suspicion flared into his small eyes. As he looked at Joe, his thin lips tightened grimly for a moment before he asked in a voice almost as hard and steady as usual:

"Who broke this package?"

"The men who stole the money, I suppose," Joe said. "It was like that when we broke open the suitcase."

"When *you* broke open the suitcase," Speaks snarled. "What right had *you* to break open the suitcase?"

"Well, I was naturally curious to see if the money was all there," Joe said.

"Where did you find it?" Speaks demanded.

"I'll tell you all about it after a while," Joe answered. "The biggest part of the job is yet to be done. We've still got the men to catch, you know."

Speaks glared at him hostilely.

"I guess the men that done it ain't far away, are they?" he asked. "I guess this is a frame-up thing, ain't it? Do you think you can pull the wool over my eyes like this, House?"

Alice expected an outburst of indignation from Joe. Indignation burned in her own heart. This was gratitude for you! But to Alice's amazement, Joe didn't even double up his fists. He only threw up his head and laughed.

"When I bring those fellows in, Speaks," he said, "you'll be convinced they're no pals of mine."

Dugan edged forward.

"You knew Doc House your ownself, Speaks," he growled. "Well, he was a good man. Wasn't he a good man, Speaks?"

Speaks didn't know Dugan—had never seen him that he could recall. But he perceived that Dugan had seen fit for some reason or other to take a threatening attitude. Under his thatch of red hair, Dugan's face was ferocious. His eyes gleamed and his blood was a flood in his face and in his throat. His right fist was swinging at his side like a mallet.

"Why, why," said Speaks, "Dr. House was one of the best of men."

"Which it ain't no very great recommend for him to have you say so," Dugan declared. "Well, you're suspicious a plenty, ain't you? This here boy goes out and finds a lot of kale that has been stole from you, and the best you can find to hand him is the icy glare. Well, lemme tell you, Mr. Speaks: You're goin' to give this boy a square deal, or, by thunder, I'll take it out on you.

"I'll give you what I know about it straight. I s'pose you think mebbe Joe was in cahoots with them robbers. Do you s'pose he'd be luggin' this suitcase back here full of kale if he was in cahoots? Use your brains if you got any."

Dugan rubbed his hand over his eyes and some of the ferocity died out of them.

"You make me mad, Speaks," he said, "an' I get mad danged easy. Years ago my woman was sick down in my cottage by the river. I called Doc House. He come an' set up with her all night, makin' a man's fight to pull her through. Well, he done all any doc could do, but he didn't pull her through.

"He never sent me no bill. He wouldn't let me pay him. So when the doc died, I went to this lad an' I says to him I was a poor man and not much account, but if ever the time come when he needed a lift to call on ol' Dugan an' ol' Dugan wouldn't fail him.

"Well, he called on me to-night, and I was there to help him. We've played out the first ac' of this here drammer and the curtain is about to go up on the second ac'. Soon the hull play will be done. All the part you got in it is to give this boy a square deal. If you don't, so help me Gawd, Speaks, I'll flay you alive.

"An', lemme tell you, they is a lot of other people in this town will feel the same way about it. The ol' doc didn't go round helpin' folks for no bad end. He had friends every place he moved, and this lad has friends that he don't even know about. Come on, Joe, we better be movin'. While we're gone, Speaks, you chew over this fodder I've shoved into your manger."

The banker wanted to tell Dugan that Dugan was insolent, but he couldn't quite summon up the courage. Dugan gave him a final glare, and they left the banker to the contemplation of his restored wealth.

In the street Alice laid her hand on Joe's arm.

"What're you going to do now, Joe?" she asked.

"Catch the robbers," Joe answered.

"Won't it be dangerous?" she asked.

"Not very. Anyhow, I can't quit now."

"Couldn't you let Dugan do it?"

Joe smiled down at her.

"You'd want me to send Dugan into something that I was afraid to tackle myself, Alice?" he asked.

"Oh, no," Alice whispered. "I guess I'm nervous. I'm baffled, too, Joe. I don't see how you're doing this."

Joe might have been forgiven a lofty and mysterious air, but he couldn't put on any side with Alice. Besides, the whole business was too ridiculously simple.

When they reached Alice's house Joe said:

"I believe I'll go in and use your phone, Alice."

Dugan could not be persuaded to go in with them. There was nothing in there that interested him as there had been at

Speaks's, and he was not at home in well-furnished houses.

Alice's father was in the sitting-room.

"I hear you're thinking of going into the gro—" he began.

Alice put a hasty, silencing finger to her lips, and Jones said no more. Joe was so full of his own tasks that his ear was not caught by what Jones had started to say.

He gave the number of the home of the chief of police to central, and presently the chief answered.

"Hello, chief," Joe said. "How's the man-hunt coming along? Yes, Joe House talking. That so? Well, I don't mind telling you that we have restored the stolen money to Speaks. Yes, sir! And if you'll go over to Sparks's and wait there for a while we'll bring the gang to you, I'm pretty sure. Can't tell you that, chief. Must go now. G' by."

He hung up the receiver and turned to Alice.

"If the chief goes to Speaks's he'll go in small pieces, I'm afraid," he laughed. "I think he blew up. Wanted to know if I was kidding him. He was so full of questions that he didn't know which one to ask first."

"Do you mean that you've got a line on that gang, Joe," Jones asked.

"I'm sure of it," Joe said.

"Well, you don't want to go into the gro— What you want to do, Joe, is to start in the detective business."

Joe smiled rather enigmatically. Alice followed him out into the hall, and he took her in his arms and kissed her.

"Be careful, Joe," she pleaded. "You're excited. Don't do anything rash."

"I was never cooler in my life," Joe denied. "And I'll be back here shortly after midnight. Maybe before."

He rejoined Dugan, and they hurried back to the neighborhood of the ravine. Advancing cautiously to the edge of it, they stopped and listened. There was no sound below, and Dugan whistled softly. Joe supposed he was trying to imitate a bird, but it was unlike the whistle of any bird Joe had ever heard. However, there was an answer in kind from the bed of the ravine.

Joe and Dugan slipped down to the bottom, Dugan avoiding the roots of the trees this trip. They found Dugan's three friends huddled up against the far bank.

"Anything stirrin'?" Dugan asked, as he and Joe dropped down beside them.

"Not a thing," one of the men whispered back. "I wisht they'd come. I'd like to mix it to get my blood movin'."

Joe wished now that he felt as cool and confident as the fisherman. Here at the climax of his adventure he found his heart had an annoying habit of beating in the throat. He had to take a deep breath once in a while to regulate his breathing. His lungs seemed to need more air than usual.

Joe had heard of leaden minutes, and the minutes that passed were leaden enough to him. After he thought they had waited several hours he held the face of his watch before his eyes and found that it was but a little past ten. Two hours more! He guessed it would seem like a week.

But it was not like a week. Dugan's forecast that the men would remain wherever they were hidden till midnight proved unfounded. Soon after Joe looked at his watch, Dugan gripped his arm.

"S-sh," said Dugan.

Joe had heard nothing. He strained his ears, but still he could hear nothing. But to Dugan's trained ears a whisper of sound had come.

"Up there," Dugan breathed.

Joe looked up at the brink of the ravine. Dimly he could see moving shapes against the night-sky which showed among the trees. The shapes began to move down the bank directly toward where the five men were sitting.

"Four of them," Dugan said. "Easy work for us. You stand aside, son, and leave them to me and the other boys."

Joe gripped his nerve. This was his expedition, and he wasn't going to let the men he had led on it thrust him aside at this big moment.

"Not on your life," he said. "I want one of them."

He could hear Dugan chuckle and then whisper to the other men:

"Th' lad wants a chance at one of them. Thought he would. You fellows each take

one apiece. I'll stand by to give a hand where it's needed. If that don't suit you, I'll take all four of them."

"They'd eat you up," one of the men said. "I thought you'd be standin' from under, you big four-flush."

"Sh," said Dugan again.

The men came on to the bottom of the ravine. They plunged down the last few steps, evidently feeling themselves secure.

"Where th' hell is it, Chuck?" one of them asked.

"Wait a minute," another voice spoke. "Don't get excited. We got time enough. I'm stiff as a board from layin' in that cave up the river. Damn them farmers, anyways. I didn't think they was so many sod-busters in the hull world. They come from everywheres. Good thing that cornfield was handy. We cer'nly had to hustle some— Well, it was right here we hid the valise."

The men were so close that Joe could have touched one of them if he had put out a hand. He heard Dugan half rise and he followed suit. The men had been groping along the bank, their backs turned. At the slight sound that Dugan made, they stopped and listened.

Dugan's light flashed on them. There were exclamations of fright. The men, bewildered, half turned.

"Now," said Dugan quietly.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ROUND-UP.

JOE leaped for the man nearest him and as he did so he was aware that Dugan's three companions also leaped. Simultaneously with this, the robbers turned fully around, so that Joe sprang straight into the arms of his opponent.

At school Joe had taken a sturdy interest in athletics, and he was no weakling, and he felt that he was in better trim than the man upon whom he launched himself. The fellow had probably led the unclean life of the underworld, and lacked stamina.

But what he lacked in that he made up in bulk. He was no taller than Joe, but he was thicker through the chest and broader of shoulder. Joe was instantly sorry that he had come to close quarters with him. He perceived now that he would have stood a better chance if he had depended upon his boxing skill.

The other men were fighting fiercely, but Joe was not conscious of this. His whole attention was absorbed in the man with whom he struggled. The man fought with the viciousness of desperate rage, and with a full realization of what defeat meant to him.

Clinging close to the fellow, Joe put his right arm about his neck and jerked his left free. His left fist went into the man's midriff and Joe heard him grunt.

"Like that one?" Joe panted. "Here's it's brother."

He tried for the blow again, but the man pressed his body against Joe's and the shortened distance robbed the punch of the steam of the first.

Joe then heard a match struck behind him and the crackle of leaves and twigs as these began to burn. A bright light flared up. Dugan had started a bonfire. He was not one to miss the details of a scrap.

"Shall I paste him one?" Dugan asked eagerly. "A smart rap would take the tucker out of him, and then you could finish him up swift and easy."

"Leave him alone," Joe grunted. "I'll get him."

As the light grew, the robber, his desperation increasing, wrenched his right hand free. The hand went round to the robber's pocket before Joe could grip it. A knife flashed in it as it returned in a half circle. Joe had an instant during which he expected the steel to bite into his flesh. But the blade did not find its mark.

A big, red-haired hand shot out and clutched the fellow's wrist. He emitted a howl of pain as his wrist was twisted. The knife fell harmlessly on the ground and Dugan stooped and picked it up.

"He was goin' to knife you, son," Dugan said. "Give it to him good and hard now. He's tricky, just like I thought, and no good."

Joe felt a rush of honest rage go through him. For the moment the robber was handicapped by the pain in his wrist. Joe

felt him weaken, felt his body give; and Joe exerted all his strength and bent him backward. The robber tripped on a root and they went down, with Joe on top.

"Wallop him," Dugan said. "Wallop him a stiff one."

But Joe knew a better way than that. He seized the robber's left hand with his own right and brought it to the robber's side. Then he turned him over and shot the hand toward the shoulder. The man cried out, tried to twist from the grip, and then relaxed altogether. Whimpers of pain came from him.

"Enough?" Joe demanded. "Or shall I break your arm."

"Fer Gawd's sake, quit that," the fellow beseeched.

Joe stood up, and the man lay still. Joe saw that the three other robbers were lying on the ground with one of Dugan's men bending over each of them.

"Get up, all of you," Dugan said, "and stick your mitts above your heads."

The men obeyed, and Dugan and his companions searched them, taking a knife and a gun from each.

"You travel well-heeled, don't you?" Dugan grunted. "Well, son, it's your party. What now?"

"We'll take 'em up to Speaks's, stopping for Miss Jones on the way," Joe said.

"For'd—march," said Dugan.

They herded the gang out of the ravine and along the river bank. Joe and Dugan walked together.

"Now, look here," Dugan said. "A thousand dollars is more money than I ever see at one time before, and I ain't sayin' I couldn't use my part of it. But it don't seem exactly right. It's too big a divvy."

"What could I have done without you?" Joe asked.

"Well, nothin' much, for a fact," Dugan answered.

"Well, let it go at that," Joe said. "We'll share just as we agreed. At that I'll be hogging half of it."

"If it hadn't been for you, there wouldn't be no hogging to do," said Dugan.

When they came to Alice's home, Joe saw that there was still a light on the lower floor, and he was glad of it. He knew Alice should have been in bed, but he wanted her to view his laurels while they were still fresh upon him.

She opened the door, and cried out at sight of him. No home-coming hero was ever more sweetly welcomed, though Alice could see the men on the sidewalk were staring up at her and Joe. She threw her arms about Joe's neck and kissed him.

"You've got them," she said.

"Safe and sound," said Joe. "Now, you run along and get some rest. The chief will be waiting at Speaks's, and I'll just turn these fellows over to him, and the job will be done."

"I'm going with you," Alice said. "There's a little collecting still to do."

She got her hat, and went down to the waiting group. When they arrived at Speaks's they could see the banker and the chief sitting in the front room.

"Wait here," Joe said to Dugan, and he and Alice went up the steps.

When he rang he saw the chief jump from his chair and run to the door.

"Howdy, chief," Joe said. "I've got the bank robbers down here. Like to have a look at them?"

Joe had expected the old chief to show excitement, but the chief only looked calmly past him at the group below, and said quietly:

"Oh, I wouldn't mind. You might bring 'em in."

Joe gave him a rather blank stare. The chief was certainly a matter-of-fact sort of person.

"Bring 'em up, Dugan," Joe said.

Dugan brought the men up on the porch, and the chief stepped away from the door.

"Come right in, gentlemen," the chief said. "You are welcome in our midst."

The crestfallen robbers stepped into the hall, and the chief went into the other room and beckoned them to follow him. Joe and Alice and the other men brought up their rear.

Speaks seemed to have recovered himself. There was a sneer on his lips as he impartially surveyed the robbers and Dugan's party.

"I didn't know there were so many of them, House," he said. "You said four

men robbed the bank. I see you've got eight."

"You big stiff," said Dugan, and he came around the group.

"Easy, Dugan," said the chief.

Alice faced Speaks then. Joe looked at her. Her eyes were sparkling and her cheeks were redder than usual.

"Mr. House is here to collect the reward of two thousand dollars, Mr. Speaks," she said.

"What reward?" said Speaks with lifted brows. "I don't know what you mean."

"Don't you?" Alice asked sweetly. "You offered a reward of two thousand dollars for the arrest of the men who robbed the bank."

"I said something like that, I guess," said Speaks. "But I was excited."

"You're not going to pay the reward?"

"A man doesn't pay a reward to an employee," Speaks declared. "When I hire a man, I hire him for all there is in him. House ought to be mighty glad he caught these men. Things didn't look any too good for him. There were a great many suspicious things about this business, and there still are. Does a boy like him go out and catch a gang of crooks as easy as this without having previous knowledge of their movements?"

Joe walked up in front of Speaks. This was his big minute. He was feeling so good that he smiled down on the banker.

"I'll just tell you how I caught those fellows, Mr. Speaks," he said. "You see, I've always had a habit of noticing things that most people don't notice. I've got a great memory, if I do say it myself. I can take one look at a man and pick him out in a crowd a year later. It's a kind of gift, I guess.

"Well, I've got a gift for detective work, I think. Miss Jones has remarked about that. I believe I'm cut out for that kind of work. As for my being an employee of yours, that's all rot. I ceased to be an employee of yours this afternoon, and you know it. I quit. You're going to pay me that two thousand. I'm going to divide it with the men who helped me make these captures, and then I'm going to the city and open a detective agency."

"Pooh, old sleuth," the banker scorned him. "How did you know where to look for the money and the gang?"

"Easy enough," Joe smiled. "The other night I was down by the river, trying to figure out a few things. I've had a good deal on my mind lately. I was down by the ravine where we found the money to-night, and where we caught the men.

"Just as I was about to leave, I saw a light in the ravine. I watched it for quite a while. To-day when I heard that the men had abandoned their car to escape on foot, I knew that they were headed for the ravine or for some spot near by. I—"

"You said to yourself that those men had picked out the ravine as a good place to hide their suit-case if they were forced to do so," Alice broke in. "When the robbers' escape was cut off, you figured that they had made that light in the ravine the other night. They had been down there looking things over so that they would know the lay of the land. You—"

"Alice, you're stealing my stuff," Joe reproved her.

"So you got Mr. Dugan and his friends and went down to the ravine," Alice went on imperturbably. "You hunted around till you found a place where the bank had been disturbed, and you dug up the suit-case. The thieves had got to the ravine and hidden the money when they found themselves surrounded. If they were caught and served their sentences, they would have a chance of recovering the money when they were freed.

"So that their presence near it wouldn't betray the hiding-place, they went up the river and hid somewhere else. When they thought the search for them had been abandoned for the night, they came back to get the money. You and your stanch allies were there and captured the robbers."

"Gee," said Joe, "how did you know all that?"

"It's as plain as a pikestaff," Alice laughed.

"It was just a case of putting two and two together," the chief contributed.

"Well, I didn't see you or any member of your whole darned force putting any two and two together," Joe flared out.

"We didn't have the first two," the chief said dryly. "Nobody but you saw the light in the ravine. As a rule, a policeman hasn't time to go mooning along the river bank at night."

"Who said I was mooning?" Joe demanded.

"You were trying to figure out a way to make more money, so that you could marry Alice," the chief declared. "You boned Speaks for a raise, and he wouldn't give it to you. You just had to have more money."

"Yes, and I'm going to have it," Joe said angrily. "Come through with that two thousand, Speaks. You've got it in the house."

"The men haven't been convicted yet," Speaks said. "I said 'for the arrest and conviction.'"

"You're a liar by the clock," Joe asserted. "You said 'for the arrest.'"

"If I were you, Mr. Speaks," Alice interjected, "I'd pay that money—right now. I'm no longer working in your bank. I quit a minute or two ago. To-morrow this town will be all excited about the way Joe got your money back and caught the robbers. Nobody's going to say he had the first two and the second two was easy to get. They're going to say he did a dangerous piece of work and did it in a fast, clean way. I guess even the city newspapers will have a story on this. Maybe the newspaper men will want to know why I quit my job. A well-placed hint might make them curious.

"Am I going to say that I quit because Mr. Speaks promised to pay a reward for the capture of the robbers and then wouldn't do it? Am I going to say that Joe quit because you were unjust to him? Joe will be pretty popular, I'm thinking. I guess a story like that wouldn't make for your own popularity and wouldn't do your own bank any particular good."

"Well, what're you quitting me for, Alice?" Speaks asked.

"Joe and I have other plans," Alice replied. "We're going to capitalize what we've got."

Speaks sat in silence for some minutes, twisting his fingers together, his thin lips puffed out. At last he rose and went into the room off this one. He came back with two packets of the currency in his hands. He handed them to Joe.

"There's your money," he said. "I'd say it's the easiest money you've ever earned."

Joe handed one of the packets of money to Dugan and put the other in an inside pocket.

"Makes you feel like a millionaire, doesn't it, Dugan?" the chief grinned. "Well, I guess you can work a little overtime without no extra pay. You can help me get these fellows to the station."

"Sure, chief," Dugan said heartily, for the money made a comfortable lump in his pants-pocket.

"Come, Joe," Alice said. "Good night, Mr. Speaks."

"You'll be at the bank in the morning, Alice," Speaks pleaded. "You'll reconsider this?"

"I'll come and help you for a week till you get some one else," Alice said. "At the end of a week I must be free. Joe and I are going into business."

"Business?" Speaks repeated. "What business?"

"The grocery business," Alice answered. "Joe's going to buy my father's store."

"With my money," Speaks lamented.

"We'll have a first-class store," said Alice. "You can trade with us."

Joe opened the door for her, and they passed out, while the chief made a precautionary search of his prisoners.

"What's this grocery stunt?" Joe asked in the street.

"Father says he will sell his business," Alice said. "He'll take whatever you can pay in cash and give you plenty of time on the balance. You're going to do it, if you love me. I don't doubt that you would make a detective, but do you think I'm going through another night like this, wondering and worrying about you? Indeed, no. Besides, if you were to go around the town to-morrow and announce that you were going to become a great detective praise would turn to ridicule.

"Oh, Joe, you've got the world by the ears if you play your cards right. Be meek, Joe. Be meek! When they praise

you to-morrow, just say it wasn't anything. Say you were lucky. Give Dugan and his friends the credit. Dugan will turn it back to you. If you do, everybody in this town will be your friend for life.

"You have a habit of noticing things, Joe. Use it in our new business. Notice people. Notice their likes and their dislikes. Notice their whims, even. Do that, and run a good store, and we can't lose."

"Where do you get all this stuff?" Joe asked.

"I'm a business woman through and through," Alice announced proudly. "When I get through at the bank, I'm going into the store with you. I'm going to keep your books and help you out generally, at least till you're firmly established. You'll do it, won't you, Joe?"

"On one condition," Joe said.

"What's that?"

"That you'll marry me the day after you quit the bank."

"We-l-l," said Alice dubiously, "you said once you wouldn't let me work after we were married."

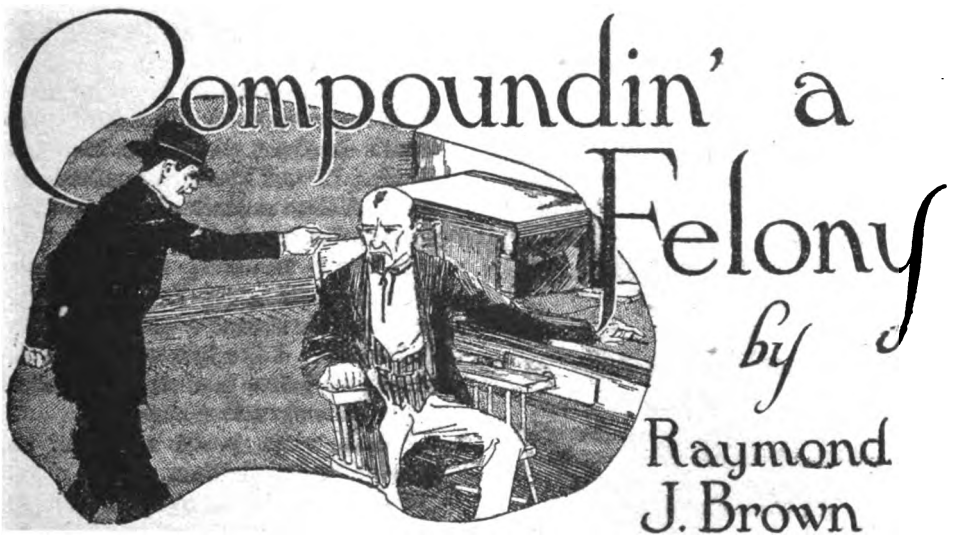
"I'll stand for it for a while," Joe said.

"Oh, my dear," said Alice, having had her way.

She put her arms about Joe's neck and kissed him lavishly. But even while their lips met, Joe was saying to himself:

"But it'll be a darned short while, or I'm a poor judge. She'll have to choose between the store and her home before long, and I'll make a little bet that the store will be a dog-goned poor second. I'll surprise her by the way I'll run that store on my own hook—after I've grabbed off all the good ideas she's got."

(The End.)



THINGS hadn't been what you might call boomin' in our line for a month.

If you looked into our office without happenin' to see the sign on the door which advertised it as the Giles Confidential Detective Agency, Investigations Quietly Conducted, Rates Reasonable, you'd have thought the place was a very select but flourishin' gamblin' den. There was me and Ed Taylor over in one corner gamin' feverish in a Marathon pinochle contest for the high stakes of five cents a thousand points. There was the boss, Horace P. Giles, busy as a one-man barber shop on a Saturday night tryin' to cheat himself at the noble indoor sport of patience, makin' false moves and cussin' bitter every time the thought occurred to him that office rent, telephone bills and wages for me and Ed went right on even though there was nothin' stirrin' in the way of clients and cases.

I guess me and Ed were well into our five hundredth game, me bein' the winner by some six bucks for the whole league season,

when the boss one day put aside the ingrown habits and established customs of a lifetime—he got an idea. Bein' as how this was somethin' entirely new and unusual, it wasn't surprisin' that the idea wasn't the kind that would have taken a prize in college. Also it wasn't any spasm of particu'ly heavy thinkin' on his part that caused it; he got it out of a newspaper. Wait till I tell you.

He comes trampin' into the office one mornin' with a grin on his face like all his troubles was over. I'm there alone waitin' for Ed to show up so's the merry round of gamblin' can continue. The boss omits his customary mornin' observations about the state of the weather, the crowds in the subway and the quality of his night's sleep, rushes up to me, hands me a wallop on the back and spreads out his mornin' newspaper.

"Look!" he bids me.

I let my eye wander to the place he was indicatin' on the newspaper and read:

$1,000 REWARD!

The above reward will be paid to any one furnishing information leading to the return of a sum of money stolen from the

FARMERS' SAVINGS BANK
Mountain Glen, N. J.

On the night of

APRIL 14

An additional reward of

$500

Will be paid for further information which may lead to the arrest and conviction of the person or persons who committed the theft.

EMORY HANKINS
President

"Well?" I ask when I'm finished readin'.

"I was just thinkin'," says the boss, "that that fifteen hundred would come in pretty handy about now when things are slack."

"Fifteen hundred would come in handy any time," I tell him, "but I don't see—"

"You don't!" exclaims the boss. "Why, we might as well have the dough in our pockets! You just go out there to Mountain Glen, solve the mystery, arrest the crooks, get the money back, collect the reward and—and—well, I guess that's about all there is to it!"

"Oh, is it!" I remark. "Your idea's in every way worthy of you—especially that part about *me* goin' out there and doin' all the work. And while I'm runnin' to earth the crooks who tapped the strongbox of the Farmers' Savings Bank," I question, "what'll you be doin'—and Ed Taylor?"

"Oh," he says careless-like, "we'll look out for things in the office."

"And when the reward's been collected, what—"

"Why," says the boss, "I'll give you and Ed a fair share of the reward, of course."

"Kind of you!" I grunt. "'Specially since I'm the boy who's delegated to do all the heavy liftin' and haulin'. It ain't possible you had any notion of workin' on this bank robbery yourself, is it? *I* could take care of the office while you and Ed—"

"You're the man for the job," the boss tells me.

"Man for—blazes!" I bark at him. "I don't know no more about bank robberies than I do about playin' the French horn! Besides, I'll bet I've seen a million dollars' worth of them rewards offered, and I've yet to meet the guy that collected one! Why, even if you was lucky enough to get this rube bank its money back, the only way you'd get the reward would be by robbin' it over again! I like jobs where you can see the dough before you start—not the kind where it's only talked about!"

"Well, while you're not doin' nothin' here—" begins the boss.

"Who ain't doin' nothin'? Playin' pinochle with a hard-boiled egg like Ed Taylor's work enough for anybody!"

"But it'd be like a vacation for you," objects the boss. "I got a kind of a hunch, Joe, that you could clean up this bank robbery case. It won't cost you a cent. I'll pay all expenses, and—"

"Oh!" I say. "That's different! Now that you mention it, I *have* been feelin' kind of punk lately, and maybe a few days in the country—"

"Here's fifty bucks to start you off," says the boss, producin' five tens from his pants pocket. "Go right over to Moun-

tain Glen. It'll be just rube cops you're up against, and if you don't bring home the bacon—"

"This is one of the most interestin' cases I ever heard of," I say, pocketin' the fifty and movin' for the door before the boss can convince himself he's give me too much expense money. And, as I thought the situation over, it struck me as bein' not so bad as it might be.

I had half a century out of the case anyhow, for the boss couldn't have got any of that fifty out of me now with a can opener. And who could tell?—an up-to-date feller like myself, a slick talker, might be able to sandbag them rube bankers into payin' him just to take up the case. Besides, there was always the matter of the reward. I'd have bet on my ability to collect that, if I earned it. Also, the boss's generous offer to split the reward with me went for Sweeney. It was me that would do the splittin' and accordin' to my own notions of arithmetic—no fifty-fifty stuff.

When I mentioned Mountain Glen I suppose you pictured a nifty little kind of summer resort place, with green trees and mountains, cute little brooks, a nice lake and a hotel which advertised "boatin', bathin', and fishin'; no fog, no mosquitoes; best table in the mountains." You're wrong! Mountain Glen was about as attractive as the northern part of Siberia. It wasn't even on a branch line. Your only chance of reachin' it lay in three trains that didn't connect and a flivver ride with a rustic youth who could have learned the cheatin' business to any taxi bandit that ever nighthawked on Broadway.

The place looked like it had started off brave enough to make a real town out of itself, but had got discouraged at the fearful odds against it and laid down to die. There wasn't a house in it that looked a day younger than thirty years. There was only one street that amounted to anything, and that didn't amount to much—a general store and post-office, a couple of churches, a livery stable and feed store, a town hall with school up-stairs and—the savin's bank. The rest of the town had kind of wandered off and got lost like the Babes in the Woods.

As banks go, that Farmers' Savin's Bank was some institution! I thought it was a dog pound until I read the sign over the door. One story, about eighteen foot square and built of wood like one of those suburban land-shark offices. The windows were barred with a brand of cagin' that wouldn't have imprisoned a good active parrot. Two strong men could have h'isted the whole bank onto a one-ton truck and run away with it. The wooden storm door at the front was open when I arrived in front of the buildin', and, on the glass door that led into the bank, I read in gold letters:

FARMERS' SAVINGS BANK

EMORY HANKINS, President
Mayor, Justice of the Peace
Notary Public, Commissioner of Deeds
Loans on Bond, Mortgage and Personal Property
Railroad Tickets, Press Correspondent
Orders Taken for Feed, Coal and Wood
Building Contractor, Manufacturers' Agent

Honest, there was so much letterin' on that door that the inside of the bank was dark! I stood there admirin' the display for a full minute and wonderin' how any guy with so many lines of graft as Emory Hankins was content to spend his days and waste his talents in a deserted village like Mountain Glen.

As I studied the thing out, the explanation come to me, and it was also the explanation of Mountain Glen's stunted growth and general air of bein' the Town that Went Wrong—this Emory Hankins, a million-dollar guy in a jitney settlement, had hogged everything in the burg from which coin could be taken, puttin' his feller citizens and the town as a whole on the hog, but raisin' Mr. Emory Hankins up to the point which is commonly spoke of as "commandin' the respect of the entire community." I wasn't a bit surprised when I turned around and found Emory's name over the general store and the livery stable.

Mountain Glen? Mountain Glen—me Sunday hat! The name of the place ought to have been Hankins's Hangout!

"Well, Emory, old kid," I think as I push open the door of the bank, "you may be the Babe-Ruth-long-bingle boy in this league, but you're about to go up against a

smart city feller. Let's see how you shape up in fast company!"

Emory's general make-up and armament live up to everything I expected. He's a hawk-eyed, polly-nosed old bird of about sixty, with a set of General Grants sproutin' on his chin, an undertaker's suit and the first set of congress gaiters I'd seen since grandpop died. He was no less than seven-foot tall and no more than one foot wide. Even before I spoke to him I could picture him foreclosin' mortgages, shavin' notes, callin' loans and singin' hymns in tenor through his hooked bugle; all with the same degree of unemotionness.

"Well, young man?" he asks me, lookin' up from a pile of yellow backs he'd been countin' with lovin' fingers.

"Mr. Hankins?" I ask him back.

He's not generous even with the nod he gives me.

"Conner's my name," I tell him. "I'm a detective—from New York City." Then I pause a second so this can sink in. "That dough your bank lost," I go on, "a real good sleuth might be able to get that back for you."

"Think so?" he asks.

"If you'd care to have me take up the case?" I question him.

"Certainly! Certainly!" he says absent-minded-like, turnin' away and startin' to count his money again.

"It wouldn't be very expensive," I go on. "Ten a day and expenses would cover everything—"

"Hey? Hey? What's that?" he demands sharp-like, lookin' up from his dough.

"I said I was willin' to take up the case for ten a day and expenses."

"Ten a day?" he repeats puzzled-like. "Ten—dollars?"

"It's a special rate—to you," I tell him. "I gen'ally get twenty, but—"

"You want me to pay you to—"

"Sure!" I grin. "I don't know how much they got you for, but ten a day is pretty cheap for—"

"But I've already offered a reward," he objects.

"Yeh, I know, Mr. Hankins," I say confidential-like. "But you and me, we happen to be business men. We know them rewards—"

"If you'd like to try for the reward," he says, "of course, I can't object, but, so far as making any other arrangements is concerned, why, the bank is in no position to offer you anything that would be worth your while."

"Oh!" I say. "Like that, eh?"

"I'm sorry you came all the way from New York—" he begins.

"Oh, that's all right!" I tell him. "Now that I'm here I'll work on the case anyhow, but I just thought—"

"Out of the question!" he snaps.

"You frosty old tightwad!" I say to myself. But I grin at him and ask:

"How much did the bank lose, and how was the robbery done?"

"A little more than eight thousand dollars," he tells me. "The thieves entered through that window there." He points to one of the side ones. There's new glass in it and new chicken wire on the outside.

"Didn't require any burglar to do that," I comment.

"It was from our vault that the money was taken," Hankins goes on.

"Vault!" I exclaim, lookin' around the place. There was an overgrown office safe stuck over in one corner, model of about 1880. It was prettied up with new black paint and new gold letters, but, if that was a vault, then I'm a United States Senator!

"Yes," nods Hankins, verifyin' my worst fears by pointin' to said safe. "You'll observe, young man, that it has been repaired since the robbery. The thieves dynamited it—blew the whole door off and destroyed the locks of the inner compartments—but I've had extensive repairs made, and the vault is now more secure than ever. In fact," he says, swellin' up, "I venture to say that a sight of our vault would frighten away any thief who might—"

"Must have been a tough job—blowin' off the door of that pie box!" I observe. "Any feller that had been practisin' with tomato cans for a while, though, ought to be able to do somethin' with it at that! But gettin' down to cases—did the thief leave any clues? Ain't the local cops been after him? How did he get into town and

out without bein' seen? Could it be any crook from right here in Mountain Glen who—"

"There are no dishonest people in Mountain Glen!" he interrupts in a touch-me-not manner. "As for the rest of your questions—the bank was robbed by one man, described as a burly brute of superhuman strength. As to local police, we have none. The county prosecutor has assigned his detectives to the case, but thus far their investigation has been fruitless. The thief came here and escaped in an automobile. He—"

"How do you know all that?" I asked him. "It seems to me if you have a description of the man and know he made his getaway in a car, you got a lot of good dope to start with and—"

"A plagued fool, a doddering old imbecile furnished the information we have," breaks in Hankins. "Think of it, young man," he bids me, swingin' one of his long arms around like a travelin' crane and pointin' his finger at me, "to have the thief in his very hands—under lock and key for that matter—and then to permit him to escape!"

"Hah!" I gasp. "What's that you're sayin' about the thief bein' locked up and—"

"He was under lock and key in our town prison and a weak-minded, crack-brained idiot let him escape."

"Who—say, start at the beginnin', won't you?" I ask him.

I'm beginnin' to get interested in this bank robbery. Most of the cases that private detectives like myself get mixed up in are about as thrillin' as ridin' on a horse-car. This one, though, sounded like a movie—the bank robber, "a burly brute of superhuman strength," slidin' into town in his racin' machine, dynamitin' the local bank, landin' in the village hoosegow, breakin' his way out and then off in his bus with eight thou to show for his night's work! Pretty good, I'd call it; especially when it happened in a forgotten town like Mountain Glen.

"Well," said Hankins, blinkin' his foxy old eyes as if to refresh his memory, "in this town is an old fool named Jud Nelson. He's no good to himself or anybody else, and ain't been in years. He used to be our town constable. It was a charity job, because the town never needed a constable. This bank robbery is the first criminal case that I ever remember occurring here. Anyhow, Jud was the constable, and he remained constable because nobody ever had gumption enough to fire him. Got a hundred and fifty dollars a year, too!" he growled. "Think of it—a hundred and fifty dollars a year for twenty years! Why, the man has had around three thousand dollars from the town!"

"That's awful!" I agree. "Especially when you think that in these days it takes a good mechanic almost two months to earn that much!"

"A weak and foolish town council," goes on Hankins, "even built Jud a prison. That was fifteen years ago. Jud, being a simple fool, took a great pride in the prison. He painted it, swept it out every day, kept the lock oiled; had it ready always for his prisoners—and the first prisoner he got, he let escape! Well, Jud's getting into his dotage. He's a man about as old as I am, but, of course, he's nothing like me. A year or so ago he began to annoy the town council with requests that it build him a larger and better prison. Not only that, but the selfish old fool, not satisfied with the hundred and fifty dollars a year he was getting from the town, began to pester me asking me to make him watchman at the bank and pay him for it.

"Well, being the mayor, I just fired Jud. I guess he's sorry now; he's had a pretty hard time of it getting along since he lost his job. There ain't many things a man can turn his hand to at Jud's age, and he's got his wife to look out for, too. She ain't much help to him, being a kind of invalid. You'd think a man like Jud would have sense enough to know what side his bread's buttered on and—"

"Sounds like he ain't had much bread to butter of late," I break in, bitin' my tongue to keep from tellin' this old skinflint what I think of him. Can you imagine—firin' an old guy with a sick wife because he "annoys" certain people by showin' an interest in his job!

"But if this Jud person ain't the village bloodhound no more," I object, "how is it that he—"

"Oh, the old fool's always around places where he ain't supposed to be," barks Hankins. "The night of the robbery he couldn't sleep, or something like that, and he was walking around near the bank when the vault was dynamited. Ever since he was first appointed constable he's carried a revolver. When he heard the explosion, he rushed into the bank, held the robber up at pistol point and marched him to the town prison."

"A game old bird!" I comment.

"Jud locked the man up in the prison, and then, instead of firing his revolver to summon help, he strutted around the town like the vain, empty-headed old incompetent he is and, by the time he'd informed anybody of what happened, the robber had broken his way out of jail and escaped."

"Well," I say, as he finishes, "it strikes me that Jud had the right idea at that—the bank certainly needed a watchman and the town certainly needed a new lock-up!"

"Rubbish!" snorts old Hankins. "Any other man but Jud—any man with common sense—"

"—would have run like blazes when he saw the yegg in the bank!" I finish for him. "It seems to me, old timer, that, while friend Jud was constable, he was the right man in the right place. I don't mind tellin' you that I think you pulled a fine bobble when you fired him."

"What!" he screams, unwindin' his bean pole of a body and standin' up to glare at me. "You dare to come here and dictate to me! You have the nerve to—"

"Aw, behave, grandpa!" I tell him. "What I'm sayin' is right; if it wasn't it wouldn't make you sore. You're eight thousand out, because—but I'll hand you that later!" I promise him. "One thing I'm goin' to tell you, though, Mr. Emory Hankins, and that is that if I land the guy that robbed your bank, you're goin' to come across with that fifteen hundred—every cent of it! The reward ain't goin' to be paid in no Mexican money in this case!"

With that I'm out of the bank. I didn't dare stay there another second for fear of openin' up on banker-manager-judge-notary-public and the rest of it Hankins. The more I thought of it, the worse his smooth way of tellin' about firin' the old guy with the sick wife struck me. I got some things in my record that I wouldn't want published in the newspapers, but makin' an old man and a sick old lady dependent on odd jobs in a town where there wasn't none—there's sometimes I'm almost sympathetic with certain kinds of murderers!

It wasn't hard to find Jud Nelson. He was manicurin' a grass plot in front of one of Mountain Glen's mansions. Jud was a skinny, little, sad-lookin' gent, and, after what I'd just heard about him, I didn't blame him. He looked about ninety, and the clothes he wore weren't serviceable at all as camouflage. His costume was a pair of denim breeches and a tailed coat that prob'ly one of the parsons had presented him with. His hair was white, and looked like it hadn't been clipped in a year. He had a long nose, a big gash of a mouth, no chin at all and scared-lookin' blue eyes.

No whiskers or other kind of brush did he have to disguise the half-starved look that his thin, pale face gave him. If I'd never heard anything about him I'd have felt like rushin' up to him, handin' him four bits and beggin' him go and eat.

"How are you, officer!" I greet him.

That "officer" pleased him.

"Howdy, stranger," he comes back with, lookin' up from his scythe and grinnin'.

"I'm Joe Conner, a detective," I tell him. "I'm lookin' for some dope on the bank robbery."

He stands up and gives me a scared look.

"The bank robbery?" he kind of stutters. "You want to know about the bank robbery?"

"Sure!" I say, grinnin' friendly. "As the man who captured the yegg red-handed, you're certainly the one to tell the story!"

That pleased him, too.

"There wa'n't much to it," he says, wipin' his forehead with his sleeve. "I hear the powder charge go off, run up to the bank and find the man robbin' the safe. I pull my gun on him. 'Hands up!' I say. Then I put him in the jail. I leave him

there while I go to call some of the boys and, when I come back, he's knocked the door of the jail down and he's gone. I told Em Hankins we ought to had a new jail," he complains. "If we had the kind of a jail I wanted, the man wouldn't 'a' got away."

"Hankins told me all about you and him," I tell him.

"Queer man, Em!" he says, shakin' his head. "Very queer! He ain't treated me none too good. Went to school with Em, I did. Smart man, Em. Made lots o' money. But he's queer. Oughtn't to 'a' treated me like that. Fired me out o' the job. That was wrong; robbery shows it. The town needs a constable; the bank needs a watchman. He won't hire me again even now. Bad for the old lady," he says, blinkin' his eyes and shakin' his head. "A feller can't make much this way," he tells me, pointin' to the lawn with his scythe. "It's hard now that we're payin' rent—"

"Payin' rent?" I ask him. "Didn't you always pay rent?"

"No," he says. "We had a little place of our own, the missus and me. Ain't got it no more, though. Queer of Em what he done about the house."

"What did Em do about the house?" I asked, already suspectin' what it was.

"Had it almost paid for," said Jud. "I couldn't pay much, though, after I lost the job as constable. Em's got the house now. You see, he had the mortgage, and when I couldn't pay—but I guess it's my own fault. I wouldn't have took that job of constable if I hadn't thought it was goin' to be steady. It kept me from takin' up anything else. I haven't got any trade, or business or anything; only this." He waves the scythe kind of weak-like. "Hard to make a livin' this way," he says, "very hard."

I ain't what a feller could call soft. Hard-luck stories and such usu'lly don't make much impression on me, but this poor, skinny, half-starved-lookin' old geezer got me. I felt a big lump in my throat, and the sun began to hurt my eyes. I step over and pat old Jud on the shoulder.

"Old timer," I tell him, "cheer up. Things have been goin' so bad for you it's pretty near time you got a break. You're a game old guy, I'll say! I'm goin' after this bank robbery case like a hungry bird after a worm and if I clean it up you're in on the loot! Tell me now, somethin' about the man that robbed the bank."

Old Jud scratches his head for a second as though tryin' to remember.

"He was a big man," he says at last, "you might say a giant. He had a long black beard and—and—that's all," he finishes.

"A giant with a long, black beard," I repeat. "How was he dressed?"

"All in black. He had a black bag, too."

"Didn't you get the bag?" I ask him.

"I was goin' to," says Jud. "I ought to, but I guess I forgot it. I was kind of excited, you see. I'd waited twenty years for a prisoner and this one kind of scared me. I just locked him and the bag into the jail and, when I got there, the bag and him was gone."

"Hankins told me he had an automobile," I suggest.

"It was right behind the bank. I ought to 'a' punctured the tires or somethin' but I forgot that, too. I was excited. The automobile wasn't there when I got back. He must 'a' got away in it."

I sat down under a tree until Jud finished clippin' the lawn. After he'd got the two bits he'd made by what must have been almost a whole day's work for him, I took him by the arm and asked him to take me to the town lock-up.

Some lock-up! No wonder Jud had asked the town fathers to build him another!

You know those mail-order garages, the ones they ship to you in sections to keep the flivver in? Well, alongside of the Mountain Glen town jail, any one of those was the Tower of London! It was just a shed. It didn't even have the imitation barred windows that the savin's bank had. I guess the idea when they built it was that old Jud could patrol the ground around it with his trusty six-shooter in his mitt, thereby stiflin' in any prisoner the very natural desire to escape.

At that it was the best-cared-for buildin' in Mountain Glen. It had been painted bright green—some color for a jail—not more than a few months before. Jud told me it was his own lovin' hands that had

done the paintin' and that he'd paid for the paint with his own dough.

There was only one door in it—at the front. That is to say, there had been a door on it, but the yegg Jud had imprisoned there certainly had made short work of that door! The whole inside of the doorway was covered with green splinters. The hinges were twisted on the frame, and the lock lay on the ground outside the door in a thousand pieces.

"For the love of Mike!" I exclaimed when I saw it. "What did this guy use—dynamite, or a batterin' ram?"

"Just his shoulder, I guess," said Jud. "He was a powerful big man, y'know."

"I see you've carried what's left of the door inside," I observe.

"No," says Jud. "Everything's just like I found it."

"H-m," I grunt. "That's queer. I ain't no Sherlock Holmes, but it seems to me a guy pushin' out on a door from inside wouldn't cause it to break all over the inside of the place. But maybe," I suggest, "he just shoved one panel through and then pulled the rest of the door in."

"Maybe," nods Jud.

I knelt down and examined the busted door close.

"By jingo," I tell Jud, "you certainly were right about the town needin' a new lock-up. This one isn't fit to store old barrels in. I suppose," I say, "you've told Hankins he ought to build a new jail since the robbery."

"Yes," says Jud, "but he put me out of the bank."

"You made a little plea for yourself, also, didn't you—told him the bank robbery certainly proved the town needed police protection?"

"I tried to," admits Jud, "but he wouldn't listen to me. Queer man, Em is."

"Strange," I say, careless-like, "that a big husky who's capable of pullin' a set of door hinges and a lock right out by the roots should have let a little guy like you pinch him."

"Oh, I had the gun on him," says Jud. "I p'inted it right at his head; he seen I meant business and he come right along with me."

"I guess maybe he'd seen the lock-up," I grin. "They're tough birds, these bank robbers! It takes a strong guy to drill a hole into a bank safe like this bird did."

"It was an old safe," says Jud. "I guess he didn't have much trouble with it."

"Maybe you're right," I nod. "I suppose he looked the place over pretty careful before he came here to rob the bank. Didn't anybody see him besides yourself? Seems to me a stranger with a black beard, one who's such a big guy as you describe this yegg, couldn't have come into a little place like Mountain Glen without bein' seen."

"He must have come here at night," says Jud. "People here go to bed pretty early."

"Well, you're around nights," I object, "Didn't you see him before the night of the robbery?"

"I ain't been stayin' up nights since they fired me from the job of constable," Jud tells me.

"But the night of the robbery—?"

"I couldn't sleep that night," he says, "so I got up and dressed and I come to the bank just in time to hear the explosion go off."

"You didn't happen to notice the number of the robber's automobile, did you?"

"I forgot to get it," says Jud, hangin' his head.

"You're an unlucky cuss!" I tell him. "You certainly had your chance of showin' up Em Hankins and the other smart birds who fired you, and you muffed it. Well," I sigh, "I'm for you, Jud; if there's anything I can do to help you, I'll do it."

"Er, mister—" he begins.

"Yes?"

"Nothin'," he says, "only thank you."

Well, there wasn't anybody in Mountain Glen who could tell me an awful lot about the robbery, but I did get some surprisin' dope on Emory Hankins. It come from the postmaster, Jim Bishop.

Jim was a stout, pleasant, middle-aged guy, who ran an ice house at the lake about twenty miles from Mountain Glen. He was the only Mountain Glenner besides Hankins who deserved to be called a prominent citizen, and he was desirious of becomin' more prominent by succeedin' Hankins as

mayor. Hankins, on the other hand, was anxious to displace Bishop as postmaster, so you can readily see that the amount of love lost between them was none.

Bishop told me Hankins was near broke. He'd had a good wad—a couple of hundred thousand dollars—a few years before, but had shot the roll playin' the stock market. In fact, just before the bank robbery, Bishop said Hankins had come to him and offered to bury the hatchet, lay off opposin' Bishop's reappointment as postmaster and give Bishop a chance to become mayor all for a loan of $5,000. He wanted the dough, he said, to finance a quick turn in the market which was liable to bring big results. Bishop refused to give up and Hankins left him swearin' revenge.

Well, Hankins got the money elsewhere, for Bishop, as postmaster, took from him an envelope addressed to the brokers in New York who Hankins did business with. It was registered and looked like it contained a bundle of currency. And a couple of days after the bank was robbed Hankins got a letter from his brokers. Bishop seen him open it and take out a check.

"Well, what about it?" I asked Bishop when he'd finished.

"Oh, nothing," says he, "only, you might find the information useful in investigating the bank robbery."

"I don't get you," I told him. "The fact that Hankins is broke don't mean nothin'—except, maybe, that I'd have a job macin' him for the reward."

"Even that information ought to be useful to you," said Bishop, smilin' queer-like.

I stroll back to the town lock-up. I examine what's left of the door real careful, payin' special attention to the splinters, and I'll tell you now I wasn't lookin' for fingerprints either. I see what I want; then I ask a feller in the road where Jud Nelson lives and go there.

It was a miserable-lookin' little four-room cottage off the main street. Jud wasn't home when I got there, so I stroll out to his woodshed kind of careless-like and start kickin' at the rubbish that's there. I'm so engaged when I hear a voice behind me.

"What're you doin' there?" it asks, tremblin'-like.

I turn around and see Jud.

"Hello, Jud, old sleuth!" I greet him. "Any time you're ready you can hand over that money!" I thought he'd faint.

"M-money!" he gasps.

"Sure!" I grin. "The money you took from Hankins's bank. I was feelin' kind of sorry for you, Jud, old scout—with your sick wife and everything—losin' your job the way you did, but, honest, Jud, do you think that gave you any right to rob the—"

"I—I don't know what you mean!" he yelps, all shakin' and tremblin'.

"Bunk!" I laugh. "Look here!" I lift up an ax that's lyin' in the woodshed and show it to him. "Green paint!" I say, pointin' to the head. "The same color as the door of the town lock-up—the only fresh paint in town, by the way! You made an awful mistake, Jud, choppin' down that door from the outside. The rest of your story was O. K.—the yegg with the black whiskers and the automobile and all the rest of it—it would have got by me the same as it got by everybody else. But those marks on the lock-up door was made with an ax—not with any crook's shoulder. Besides, Jud," I say, leanin' over and pickin' up some other things that I'd found in the woodshed, "these two powder cans and this length of fuse—yes, Jud, the crook with the long, black whiskers, the black bag and the automobile was Jud Nelson!"

He stands there reelin' on his feet for a few seconds, blinkin' at me and tryin' to speak. I'm sorry for him—almost as sorry as I was when I'd first heard the story of how he'd lost the job he'd had for twenty years and was drove to trimmin' lawns and choppin' wood to try to buy food for his sick wife. But there was fifteen hundred bucks for somebody in this case, and, as old Giles himself would say, fifteen hundred is fifteen hundred.

"Well, Jud," I ask him, "what've you got to say?"

"I—I done it," he stutters. "I—I robbed the bank. There wa'n't no crook. There wa'n't no—"

"Come across with the dough," I say severe-like, holdin' out my hand.

"Th-the dough!" he stammers. "Th-the dough!"

"The eight thousand bucks you lifted from the safe," I explain.

"I—I—there wa'n't no money in the safe!" he blurts out.

"No money!" I almost screech. "Aw, what're you givin' us? D'you think I'm a hick cop? You can't put over nothin' like that! Come on, hand over that jack!"

"As God is my judge," swears Jud, "the safe was empty."

"Empty! You mean—"

"There wa'n't a cent in the safe. It was—" I grab him by the arm.

"Listen, you!" I bark at him, leadin' him toward the road. "I've give you your chance. If you'd come across with that darby, there might have been some way of savin' you, but if you think you can hold out that money and get away with it—Come along with me!" I roar. "I'll let you explain to Hankins how it is that—"

"No! No!" he screeches. "Not Hankins! He'll send me to jail! He'll—"

"You belong in jail, you old crook!"

"I ain't got the money, I tell you!" he cries. "I never had it! I didn't want it!"

"Didn't want it!" I snap. "What made you blow open the safe, then?"

"I just wanted to show 'em they needed a constable!" he weeps.

"Br-r-r!" I growl, to hide the fact his answer made me grin. Then I start draggin' him to the bank.

"It's your last chance!" I whisper when we get there. "Are you—"

"I ain't got it! I ain't got it!" he wails.

"All right, then! In you go!"

Emory Hankins, busy at his favorite occupation of countin' money, looks up as we enter. "Oh, Em!" cried Jud. "Don't send me—"

I clap my hand over old Jud's mouth. Then I grin at Hankins. "Howdy, Mr. Hankins!" I say. "Please to report the bank robbery's all cleaned up. If you'll just give me fifteen hundred dollars—"

"Hah!" gasps Hankins. "Fifteen hundred dollars! You want—"

"Fifteen hundred," I nod. "A thousand for gettin' the money back, and five hundred for namin' the guy that rifled the safe—the vault," I correct myself, smilin'. "No checks; make it big bills."

"But—but—" he stutters. Then: "Where's the money?" he demands.

"In the safe, I guess," I reply.

"The—the safe!" he stammers.

"You ought to know it," I tell him, "You're the guy that put it there!"

"I—I—what do you mean?"

"Aw, say, Hankins!" I laugh. "Don't stall! You know damn well the bank was never robbed—except by yourself. That little stock deal—"

It was bluff. I was just takin' a long chance with the dope Postmaster Bishop give me. But it went home—bang!

"You—you—what do you mean?" gulps Hankins.

"Would you rather I told you about it, and asked you for fifteen hundred to keep my mouth shut, or would you like a bank examiner to—"

Without a word he walks to the safe, throws open the door and takes out a bundle of bills. With shakin' fingers he counts off fifteen centuries and hands them to me. I take them and—pass them to Jud Nelson.

"This is yours, Jud," I tell him. "You're really the guy that solved the mystery and," I say, turnin' to Hankins, "Jud prob'ly wouldn't spill anything about this—if he had his job back. About four hundred a year, I'd say, ought to be his salary as town constable—considerin' the high cost of livin'—and maybe a hundred extra for guardin' the bank. What d'you say?"

"Go home and get your badge, Jud," he says after a moment's thought.

"B-but—" Jud starts to stutter.

"Don't you hear your boss talkin' to you, Jud?" I say with a grin. "And, listen, Hankins," I add as Jud, bewildered and dizzy, walks out of the bank, "you'd better be on the level with Jud; I'm goin' to look in on you every little while and see how he's bein' treated!"

What do they call it—compoundin' a felony? I guess it was at that, but an old guy with a sick wife certainly deserves to have a job, and I guess I scared more decency into old Hankins's heart than ever would have got there natural. The hardest part of the whole case was convincin' the boss he wasn't entitled to no rebate on the fifty bucks he give me.

Naked Men of Naga

by Gordon MacCreagh

Author of "Tact And Some Diplomacy," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

"JEHANNUM" SMITH, soldier of fortune and jungle-cruiser, with his servant, Poonoosawmi, discovered Professor Elias Harrison, his daughter, and their assistant, Howard Van Eyck, camped in the jungle. Professor Harrison was engaged in experiments as to the practicability of deriving a camphor distillate from a certain *Dryobalanops Malayensis,* and to Smith's assertion that the expedition was surrounded by Naga tribesmen Harrison *et al* turned a deaf ear.

Failing to move these "babes in the wood," and impressed by the girl to an extent which made it impossible to use force, Smith journeyed to Dimapur, there learning from Nicholson, representative of an American firm which had sent out the expedition under Harrison, that he—Nicholson—had sent *backsheesh* to the native chiefs, for the safe conduct of the party, through one Papadopoulos, whom Smith at once stigmatized as a blackleg.

At Nicholson's urgent request Smith consented to return and extricate the travelers, Nicholson saying further that he feared for the expedition through the machinations of a Japanese business rival, Fundoshi & Co. He hinted at international complications. He seemed more concerned, however, for the safety of the note-books containing the formulæ than for the lives of the travelers.

Then, at Nicholson's stiff displeasure when Smith asked for rupees, thinking he wanted payment in advance, the latter roared:

"Rupees are *backsheesh,* an' they may save blood! When I've got your people clear I'll give 'em back to you for nothing; and I'll charge you a bill for your damned note-books that 'll twist the liver an' lights out of you!"

CHAPTER V.

PROOF.

THE return journey was accomplished in eight days; strenuous days of following dim jungle trails down one long ridge of the rising mountain system and up the next, gaining elevation steadily as they toiled. Only eight, because they strode boldly through the jungle villages whose highroads the trails were, relying on the knowledge that white men had already been permitted to pass unmolested because *backsheesh* had been paid to a big chief.

But toward the end, as they approached Mata-Pembe, the Naga chief's country, Smith went more cautiously. Villages were avoided, because he did not know what intriguing might be going on in that crafty ruffian's stronghold.

Then they were through once more into the wide stretch of no-man's land, and Smith made up for lost time again. But his eyes and Poonoosawmi's were on the keen watch for the light, almost imperceptible tracks of single men. There were many of them; more than before, crisscrossing each other in all directions. Smith's lips tightened as he counted them up, and Poonoosawmi chattered in his rear about "highly deplorable suey-side for no good purpose." Then came the wide-trampled trails of the white men's camp.

Smith stopped and studied these with pursed-up lips. He looked to Poonoosawmi for enlightenment; but the little man merely scratched his leg with his bare toes, and wondered. Smith's anxiety was too keen for delay. He plunged ahead.

Then suddenly, unexpectedly, he stopped.

This story began in The Argosy for April 17.

Noises came to him from the denseness ahead. Unmistakable noises. Voices, cheerfully careless, and the clatter of tin plates. The camp was a whole six miles farther than it had been!

Smith reconnoitered. He came upon a gay luncheon scene. He grunted with impatient scorn—what did people traveling through the jungles want with luncheon, anyhow? For it was clear that the party was traveling. Tents were stowed, and all the cumbersome impedimenta of the expedition were packed.

He smiled thinly to note that the baggage was stacked in a compact pile, and that the coolie bearers were squatted in a compact group instead of being scattered all over the place.

"That last little parting demonstration o' mine did some good, anyway," he murmured. Then he catfooted in on the party, and stepped out among them with the dramatic suddenness that his overgrown boyishness loved. Their ludicrous astonishment was his chance to take the initiative.

He knew that he was about to encounter vigorous opposition, and he was bringing all his varied experience of human nature to his aid to offset the disconcerting directness of the girl's gaze. She seemed to him to look more like a goddess than ever, radiating joyous exhilaration, as she did, from her whole being. The two men, too, looked cheerfully self-satisfied.

"I told you I'd see you soon, didn't I?" Smith grinned. "Now, if you'll invite me to have a cup of cawfee, we can start quarreling without fooling away any time."

The professor was magnanimously gracious.

"Certainly, Mr. Smith, please partake with us. And, not at all; there is no cause for disagreement in the world; we feel far from quarreling, I assure you."

"So? Guess I can congratulate you about the D. Malayensis brew, then,"

Smith hazarded a quick guess, and hit the mark squarely. He was making a swift observation of all the little signs about the camp which his experience could read so clearly. The young assistant was suspicious at once, while the girl was watching him with level steadiness. But the professor rambled pompously on.

"Yes, Mr. Smith, you may; I am glad —I am proud, in fact—to say—my theory has proved to be most gratifyingly correct. We are on our way home, as you may surmise, and we have no cause for quarrel with anybody."

"M-m. But you will have," said Smith, with emphasis, "as soon as I tell you that right after *tiffin* we travel *south*, not north."

The professor showed dignified displeasure. But his assistant was unable to hold his irritation. He flared up.

"Mr. Smith. This is the second time that you've butted in on us uninvited, and have attempted with the most astounding effrontery to conduct our affairs. I want to tell you flatly that I don't stand for it."

Smith stood looming ponderously above him, leaning on his rifle and nodding his head slowly. His attitude of vast security and surprised approval was unconsciously exasperating. The girl stepped into the breach with quiet assurance, and took charge of the situation.

"I see that you men *will* be quarreling very shortly if I let you. Sit down, Howard! Mr. Smith, your interference doesn't seem altogether sane; so much so that I'm sure there's something behind it which isn't apparent. We have concluded our researches—in which, by the way, you seem to be quite unduly interested—and we have nearly reached home, Dimapur, that is, without a single untoward incident, in spite of all your alarming statements and hints about disaster. Now you don't look crazy enough to expect us really to turn back; so I want to hear your explanation."

Her bearing was calmly authoritative. Smith felt the hypnotism of her gaze, but this time he was backed by a knowledge of hard facts which he lacked before. He steeled himself to maintain his composure.

"Without incident, you say, Miss Harrison? You mean, you haven't seen any more niggers?"

"Exactly," she said, pointedly.

Smith had to smile at the thought of one of those flitting shadows being surprised by any one of them.

"I can bet you didn't. Now, let me tell you something." He looked the camp over with an appraising eye. "You broke camp about two weeks ago, an' you've traveled, with this outfit, say twenty miles a day. So you figure you're two-thirds of the way home."

The girl was distinctly surprised.

"Your knowledge is extraordinary. But I can't imagine why you have made it your business to spy upon us."

Smith had to smile again, in spite of her antagonism. He hesitated about how to prove his next point.

"Now, you won't believe what I'm going to tell you. You'll call me a liar to my face, but I guess I can prove it. We won't have far to go, so if you've finished grub, we'll take a little walk."

His manner was so assured, and the situation was so pregnant with imminent mystery, that all three of them rose and followed him, questioning with their eyes what fantastic explanation lay behind his extraordinary madness. He led them back along the way that he had come, through the tangled mass of brush and vine and fallen tree.

It was hideously tiring and unpleasant, yet their wonder drove them on. Presently they came to the broad swath of their own trail, damp and steamy, as a trodden track always is. Smith halted and looked a question.

"Ah, our late path, I presume," said the professor. "We must have swung round quite a bit; though this jungle is such a maze that one never knows how one is traveling."

"Fine. I'm glad you know your late path when you see it," said Smith. "I'd like to tell you that it's two days late, but you wouldn't believe me. But come along some more."

He struck off in another direction, and they scrambled pantingly after him, beginning to be full of a vague apprehension of they did not know what; but it was a looming nervousness accentuated by the dim stillness of the inner jungle, where the only sound when they stood still was the depressing drip of condensed moisture from the giant, orchid-festooned limbs above onto the leaves beneath, and the occasional astounding plop of a big drop onto one of the helmets.

Suddenly Smith stopped. He pointed out to Van Eyck a thin line of disarrangement of the lushy undergrowth.

"I showed you a nigger once, didn't I? Well, if you'll follow that you'll see another. D'you care to?"

The young man looked dubious. The vast jungle awed him. It was different to the previous occasion, when the familiar security of his own camp was behind him. Then it was quite evident that he felt that it was up to him to show his courage. His face set resolutely, and he felt for his revolver. The girl suddenly laid a hand on his arm. There was a fear growing in her eyes. "No—don't," she said quickly. "Let's go on."

Without a word Smith crashed on, breaking the trail like an elephant; he was careless of concealment because he knew its futility. Within a hundred yards he plowed through a tree-fern brake and brought his party into another wide trail.

This one was not so plain as the last. Already the trampled undergrowth was standing stiff again, and snakily graceful vines stretched across to span the opening. Smith strode up this path, evidently looking for something.

Presently he let the girl draw up to him, and then he pointed. It was a patch of something brown clinging to a thorny creeper. The girl looked, puzzled for a moment, and then cried out in surprised recognition.

"Why, look, father, that's where I tore my shirt sleeve the other day, and scratched my arm so badly—" And then she stopped suddenly, and her eyes widened with questioning wonder and horror. "The other day!" The significance of the expression was just being borne in on all three of them. Their troubled glances were full of dawning discovery. Smith put their thoughts into crisp speech.

"M-m, yes; just about eight days ago, I should figure, looking at the trail."

He stood with his legs wide apart, massive and dominant, letting the fact soak in. His varied experience of man told him that

this was requisite in order to establish the ascendency that was necessary to him. Then he gave a succinct translation of the phenomenon:

"Yes, all of eight days. An' I can take you around some more, an' show you your trail of nine days ago, an' ten days, an' two weeks. An', son, if you'll climb that tall teak you'll see the bamboo *tope* where your old camp stood!"

Suddenly he had a thought. "An' say, talking about untoward incidents, didn't your old guide disappear just about the time you were ready to break camp, an' you had to get another?"

He had aimed his shaft at the girl, but his triumph was evident in the downcast looks of all of them. The girl was white and very calm. She looked up at Smith without shame. "Mr. Smith, once again I beg your pardon. Won't you please tell us what it all means?"

Smith was immediately flustered by this frank avowal. That was what he called good sportsmanship, and his heart went out to it. But it almost shook him from his position of aggressive ascendency. He had to talk rapidly to save himself.

"It means, Miss Harrison, that you've been walking in circles round yourselves and in long, parallel zigzags. You've covered twenty miles a day—and you've traveled just six miles north of where you started. That's why we go south. So much for what's been happening here. In the meanwhile, I've been to Dimapur an' seen your Mr. Nicholson. So, if you'll believe now that I'm not just a four-flusher my scheme is that we go back to camp and make palaver."

Arrived at the camp, Smith with a sudden self-consciousness placed a chair for the lady. The others slumped down, too, dispirited and panting. Smith alone stood, massive and tireless, leaning on his ever-present rifle.

He asked first for a detailed account of their doings. There was nothing to relate. Nothing had happened. They had finished their work. They had broken camp. And they had traveled *homeward* without incident. Nothing had broken the monotony of tramping along behind a gang of coolie bearers who broke the trail. None of them, of course, had ever thought to wander abroad to shoot anything for sport.

"H-m," grunted Smith, when it was all over, and stood grimly thoughtful. Then he called Poonoosawmi to inquire what he had been able to discover among the servants. Poonoosawmi had not needed to be told what was expected of him. In his master's absence he had made a very thorough canvass of the coolies.

"Didn't *any* of these people know that they were parading about never more than half a mile from their own track?" Smith asked him.

"Of course, marshter," Poonoosawmi assured him. "But this damn coolie fellow is an unenlightened heathen. What the sahibs are doing, what business is it of theirs? Furthermore, only fellow who can speak with educated English like me to the sahibs is head *jemadar*. This loafer is telling that it is religious enactment of Christian God to make pilgrimage like the Jew in the desert for forty years without profit; and the coolie cattle is saying: 'Wallah, the way of the *sahib log* is not as our way.' Therefore, I have given order to have this treachery bound hand and foot."

The calm assurance of the astonishing authority assumed by this little wizen and naturally timid native was a striking evidence of the effect of good example and of the doglike reliance which he placed on the almighty power of his master.

Smith's eyes twinkled as he watched the faces of the rightful owners of the outfit; but they were too broken by the succession of staggering disclosures to make any comment at all. Poonoosawmi was encouraged.

"Also, marshter, by plentiful kicking in the stomach as he lay bound I have extracted groans to effect of he is hired by Greek agent in Dimapur."

"So?" shouted Smith, clapping his hand in his thigh. "That just about joins up the string! Now it's clear! You see, folks, it's like this: Certain interested parties have got on to your camphor prospect; so they fixed up the Greek with recommendation *chits* which you could change for money, an'—"

"Oh." The cry was a gasp from the

girl. She had been looking at Smith with increasing amazement as each successive revelation came to light; and now the self-reliance in her eyes which had so baffled him was giving place to a half-frightened submission.

It was a mute acknowledgment of a better leader for her menfolk than herself. Henceforth her antagonism was gone. In its place was an uncomprehended, almost unwilling, admiration.

But Smith, keen as he was to note the expressions on men's faces, and to turn his experience of man psychology to his own profit, saw none of these things in the face of the girl. He plunged on with his explanation.

"So this civet-cat of a Greek got the job, an' planted his agent as *jemadar*, an' then he took the whole *backsheesh* money to Mata-Pembe, who's a worse thief than himself, an' a big ju-ju chief. The game is to grab your dope an' rush it to whoever is back of the scenes so they can get a concession or whatever they want, ahead of your folks. Now—"

Smith paused and considered his next statement carefully before giving it utterance. He looked at the men, weighing them up, and then at the girl. None of them looked like people who would get frightened at danger. He proceeded with confidence:

"Now, we've *got* to consider this: It's pretty clear that they want to keep you fooling around wasting time while they get into action themselves. It's clear, too, that as long as they can hold you old Perape doesn't want to get into complications by starting a race riot. He's no fool, an' he's had a lesson or two. But as soon as we begin to get away I don't know how far he'll have the nerve to go—it'll depend on how much *backsheesh* he's got—an' that's what we've got to find out.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TEST OF THE FILE.

SMITH was not disappointed. There was no hint of the hysteria which he, with the usual viewpoint of the hard, rough men of the open places, rather unjustly expected to find in people who had been brought up in more sheltered conditions.

As for the girl, she had been listening with eyes wide and glistening, curved lips apart, showing a glint of the most amazing white teeth that Smith had ever seen, and a flush of color on her rounded cheek, just as though the whole thing were the recital of an absorbing anecdote.

"How do you propose to find out?" she asked quickly.

"Easy. I'll twist the information out of the *jemadar*."

But when Smith went over to question Poonoosawmi's captive it was evident that there was more than one traitor in the camp. The man was gone! Only the relics of his cut bonds remained.

The three scientists looked at one another with anxious eyes. As soon as a hitch occurred in the smooth running of Smith's plans there was room for apprehension to creep in.

Smith stood with lips sucked in to a thin sword gash, swaying gently on his feet. He swore softly to himself, quite unconscious of the lady's presence. His thoughts were racing ahead, planning, rejecting, and planning again. Suddenly his mind was made up.

"Not so easy as I thought. But we've *got* to know. I'll go out an' bring in a nigger!"

He made the astounding statement in a matter-of-fact way, and turned instinctively to the girl, but checked himself and spoke to them in general.

"Will you see that everything is packed an' ready to jump in case we have to move in a hurry? I'll be back in half an hour."

He looked again at the girl now, wondering for a fleeting instant whether she would lay a nervous hand on his sleeve and hold him back. But her only move was to rise in readiness to carry out his request. As a matter of fact, it never occurred to her that there could be any danger incurred in this case. All she said was:

"Aren't you going to take your rifle?"

Smith grinned—it showed at least that she noticed—and pushed the comfortable butt of a Pflüger automatic from under his shirt. Then he was gone.

The three looked at each other, rather helplessly at first, and then with incredulity as the swift-following events of the last half hour reviewed themselves before their minds. It had been crammed more full of astonishing events than all the rest of their lives. The professor took a long breath, and voiced the general opinion:

"Prodigious! I never heard anything like it in my life. In fact, I expect to find presently that we are all under some extraordinary spell of auto-hypnosis. This thing is a hallucination. I don't believe it is happening at all."

The assistant pushed his spectacles up to his forehead, and agreed heartily: "It's the kind of thing that happens only in books."

They spoke of events. But the girl took a deep breath, held it, and let it go in a long, tremulous sigh. She said simply: "He's the most astonishing man I ever met."

"Prodigious," agreed her father again. "Marvelous! What a man to introduce to an unruly lecture room!"

But the assistant's brow clouded, and he turned away to attend to the packing and roping of all loose equipment.

It was inside of the half hour that Smith returned. This time they heard him, for he crunched heavily through the undergrowth. They waited tensely, expecting they did not know just what; yet they gasped as he swung into view. Across his shoulders he carried, like a sack of flour, a limp brown body, naked as the trees, except for a wisp of nettle fiber cloth bound about his head. Smith grinned at their wide-eyed surprise as he swung his load to the ground.

"Copped him not two hundred yards from here, squatting behind a tree an' picketing as calm as you please. He thought that one of his tree devils had jumped him, an' he yipped once, but I shook the wind out o' him, an' hiked him along. Now lemme have some rawhides quick to rope him to a tree with, 'cause I want him to be scared stiff when he comes round."

As Smith bound his prisoner to a sapling they were able to notice for the first time what these men were like who had watched them from within stone's throw for nearly a month. The man was tall and clean-limbed, taller even than Smith, who was a clear six feet, but, of course, not half as wide. No rugged mountaineer, this, but a jungle of the foot-hills, a runner.

Physically, he was a splendid specimen. But his face— The lips were wide and thick, the nose flat, with nostrils nearly as thick as the lips. The cheek-bones, too, were wide apart and prominent, and the lank, matted hair grew nearly down to the overhanging brow. A point of marked difference to most savages was that the man wore no ornaments of any kind.

The professor was keenly interested, and hovered at Smith's elbow, firing a storm of questions at him, wanting to know about dentition and cranial capacity, and sexual relations; to all of which Smith only grunted and worked the faster, winding the man beyond all chance of a sudden dash. It was clear that he wanted to waste no time. Suddenly the heavy-lidded eyes opened and scowled fiercely. Smith grunted again.

"H-m, shamming. I thought so. Playing for a chance to get away, eh? I've been fooled that way once, my bucko—but that was *very* long ago. Now you listen good, an' then I want to hear you talk."

The man, of course, understood no word of all this; but the dull intelligence in his eyes faded to nothing and he stood staring straight ahead of him with a vacant sullenness. Smith clucked with swift annoyance.

"Blast him! I was afraid of that. When these half animals get on the sulk nothing 'll make them talk. At least they think nothing will. But I know a way that 'll open him up. You've got a file? A flat one? Dig it out, quick; we can't afford to spend the day entertaining this bloke."

The professor went obediently. But the girl, who had been standing a little distance away, demanded quickly:

"What are you going to do to him, Mr. Smith? You're not going to—to hurt him?"

Smith spoke with grim purpose.

"Don't worry, son—I mean, miss. We don't use torture; but—he'll talk." And he busied himself preparing a thong. He was

so unsatisfactorily businesslike, this Smith man, when there was something to be done.

The professor returned with the file. Smith snatched it from him, and turned grimly to the prisoner.

"It's mighty small, but it'll do," he muttered. Then to the dully staring man: "Come on now, my buck; open your jaws for the bit."

The man's expression remained dead, but his great animal jaw muscles swelled as his teeth clenched in dogged resistance. But the rough edges of the file bruised his lips, till suddenly, like a recalcitrant horse, he gave way, and the instrument slipped between his teeth.

"Sorry, old top," Smith murmured. "But it was necessary, an' I can't waste time persuading you." And immediately he set about binding the man's jaws tight over the file with his own headcloth.

The girl stood watching with big eyes, fearful of some horrid scene. Smith smiled with what was meant to be reassurance; but the result was grimly alarming. He called to Poonoosawmi, and growled in his throat:

"Imp, you know enough Naga, so you tell him. I want to know first whether that Greek is with his chief."

Poonoosawmi translated; and then at last expression came into the man's face. His dull eyes glared sudden hate, and he shook his head fiercely.

"Um. That's what they all say—at first. But now watch."

He drew his heavy hunting knife. A horrid fascination held the eyes of all of them; though the girl felt suddenly sick. She gave a little shriek, but Smith was absorbedly oblivious—this was business. Using the broad handle of the knife as a mallet, he began to tap the file gently along between the tight-pressed teeth.

Once, it traveled its grating length, and the man's facial muscles twitched in spasmodic response. Smith looked at him questioningly; but only hate glared back. He shrugged wearily, and the thin smile came out. Once again he tapped the screeching thing back on its return journey.

The sight alone of its slow, jarring progress set the teeth of the onlookers excruciatingly on edge. Just the dry rasp of the fiendish thing was an unbearable nerve ordeal. The prisoner's whole body quivered in nervous reaction; yet he held out.

A third time the terrible journey began, but it was more than even animal nerves could stand. The man's eyes started from his twitching face, and he nodded his head vehemently in capitulation.

Smith's smile was grimly twisted; this thing was not to his taste. He unwound the head bandage, and removed the potent truth compeller. The man shuddered from head to foot and spat with impish grimaces. He seemed to want to keep it up indefinitely, till Smith poked him with suggestive reminder. At that he turned fierce again, and for a moment he hesitated. Smith's gesture with the tool was horribly threatening. It was enough. The man spoke.

Poonoosawmi translated. "He say one damn slimy yellow-belly fellow is come maybe one month gone and is thick with Pembe dog-eater like the two thieves."

Smith was quite sure that the man had said nothing half so disrespectful, but he was satisfied.

"Good. That's all about that end. Now one more thing. What are his orders about this outfit?"

They all hung tensely on the man's answer; for it meant—but Smith was the only one who had any conception of all the things that it might mean. Poonoosawmi's shrill chatter broke on their tension with a shock. It was brief and unmistakable.

"He say Pembe is vulture's egg. Pembe say, if the white man walk kaleidoscope like the sheep, it is well; for by grabbing can his friend obtain the evidence. But if they go away, then the sentinel must stop with the shout and the spear."

The orders were direct enough. Smith concealed his misgiving under an assumption of carelessness, speaking with a studied bravado as he unwound the prisoner:

"So? With the spear, eh? Well, we'll talk about that later. I've had people rattle spears at me before. Glad he told us about it, though. Professor Sahib, maybe you can explain the trick. It don't exactly hurt, but it jangles up the nerves."

Without waiting for a reply he slipped the thongs from the man, and held him with a bent elbow at the breaking point.

"We can't do anything with this fellow. Can't keep him; he'd be more trouble than use. So, Poonoosawmi, I guess you'd better kick him out o' camp."

Poonoosawmi, when personally secure, had all the bloodthirsty tendencies of his savage forefathers. With a whoop of joy he took the proposal literally; and the sight of the hero kicking valiantly at the tail of the tall warrior, who fled like the wind, was a sight for weeping gods. It had the effect of dispelling to a certain extent the gloom with which the order for armed resistance had been heard.

If this man Smith, who knew so much of the ways of these people, could jest at such a time matters could not be so bad. Smith laid out his plan of advance with an air of boisterousness.

"Well, folks, we know now what's in the wind; an' knowledge, as some wise boy said, is better than a loaded gun. It's like I said. North, we've got the whole of the Naga tribes to buck. South, is the Lushai country. *This* is Lushai country; an' this hold-up crowd is just poaching. They daren't follow us far. And—a trick they don't know—I've got a little bit of pull with some of the Lushai chiefs. So it's south, like I said."

It was no more than the logical, proved-up reiteration of his original statement. This time the absence of opposition was almost an audible prayer to please do.

"The motion being carried, we'll go in a hurry, before they get time to collect a gang to head us off. An' my best dope is that we break for the long strip of bamboo jungle where you first camped, 'cause once we're there it's easier going, an' in the open ground they can't get too close. Here, in this mess o' garden-truck, anybody could creep up an' jab us in the leg. What say, people?"

They all said it together, and they all said the same thing. Even the professor for once was laconic.

"I think you're quite right, Mr. Smith."

Smith nodded his satisfaction, and turned to give an order to Poonoosawmi; but the astute little henchman had not waited for the conference to come to an end. In his mind, when his master was discussing anything, there was never any room for doubt about the final outcome.

He had already bullied the coolies to their feet, and was plying them with shrill invective to take up their loads. They obeyed with sulky grace. The coolie man always turns sullen as soon as there is any hint of trouble in connection with his job.

Unlike the African *safari* porter, who has often a sturdy courage and sometimes a certain sense of loyalty, the coolie bearer works only for his pittance of rupees. He will bleatingly desert his post at the least hint of danger, and will later come shamelessly back to importune his master for the pay which he has not earned.

His naive contention is that he was hired by the month, and, therefore, even if he did run away, was he not still the sahib's servant?

Poonoosawmi yelled shrill abuse at them till they took up their loads like sulky oxen. On his own initiative he selected a burly Santali and promoted him to the proud position of *jemadar*, buttressing his courage with honor and stiffening his pride with derisive reference to his racial failings. Keen observation of his master's methods had taught him that the inevitable reaction would be a powerful impulse to disprove the slander.

"Father of tadpoles, these jungle cattle now be thine. That they travel as the order comes is thy care. Many apes have lived under thy roof and have scattered thy befouled gear in their play; yet if one single cord of one of these packs be lost on the way, myself will I stamp thy liver into a swine's pen. Set thy flat ears back, then, and wait on the word."

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE MIDST OF ALARMS.

SMITH cast a quick eye over the outfit. He stepped forward and adjusted a slovenly-looking pack. Then he grunted an order, fired some instructions at the outfit in general, and swung into the lead,

with Poonoosawmi sticking to his heels like a faithfully trained ape.

The scientists followed close behind, and then came the coolies, jostling one another in a grumbling bunch. The new *jemadar* strode in their rear, freed from a load by the dignity of his position, and shouted manfully at them, passing on with unthinkable embellishments all the abuse that had been heaped on him by Poonoosawmi.

It was desperate traveling; for Smith knew the urgent need of getting into open ground before the tall spearmint should have time to take any concerted action. He knew that they would babble apishly together before they could decide on any definite course, and on this he relied to make a quick dash through.

Tireless himself, he fretted at the slow and painful manner in which the inexperienced trio followed. They were finding this very different from the leisurely advance of the previous days, when they walked behind a gang of porters who broke trail and halted every time that an obstruction was encountered till it was cut away.

Thorny creepers which seemed to be voraciously alive reached out suddenly and snatched at their eyes, thin, snaky lianas, hidden under the *rukh*, wound themselves intricately about their ankles and, acting as draw strings, pulled upon near-by mottled stems of *hathi-patha*, which turned their huge leaves over and emptied their accumulations of viscid, tepid water onto their heads.

But they ducked and climbed and panted on without complaint; for there had been something in Smith's manner, in spite of his pretended cheerfulness, which had filled them with a keen sense of misgiving.

Presently even they became aware of quick rustlings and shufflings in front of them. Smith had been hearing them for the past half-hour, and now made his way forward with scarcely diminished speed, but with the caution of an old tusker.

They were startled at the nearness to themselves of those disquieting noises. More than once all of them shrank together as sudden light scufflings broke out only a few yards in front of them in the dense blanket of green.

Most of these, had they only known, were nothing more alarming than the lesser denizens of the jungle which had crouched in motionless concealment on hearing the advance, and which sprang away now only on finding themselves in the direct line of travel.

But there were more unpleasant things than wild animals; noises which retreated steadily, and more clumsily. Smith knew, and Poonoosawmi knew just about where each one of the naked watchers flitted from one cover to the next, giving way before their advance, but never breaking away to the side as the beasts did. There were not many of them; that was quite evident; but they skirmished persistently ahead.

Half the distance to the bamboo-jungle they covered in this way, and Smith hoped almost that there would be enough indecision among the skirmishers to allow his party to reach the more favorable ground; but it was becoming clearer every minute that the nearer they approached, the bolder became the natives.

Smith looked critically back at his following. The Americans, of course, were doing all that could be expected of them. They were scratched and torn, but they panted and sweated along as close behind his heels as they could.

A thin streak showed crimson against the girl's white forehead, where some tough vine had swished back across her face. Smith's eyes softened for a fleeting second; but, thunder, he muttered, in the next instant, speed was more essential than looks —he was so infernally practical, this grim man of the woods.

What he was particularly worried about was the coolie gang. He knew that their psychology was on a level with that of cattle, and that they might just as easily be stampeded. But the burly Sonthali shouted lustily in their rear, and so far everything seemed to be going well.

Poonoosawmi was the wonder of the moment. Ordinarily timid to the point of ridicule, palsied with fear at the thought of danger, now that actual danger was all round him, he seemed to absorb a certain recklessness from the surplus which radiated from his master.

It was far from the same cold efficiency, but he scuttled along and poked his nose into every suspicious place like a little questing terrier. But Smith knew Poonoosawmi of old; he had no care on that score. He ordered the advance resumed.

Then the long expected happened. A swish came from the leaves, and a whir and a lean, brown spear streaked out of the greenery and smacked into a tree-trunk, where it stuck, quivering.

An involuntary "Oh!" came from the girl, and a sharp gasp from the men. It was the first forcing home to them of the reality of hostilities. Instantly Smith fired.

He aimed at nothing, of course, for in that close tangle of greenness he could see nothing. But he knew from its elevation that the spear had come as a forceful reminder that their advance was to be contested.

Yet he smiled thinly as he fired. He was glad of the sign. It was an indication that, as he had thought, the natives were hesitant about taking the last desperate measures before they had to; or, rather, until some definite authority should arrive. They held too piquant a memory of the scourge of bloodthirsty little Gurkha soldiers which had followed on the last killing of white men. His shot, then, was in immediate answer to the despatch in military code.

To those who have never heard it the racket made by a bullet in the jungle as it slaps through fat leaves and ricochets among twigs is inconceivable, and the dying away of the clatter in the distance is ominously suggestive of a vast and instant tearing force.

The Nagas had heard it before, and they knew from of old what a ghastly explosion in flesh could be made by a .303 bullet when it had been turned from its path by a twig. They understood that code, too. It meant that this party intended to advance, and that there was no hesitancy about their intention, either.

Following immediately on the prolonged crash of the bullet came a series of lesser crashes and scufflings, this time *away* from the line of march, the same as the other animals had done. Poonoosawmi whooped his jubilation.

"*Shabash*, marshter! Splendid feat! That is way of putting fear of God into the devil. Now he will doubtless give right-of-way, which is to the advantage of our speed."

Smith looked back over his party, half afraid that the report of his rifle might have sufficiently impressed the nearness of danger upon the coolie mind to stampede them, but they held together yet, huddled like sheep, more afraid of the shadowy dimness of the jungles than of linking their fates with that of the white men.

Smith's swift glance next flew to the Americans. They were tired, but not spent. He looked critically to note the girl's condition with eyes narrowed characteristically, and nodded slow satisfaction—it seemed horribly impersonal to her. Then he swung to the front again.

"One more lap, an' we're there," he muttered. "An' the sooner the better. Don't know what their next move is going to be, but I guess we'll be ready for them. Poonoosawmi, you pick the best going, I'm going back to drive these coolies, they're just about beyond friend Sontali's limit."

Poonoosawmi jumped to the appointed task with all the pride of conscious worth. He ducked in and out of likely openings and back, nosing out the best way, and squeaking high-pitched advice to those who followed. Particularly solicitous was he for the protection of the Missy Sahib from springing branches. To him she seemed the cause of vast anxiety and argument and delay, but since his master, for some inexplicable reason, tolerated the nuisance, he felt loyally bound to protect her.

Another hour's desperate scramble brought them to where they could see hot sunlight glimmering yellow ahead instead of the filtered green of the deep jungle. To their panting souls it was like the sight of the sea to Xenophon's struggling heroes. In a few seconds they broke out into the dry openness of the bamboo-brakes, and thanked their various gods for the chance to rest.

But Smith drove them mercilessly, in spite of the universal murmur, for another half-mile away from the heavy cover before he was willing to halt.

White men and coolies together, they threw themselves onto the soft ground, inches deep in fallen leaves, and lay gasping in blessed respite. Or, rather, it was only the white folks who lay; the coolies, with the extraordinary habit of their kind, found rest in squatting on their haunches. How they could breathe with their knees pressed flat against their chest was a wonder; but they seemed to inflate sidewise, rather, as do frogs, and their faces were as staringly dull.

Smith surveyed the group with grim approval. He stood with wide-spread legs and heaving chest, streaming perspiration like the rest, but he showed no disposition to stretch himself on the ground. Instead, he stalked over and kicked tentatively at sundry packs till the clank of metal told him that he had found the water-pots. Then he strode off to the stream, which tinkled peacefully down the gentle slope a short distance away.

He dipped and drank hugely, absorbing the liquid with a vast suction rather than swallowing it. Then he dipped again to bring the life-giving draft to his gasping companions. The girl's eyes were on him, clouded with conflicting emotions. That he should drink first at the source of supply was surely the efficient thing to do; yet she was feeling that the men she had known might have been more gallant and less efficient.

The habit of sheltered feminity was strong within her, but she was given no time for introspection. While Smith was yet rinsing the vessel, Poonoosawmi's warning shout thrilled out. Without waiting to look, Smith dropped the pot and dashed back, leaving questions till he should be with his rifle. But he was too late.

There came a whoop and a pandemonium of yells. A flurry of spears rattled among the bamboos and some twenty or so wild, naked figures rushed out from behind horribly near-by clumps, waving their arms and leaping fantastically into the air.

The psychological moment had been chosen with all the cunning of primitive men who knew their own kind. Coming at a moment when the party was at its lowest physical ebb, exhausted and relaxed from its weary defensive, its effect on the coolies was immediate and disastrous.

With yelps and terrified bleatings, they scrambled to their feet and bolted in all directions. They never looked; they never thought. In blind confusion they rushed anywhere, as long as it was away from the ferocious figures who howled like devils and looked like savage incarnations of ape-men, with the sunlight flickering bronze and black on their contorted, naked bodies.

It was a stampede, cunningly planned and perfectly executed. Smith snatched his rifle to his shoulder. A moment his hard eye gleamed along the barrel, and then he lowered the weapon again slowly.

What was the use? The naked spearmen ducked behind the bamboo-clumps with the same swift suddenness with which they had appeared. He might have dropped one or two with quick shots; but even as his rifle slapped to his shoulder he reflected that one or two would make little difference in numbers and much in antagonism.

He grounded the weapon, then, and looked after the bolting coolies with impotent wrath. In their case, too, he might have given pursuit and brought back one or two, but of what value would one or two terrified men be? He wished viciously that his rifle might have been a shotgun, loaded with snipe-shot to help their flight along a little.

Then his sour gaze swung round to the rest of the party. They were all on their feet, their weariness forgotten, looking at him with consternation. This was a closer physical menace than they had ever known in their lives. Never having had anything similar to compare by, they looked to Smith for a clue as to just how frightened they ought to be. Poonoosawmi alone was sublime.

"That," he announced with earnest conviction, "is multicolored hell! How is marshter now going to wreak vengeance upon these naked heathens?"

Unconsciously, by his supreme, ingrained confidence in his master, he had given reassurance. Smith, as a matter of fact, was not looking apprehensive at all; he was looking, rather, very much disgusted. Quite forgetful of his company, he spat with

ruminative irritation. His mind was occupied with the thousand pros and cons of the situation.

When he spoke it was a judicial summing-up of his conclusions, just as though he were talking to a trio of hard-bitten prospectors rather than to three inexperienced scientists who had to be kept in good spirits.

"Well, Gor strike 'em, I'm not sorry it happened. It shows one thing. They're not out for scalps yet. Stampeding those coolies was just a part of their game to hold us here. They daren't take the responsibility of attacking us until more orders come from the big chief; not as long as we sit tight, that is. Now, it 'll take until to-morrow morning at least before a runner can get to Pembe's den an' back with orders. 'N' it's going to be dark soon, anyway; so the best we can do is to break out a tent for the lady an' sit right here."

A fleeting gleam came into the girls tired eyes; it seemed that this uncompromisingly efficient man could find time to be human, now that the immediate stress of action was past.

Smith's decision was obviously the acceptance of the least of two or three worse evils. Yet Van Eyck showed a tendency to be argumentative.

"I suppose you know best about stopping or making a dash under cover of the dark, but—"

Smith's scorn was immediate. "Huh? Cover? Son, the only cover there'd be in the night would be for the niggers to walk up behind and jab us in the end with a spear. 'But' what?"

"I was going to say, but why is Miss Harrison selected for all the little luxuries?"

It was petty; but Van Eyck was laboring under the strain of jangled nerves and aching muscles. Smith was, moreover, a man—as he, too, was a man, while the girl was—a girl. But Smith was all unconscious of antagonism.

"You mean the tent?" he said quickly. "Because these jungles are likely to be a bit malarious at night. 'Sides, she ought to get all the rest she can to-night, she'll likely need her strength to-morrow."

"And what about us?"

Smith was busying himself with one of the scattered packs, but he was beginning to be surprised.

"We? Oh, thunder, we'll roll up in a blanket a piece."

Van Eyck was strangely persistent.

"And don't we get malaria?"

"Huh?" Smith stiffened in his stooped-over position and turned. Then he murmured, with slow deliberation: "I was figuring on a scheme to sit up an' keep an eye peeled; but I guess I should have said, ladies."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ONE CHANCE.

VAN EYCK went suddenly white, while Smith, with cool disdain, turned again to stoop over his pack. It was all very foolish and unreasonable, and neither of them could have told what it was about; but the girl needed no conjecture. With feminine intuition she fathomed in a second the strained feeling between them. As once before, she stepped with calm decision into the breach, and adroitly twisted the meaning which was so obvious to her into another and safer channel.

"How silly you two men are, growling at one another like bears because you're both tired and nervous."

She was clever. She knew that the charge would stagger Smith into an indignant defensive, and Howard she could manage at any time. Smith, as she had expected, snorted. He tired! And nerves! Gorblimey! He straightened up with hands thrown out in a declamatory attitude to repudiate the shameful charge; but the girl's steady eyes upon him reduced him, first to stammering incoherence, and then to gruff mumblings.

He turned again to his pack, rumbling like a querulous elephant, and set about erecting single-handed a tent which four coolies had been accustomed to struggle with. Van Eyck stalked moodily to hunt through the other packs, and produced, sulkily, blankets. Poonoosawmi was already clattering with pots and pans and blowing at a camp-fire such as campers

read about in outdoor magazines, but are never able to make—a microscopic flame which consumed the minimum of fuel and gave the maximum of heat concentrated in one spot under the pot.

Presently Smith's voice boomed from within the drunken billowings of the tent, cheerful again, and coldly impersonal:

"While we eat, folks, there's going to be a heap to talk about, an' maybe decide about; so Poonoosawmi, cook of the devil's hostel, make speed."

"Instantly, marshter," responded Poonoosawmi with alacrity. "Here is wealthy predigested foodings in tins; therefore, is every possible soonness easy. Marshter, I am seeing in distance one black coolie fellow's head examining fearfully from behind bamboo. For, marshter, it is easy shot in the gloaming, and then say, 'Swine, that is for running away *backsheesh*.'"

Smith's only answer was a growl of exasperation at a complicated tent-cot, and shortly after a rending of wood and canvas as the whole thing came apart in his impatient hands.

Fifteen minutes later the party sat on four immaculate camp-chairs round an intricate camp-table which Poonoosawmi supplied with exotic luxuries out of tins. It was as comfortable a little party as could have been found in any summer camp. The only suggestion that tall savages watched from almost within spear-throw was in Smith's eyes, which flitted incessantly between the tall bamboo clumps, and in the fact that his rifle rested in the crook of his arm against his shoulder.

Conversation was almost cheerful, though desultory. Smith contributed little toward it, for he felt rather hopelessly out of place in the, to him, profound subjects which the scientific trio discussed. He frowned frequently as his gaze shot from one clump to the next, and it was clear that he was absorbed in some weighty matter. It was with relief that he was able to rise finally and fish his pipe from a patent little strap sewn on to his belt.

"Get comfortable, folks," he admonished briefly. "We got to talk."

There was an ominous seriousness in his manner which coupled with the gathering gloom to convey a chill misgiving to the others. The strain of continuous apprehension was beginning to wear on them.

For a moment he loomed massively huge against the fire as he snatched a glowing coal and dropped it into his pipe. Then he stalked and dropped down, cross-legged, on the ground—no unstable folding camp-furniture for him. They hung on his words. He ruminated a while, and then spoke in a slow rumble:

"Now here's what I figure we're up against. We've a choice of two things, an' I think you all ought to decide before we make a start."

Poonoosawmi, listening as he washed up, chuckled; and the girl, too, was beginning to understand that Smith was just being diplomatic, and that the ultimate action was already outlined. She sat still and listened.

"Now we know that this bunch doesn't want to take the responsibility of attacking us, so it's good betting that we're safe for to-night, *if* we sit tight; an' that's what you've got to decide. We know there's some two dozen of the Nagas to hold us. Well, two dozen isn't such bad odds." His voice was suddenly hard with grim emphasis. "Now *I can bust through!* I can get *you* through. *But*—the dark is all in their favor, not ours; an' there's a chance that some of us will—stay back in the jungle."

He studied them with the shrewd intensity of a hawk from under his pale brows. The fire-light flickering on their faces showed them tense and white, waiting still on his words. Suddenly he fired this bomb.

"But you'll have to abandon everything you've got."

Immediately the professor spoke. There was no suspicion of hesitancy in his tone.

"It is not to be thought of. All the equipment is of no consequence. But the results of my experiments *must be saved.* They may mean more to my country than I dare to hope. We prefer the alternative, whatever it is. Time is the only element to be considered. Our information must be placed in the proper hands as soon as possible." And the others nodded in emphatic assent.

Smith nodded, too, slowly, as was his habit when he approved. "Yes, that's how I figured you'd jump. The other side is: By to-morrow a runner will get back from Chief Pembe. It's easy guessing he'll bring reinforcements, an' some topside dog with authority. An' there my guessing quits business. What this chief will do is past betting. We know that Pembe knows that it doesn't pay to get into complications with the government by killing white men. On the other hand, that slimy Greek may have given him enough *backsheesh* to persuade him that it does pay."

Smith stopped and rolled over to the fire to procure another coal for his pipe, letting his words soak in. He rolled back, and sat puffing for a full minute before the professor spoke.

"Still, that leaves a chance of saving the result of our labors. The other thing is a certainty. And our results *will not be abandoned.*"

He spoke with a desperate intensity; and again there was no hesitation in the support from his companions. Then he added hopefully: "And something may turn up."

Smith flashed an immediate didactic finger at him.

"Professor Sahib, things don't turn up —unless you make 'em."

The professor was silent. By virtue of his age and his position he had acted as mouthpiece for the party; but he was a scientist; he was no leader of men to devise a plan of campaign. His daughter quietly asserted the position which should have been his—and had always been hers.

"I—we were thinking that perhaps you could make something turn up."

Smith swung his gaze around to her with an intenseness which held her. His back was to the fire, and only the hard outline of his cheek stood out against its glow, but refracted light showed the dominance in his shadowed eyes and the fierce question that they held, accentuated rather by the alert, forward poise of his body than by any distinguishable detail. In his foolish male reasoning he was sure that her attitude in what was to come would indicate the answer.

"That's just what I was coming to," he said quickly. "I wanted to know how you people felt about your stuff. Well, seeing that you're bound to stick by it, there's just one chance that I know."

He paused, choosing his words while they sat tense. Then he shot this at them:

"I told you I had some influence with the Lushai villages. Well, there's a chief, Ugo-Banda, got a thorn stockade some twenty miles south of here. There's a chance that one of us may be able to sneak through, an' if we give him enough *backsheesh*, bring back help. It 'll be a mean job, 'cause these Nagas can see and hear about as well as wild animals in the jungle. But it's a working chance." He paused, holding them with his glowing eyes. "Now *I* have the best chance."

He stared at the girl, thinking in his paltry male craftiness that his answer would surely come now. But what man, even a dilettante of the drawing-rooms, can fence with a woman in these matters. What he got was:

"Is there—any chance of your—not—coming back?"

"Three to one," said Smith promptly.

"Then, we can't afford to take that chance," said the girl, with quiet conviction, "because our ultimate fate depends on you." And her father rumbled agreement.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FORLORN HOPE.

SMITH was no nearer to his answer than when he had started. But the stern necessity of deciding upon the details of some definite plan of action was beginning to absorb his attention. Had he been as keen an analyst of self as he was of his fellow men, he might have wondered from his readiness to digress whether the answers were so vital a thing in his life, after all. But such fine psychology was beyond his conception. He put aside the emotional for the practically important.

Well, Poonoosawmi would have the next best chance. But, being only a native, supposing he'd get through, the chief would never believe but that he was lying, an'

would swing him by the heels between two trees. Poonoosawmi might go as a guide; but—" it's got to be one of us white men."

Once again he paused. This time it was a very long silence that followed. With the strange telepathy of intense moments everybody knew that everybody was thinking the same thing; yet nobody voiced the thought. The girl sat with staring eyes glued on Smith. The professor scowled fiercely at him from under his pent-house brows.

Only Van Eyck seemed to see nobody. He stared straight ahead of him into the dark, and the picture that he saw must have been fearsomely vivid, for his face was strained and gray. Slowly, irresistibly, all eyes were drawn to him, and so they sat waiting.

At last he stirred painfully, as out of a trance, and moistened his lips several times, and then his voice came, strangely quiet:

" How soon do you think I should start?"

" Howard, you can't go!"

The cry came from the girl, torn from her lips, where it had hung expectant, knowing what was coming. In it Smith, if he had known women as he knew men, might have found some clue to the answer he was seeking; but he seemed oblivious. He was nodding, smiling slowly at the young man through hard, narrowed eyes.

" Good lad!" he rumbled, deep in his chest. " Good lad! I was figuring you'd go over handsome."

But the girl turned to him with blazing eyes.

" You! You knew that it would come to this! You worked up to it deliberately from the beginning. I can see it all now. Oh, you—you *man!*"

There was no compliment in the agonized epithet, no room for acceptance of any of the virtues which might be attributed to the word, pronounced thus, without qualification. Man, to her mind just then, meant simply the male of the species who sought to destroy his rival. But Smith was nodding at her now with the same hard eyes; but there was no smile in them.

" Yes," he said, and his voice was inexorably impersonal, " I knew that was the only chance."

" Oh, how could you? How dared you? He has no experience; his danger will be a hundred times greater than yours. Oh, it's the case of Uriah over again."

Smith was splendidly ignorant of what the insinuation might mean. He knew only that the girl was hysterical. He nodded, still grimly.

" Yes," he said with quiet emphasis, " and if I go *your* risk will be a hundred times greater. Therefore, I stay."

The girl gasped a great breath, and stood strained in impotent anguish, clenching her finger-nails deep into her quivering palms. Words came no more to her. Van Eyck stepped swiftly to her side and laid a hand on her arm.

" He's quite right, Margaret," he said quietly. " I'm the logical man to go." He led her to her father, unresisting. " I've got to talk with Mr. Smith."

He turned to Smith with a certain grim resolution; and Smith took his hand with what he thought was a firm pressure of commendation, but Van Eyck screwed his face and hunched the shoulder. The girl had hidden her face against her father's coat.

Smith was unable to understand the necessity for these demonstrations. But they pained and distracted him. Discreetly he drew Van Eyck aside, and his first words were to comfort him.

" It isn't going to be as bad as it looks, son. I'll come with you past their line of pickets, an' "—his face suddenly glowered fierce—" we'll get through. After that your big job is going to be covering the distance, an' then persuading this Ugo-Banda bloke to send his gang along. Now come an' talk with Poonoosawmi, an' let's get an outline on the thing."

Poonoosawmi was abject. Under Smith's compelling eyes, when he had been dragged ruthlessly into hair-raising situations which those eyes regarded only with cold hostility, he was capable of absorbing a certain amount of the cunning and aggressiveness displayed by his master; but to go anywhere without him was a paralyzing prospect.

He gesticulated with angular contortions, and yammered:

"Marshter, this is impromptu immolation. This fellow is ringing us round like the Sunday-school game in which we are the *it*. With malignant face of bush-devils he are waiting with uplifted spear in the black dark to leap upon our back. Marshter, never is it—"

"Shut up," growled Smith. "Toad's egg, I'm going to see you through the line."

Poonoosawmi was instantly appeased. Only one difficulty did he make.

"How is possible, having run this blockade by the grace of God and marshter, to persuade to this bloodthirsty savage that succor is imminent necessity?"

Smith thought for a while, blowing furious clouds from his pipe. Then he took it from his mouth and pointed his utterances at both of them with the stem.

"You'll take, first, all the *backsheesh* you can carry—rupees, guns, an' anything in the outfit that looks like a good toy for a jungle nigger. You'll tell him it's for me, Smith, the hunter of rhino horns. He'll remember."

There was a grim twinkle in Smith's eyes which was reminiscent of some astounding escapade in the past. "And you'll give him"—he unbuckled his belt and slipped from it the loop of a heavy, silver-mounted hunting-knife of Gurkha manufacture—"you'll give him this as a proof; he's wanted it for three years. An' you'll tell him that Smith Sahib says that there's a gang of naked Naga monkey men making war in his country, an' you'll work him all about the insult of it.

"An' you'll wind up with telling him that Smith Sahib promises him twice as much *backsheesh* if he'll come up with speed and clean the offense out of his country, an' that I, Smith Sahib, will be right here to help him."

He lit his pipe again and puffed ruminatively with glowing eyes.

"I think that's all; an'"—with sudden explosion—"if he don't come up, tell him by Gora'mighty that I'll come an' burn his blasted stockade an' his rotten village all to *jehannum!* Now let's dig for the presents; an' then the sooner you get away, the better chance of turning the trick."

Preparations were simple. Under Smith's great hands the scattered packs were ripped apart and rifled in a jiffy.

"You go an' say so-long to the folks, son," he advised as he grunted over a tough rawhide knot. "Take all the money they've got; I've got a little pile from Nicholson myself, an' hop to it."

Van Eyck took long enough to return out of the little circle of fire-light to find two compact bundles cunningly fitted with shoulder-yokes, improvised on the spur of the moment, for the coolies, of course, had carried everything on their heads. Smith strode for a moment to the fire.

"I want you folks to collect up your packs an' do 'em up again and then stack 'em round the tent. Keep moving, 'cause you'll be watched, of course; an' let 'em think we're all at home. Professor Sahib, if anything happens, shoot, an' I'll come running. But it won't. Come on, Van Eyck. Edge easily out of the fire-light, an' then duck; an' keep right in my tracks."

That was all. Brief, to the point, efficient. The professor reached mechanically for a rifle. The girl raised her head, as though to say something, but Smith was already melting away in the shadows.

For perhaps a hundred yards he slipped noiselessly from one bamboo-clump to the next. Poonoosawmi followed him like a ghost, and Van Eyck stumbled along behind, making the best of an unaccustomed situation. Yet his noise was appalling. Smith stopped.

"You got to do better than that, son. We'll go slower. Their line won't be very far ahead now, but they'll be spread pretty wide, an' by the grace o' Pete the woods are full o' scared coolies, so we'll get less notice than we might otherwise."

They stole forward again. It was a direct dispensation of Providence that there was no moon, but the light that filtered from the brilliant stars through the swaying foliage was sufficient to distinguish the looming masses of the giant grass. The incessant rustling and clicking of the tall stems, which is ever absent in a bamboo-jungle, even in a dead calm, was another godsend which covered much of the noise of their advance.

Suddenly Poonoosawmi tugged at Smith's

coat. In the dark he ran his hand along his master's arm and pointed. Smith could see nothing in the dense blackness ahead, and he was sure that Poonoosawmi's eyes were no better than his own. But he knew that the little man had the uncanny sensitiveness of an ape. Something must be there, he was sure. He cupped his hand to his batlike ear.

"What does your skin tell you? Go ahead," he whispered.

But Poonoosawmi's forte was not the leading of forlorn hopes. He clung to his master.

"Son of Shaitan's goat! I hope that all the twenty fiends of Laipoh catch thee!" Smith muttered, and he advanced slowly, feeling ahead of him with the muzzle of his rifle, his finger curled over the trigger. His advance was infinitely cautious and with less noise than a cat. Within two yards he melted from his companion's view, and left them wondering and waiting in the tingling dark.

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

A Good-for-Nothin' Gal

by Edwina Levin

WE cantered leisurely along toward the northeast, where unsightly derricks etched themselves blackly against a distant horizon, and stood guard over the Marvin oil-fields. The air came fresh and crisp from the hard earth, while an early sun was caught up on frosted stubble-grass and spread away like silver spangles on a woman's gown in shimmering beauty, unbroken by tree or shrub or hill.

"See that?" Marvin turned in his saddle, and I followed his outstretched arm.

Away to the east, clearly set against the glittering green landscape and cutting a white line into the blue sky, was a tall marble shaft, stately and impressive. Beyond it, an animal about the size of a shepherd dog stood rigid as gray stone, sharp head toward us, ears upstanding, alert for danger. It was that most contemptible of all animals—the cowardly coyote.

"Why is Nature so wasteful?" I mused. "She does so many useless things."

Marvin looked at me in surprise. Then: "Oh, the coyote; I meant the monument!"

He fell into thought and without a word headed toward the east; the while I studied him—this young soldier man, about whom the papers, British, French, and American, had had so much to say. Somehow I had never been able to adjust my mind to the incongruity of him.

Marion Morgan Marvin was his name. A theatrical appendage, such as an actress or movie-star might have. And feminine. Not at all the sort of name one would expect of a hero of the Argonne. His face was too womanish, in a sort of way—not weak; but the features too finely cut. Yet there on his shoulder was a gold leaf—and he had gone into the war a private! And there were medals and ribbons and crosses, about which we had all heard; but which none of us had seen him wear.

As if in answer to what was in my mind, he said abruptly: "The world has a curious

way of saddling us with honors we ought not to have."

"What do you mean?" I questioned, as the coyote turned at our approach and scampered away.

Silently he drew rein before the monument—imposing in its majestic aloofness.

With surprise I saw that in the base of the shaft had been cut a small, narrow vault and on a purple velvet bed therein, well protected by heavy glass, were medals and ribbons, and crosses for distinguished service overseas; while underneath the little vault was an inscription which read:

MARY: A Good-for-Nothin' Gal

"Who was Mary?" I asked.

Marvin's fine gray eyes wandered off into space; and knowing him, I waited. Presently he spoke, softly, as if seeing what was hidden from my eyes.

"She was just a stray cat. Not really you know; but she blew in out of nowhere, like one—*a bit of life's waste*. Yet she was one of my mothers; she suffered as woman is seldom called upon to suffer that a man may be born. God!"

He broke off as if torn by his thought, and into his voice there came a curious repressed passion. "I wasn't worth it! But I brought back the pretties to her—"

He gestured toward the decorations on their purple bed, buried within that stately marble.

And I held silent.

When he spoke again he had recovered his usual calm.

My folks lived down in Louisiana then, in the pine country; and one day in the early autumn Mary dropped in, carrying her wardrobe slung across her shoulder on a stick, and dragging a pine brush after her.

"To wipe out my tracks," she announced nonchalantly.

She was running away. She admitted it. Where from, what from, who from, nobody ever knew. She talked a great deal, but nobody ever found out anything about her. My mother thought she was about twelve years of age then; though she might have been older, for Mary Morgan didn't know her age. Sometimes she claimed to be a waif; said her mother had left her to be raised by negroes, which was why she had run away; at other times gipsies had stolen her from her father's farm; and again, she was the child of circus performers, and had strayed from the tent. Several things led my mother to believe that this last came as near to the truth as anything she ever told. The one point upon which every one was soon agreed, and in which opinion she heartily concurred, was that she was a "good-for-nothin' gal."

My folks were very poor in those days and were not able to take another child. Father and mother had seven of their own. But Mary didn't ask them to let her stay—she just stayed. And they were tender-hearted and generous beyond their means, as the poor usually are.

Almost her first words on setting her bundle down were:

"I want to be bound."

Rigid questioning brought out that some one had told her the story of *Hannah the Bound Girl* in "The Hoosier School-Master"; and nothing would do but my father must make out a paper which said that she was bound to him till she was eighteen—and she affixed her "mark" thereto.

My mother afterward learned that this was a precautionary measure on Mary's part, to prevent herself from running away; for somehow she had a curious sense of honor about her mark attached to a piece of paper. And only in this way could they ever, in any measure, control her.

"I ain't no good at housework," she declared at once, and repeatedly. "The house shuts off my breath. But I'm a right smart field-hand. 'Tain't so hard as housework, 'cause you don't have to keep at it all the time."

So she went to the field with my brothers, by choice, and chopped out more cotton than grass, and transplanted jimson-weed for corn. She assured my father that she could plow; but when he tried her, she merely tore up the young crop. And later when the cotton was ready to pick she would dawdle all day; and at sundown put a couple of bricks in her sack, or pour a dipper of water into the center of the cotton, to make it weigh heavy.

In despair, my mother tried her at cooking. The potatoes were at once raw, and burned, and the corn-bread doughy in the middle. Nor could she learn, though she accepted instruction with seeming intelligence, and went about her work willingly, industriously, busying herself about nothing. She would sweep the floor, using more energy to hide the dust in a corner or under a chair, than would have been necessary to get it out. Her idea of tidying the house was to throw my mother's best bonnet under the bed out of sight, then roll watermelons alongside of it, or on it, as the case might be. If mother scolded her, she acknowledged her fault contritely and promised to be a better girl. And always her favorite apology was:

"I ain't nothin' but a good-for-nothin' gal, nohow."

This seemed to be the exact truth. If she could do one thing well, besides ride a pony, nobody ever found it out. But *she could ride!* Anything! Anywhere! Standing or sitting; on neck or rump. It was this that led our folks to think there might have been truth in her tales of circus life.

I wish I could make you see her as I do: slim and yet plump, barely above medium height, with hair as black as night and as glossy as moonlit waters. And heavy waves were in it, which she spent her life trying to smooth out. Her eyes, big and round and black as human eyes could be, had in them a sort of doglike affection, a gentle, pleading light which begged you not to throw her out. At least my folks read her expression that way; and they never had the heart to tell her to go.

She chewed tobacco, and spat the puddles behind chairs, or perhaps in more conspicuous places. If she went to visit a neighbor, she always managed to steal something. One time it would be a corkscrew, for which she had no use; or a match-safe, or one shoe—a man's shoe, as likely as not—or again a letter, which she could not read. Nor could any amount of pleading on my mother's part convert her from the error of her ways. She acknowledged her sins freely and repeated them at the first opportunity.

Once she acquired religion. My father had been reading a chapter in the Bible, as was his wont of evenings, when suddenly Mary jumped up and began dancing on tiptoes, and shouting:

"Oh, praise the Lord! Praise the blessed Lord! I want to die now 'cause I done plumb got converted from the devil in me."

For two days thereafter she claimed that all her sins had been rolled away, and declared she felt like a feather floating around the house.

Then she swallowed a gold ring belonging to a little girl, whose mother came to visit my mother; swallowed it purposely, because she had no other way of hiding it.

My father tried, when she first came, to find out something about her people; but he never succeeded. If all the weird tales she told about herself had been true, she must have lived thirty years instead of twelve. Anyhow, she grew up with my mother's children, and called her "Mama" and my father, "Papa," as if she had been their own.

Now and again she would disappear; to be gone a few days, or perhaps weeks. At first my mother, full of human kindness, as are women who have large families, would worry about this stray child of hers; but always Mary came back.

"On account of me bein' bound, I had to come back," she would confess ungratefully, "not as I wanted to."

And always she had wild tales to tell of her experiences in a far country. She had got that expression from the Bible, no doubt, and forever "journeyed to and from a far country."

My folks tried to send her to school; but it proved as futile as any other attempt at improving her. She kept the school in an uproar—when she attended. Usually she went fishing; though she never caught any fish. Her excuse was generally the same when my mother took her to task.

She would whimper: "I couldn't study nohow, an' I jes' naturally had to have some fish. I was fish hongry."

Finally she went away and was gone two months. Upon her return she declared that it was the school which "driv" her away.

"I can't stand the looks of my teacher's face, nohow," she told mother, with an air

of grave confidence. "She reminds me of a frog; and I hate frogs."

After that mother gave it up. I believe Mary learned to sign her name and to spell out a few simple words; but beyond this her education never progressed.

Regular habits she had—one: her endless efforts to stretch the waves out of her glossy black hair. She soaped them, and oiled them, and wore band-combs and ribbons; but those big, beautiful waves refused to straighten. My mother thought she may have carried a strain of darker blood in her veins, which would account for this curious trait. Also her skin had a soft, yellowish tint, both beautiful and suspicious.

Altogether, there was perhaps never a human being more trifling, more hopelessly no-account to life than was Mary Morgan. She acknowledged it forlornly. She wished that she was "smart like other gals" and had many visions of herself as doing this or that heroic thing; the while she hid under grape-arbors to avoid work, or when forced out, did it as slouchingly as possible.

When my mother, who had seven boys and was always hard-worked, asked her one day why she scrubbed a kitchen-table for an hour, she replied:

"Might as well. If I get through quick there'll be something else to do."

It never occurred to her that she expended as much energy upon the table as she would have done upon the "something else." Nor could she be made to see it.

Finally, one day when she was sixteen, she asked my mother to let her see her "bound" paper.

"I want to scratch out my mark. I'm tired of bein' bound. It ain't no use nohow to be a bound girl."

Blotting out her mark, she viewed it with satisfaction.

"I'm free now; and I allow it's time to travel and see the world."

Just what she had in mind, no one knew, because she had always "traveled" at will.

Shortly after that she disappeared in the night, and my folks supposed she had gone for good.

It was about this time that they moved to Oklahoma to take up some government land, and they had no way of letting Mary know.

Months passed in which no word came from her, and they felt that she was indeed lost. Oftentimes my mother thought of this strange child who had come from nowhere and gone again into nowhere, and tears would fill her gentle eyes.

Father built a little two-room shack out here; for my folks were still poor. Two of my brothers had gone away to St. Louis to make their fortunes, and one had married and stayed in Louisiana, so that there were only four children at home; six in family. The little cabin stood right over yonder beyond the monument. And there were two beds in the front room, and one in the back. This last was used for a kitchen and dining-room, as well. My father and the four boys at home tried to till the ground; though a poor living came out of it.

They had been there about two years, when one day Mary walked in. She was amazingly dressed in a scarlet silk frock, with a large beplumed hat; and she announced to my mother that she was now a "bad woman."

"Mary, you shouldn't tell such stories," reproved mother.

"It's the God's truth!" Mary replied earnestly. "A man which ain't married me give 'em to me and I come home to show you." She spoke of "home" quite as if there had been no change in location.

My mother accepted this story as one of her romances, and took it for granted that she had stolen the clothes, as perhaps she had. She declared she had been in jail, and that it was the jailer who had given them to her. Later, she said she had "borrowed" them from the jailer's daughter. She stuck to it, however, that she had been in jail.

"What were you in jail for, Mary?" asked my mother.

"For getting drunk," she replied nonchalantly; "and usin' bad words in front of a man. He was a pretty man with gold buttons on his clothes."

After the usual futile lecture my mother questioned her as to how she had found our new home.

"I went down to Louisiana," the girl re-

plied, " and folks told me. That was when I run away from my husband. I done went and got married since I see you; but I didn't stay with him but a week, 'cause his name was Johnson, and I found out Johnson was a nigger name."

" Won't you ever stop lying, Mary?" asked my father exasperatedly.

" No, sir, I reckon not; but I'm married. I didn't like the name of Morgan. Mary Morgan is a trifling name."

She produced a license to substantiate the story of her marriage; but beyond these brief details my mother never learned anything further about this episode in her life.

In the four years that followed many changes came to us. Two of my brothers left home, and one died. And father and mother were alone with Ben, their youngest child, a boy of fourteen.

Then my mother discovered that another child would be born to her. I am sure she could not have looked forward, at her time of life, to my coming, with any degree of happiness.

Meanwhile, Mary came and went. The last time, however, she told my mother with sad earnestness that she would not come again.

Mother, feeling oddly concerned, spent hours talking and reading Scripture to Mary, to all of which the girl answered: " I like livin' nice where there ain't no work to do. But I had to come home first and see you-all once more."

My mother wept over her in one last attempt to help her; Mary wept, too, bewailed her shortcomings, and remained as fixed as are the prairies. She hung around, however, for weeks, as if loath to leave, and followed my mother about the place with doglike devotion.

Ben, the one child left in our home, had been sent to Oklahoma City to go to day-school and work for his board, as my mother was determined that he should not be brought up without education.

Mary was still lingering when the momentous day came for mother; and my father went to town as fast as horse-flesh could carry him to get a doctor.

Mary sat inside the cabin, watching my mother with great doglike, black eyes; but, as usual, doing nothing to help or relieve her.

It was toward midafternoon, and my mother was racked by the burden of her pains, when there came to the two women, alone in that little cabin, a faint, distant rumble, like the far approach of a storm. At the first sound Mary lifted her head after the manner of a jungle creature. My mother sat up in terror. Both knew instantly what it meant. Mary ran out into the yard. Torn with pain as mother was, she followed, grabbing a rifle as she went.

Far over the prairie they saw a dust-cloud—no more. It was approaching rapidly; the while that roar grew louder and louder. A stampede! They were coming on and on—those crazed animals, carrying destruction and death with them! And directly in their path was my father's cabin, my mother, heavy with child, and Mary. They would sweep that small shack down like a box of pasteboard; would stumble and fall, and trample each other, and go on—and a heap of splintered boards and mangled flesh would remain!

" Well, Mary," said my mother, with that stoical philosophy which comes to the woman of the prairies, " the little stranger won't see the Oklahoma sunlight to-morrow, will it?"

" I reckon *he* will," Mary returned. She had from the first decided that this child must be a boy; and constantly referred to it as " he."

" Guess he's going to be a President or some other kind of a big man," she went on. " And I allow the good Lawd ain't gwine to be cheated out 'n His big men by a lot of foolish oxen."

" I don't mind dying," my mother groaned, " but, oh, those dreadful hoofs!"

" Maybe so us could ride fast and get out o' the way," Mary suggested hopefully, " but papa he done got the mare, and ain't only that wild colt left," she finished forlornly, " and you couldn't ride hit."

" I couldn't ride anyhow," returned my mother, her face drawn with pain, even as she spoke; " but you, Mary, there's no need for you to stay and be killed, too. Go quick! Take the colt and keep to the north. Go! Go at once! And ride like the wind!"

Without a word Mary ran into the lot. I believe I mentioned that she could ride anything with four legs. In a twinkling she had bridled that bucking colt and was herself astride it. Round and round it whirled, two, three times, reared up on its hind legs, then on front—but Mary held fast.

Digging her heels into the animal's flanks she jerked cruelly on the bridle, tearing the tender, untethered mouth, and heading him to the north. Like a shot from a rifle he started. Then the colt whirled suddenly, stood upright again, and made a leap toward the cabin. My mother shrank away as it came toward her. It flashed past; but Mary in that instant had leaned to the side as if to speak; instead she had snatched the rifle from my mother's inert hands. The next instant she was gone.

With horror my mother watched that wild colt carry the girl—not away to the north—*but straight toward that infernal dust-cloud!* It had now resolved itself into a moving mass of mottled death which, though away off still, was charging straight as an arrow, toward the lone cabin! And Mary was charging as madly toward it!

Suddenly the girl stood upright upon her bucking steed, raised the rifle to her shoulder—to right, then left, the black barrel turned— She was too far away and the noise was too great for my mother to hear the sharp crack of those shots, but—

Who has solved the psychology of a stampede? One moment a great herd of mild oxen are peacefully grazing upon the plains; the next, without reason or warning, they have become a sweeping inferno of noise and destruction—blindly following their mad leaders to death, perhaps for themselves! And who taught that Good-for-Nothin' Gal the thing which made her ride out that day, firing first to the right, then to left, *at the leaders*—not to kill, nor to cripple, in which case those in front would have been trampled down, and other leaders would have taken their places—but low enough for the shots to fall on their savage ears, a foreign noise, sharp, strange and terrifying; shocking them, rousing in them that most powerful instinct of man and beast—self-preservation from danger!

To right and to left the leaders swerved, elephants of destruction, frightened before a mouse, small and awful.

They began forming a huge "Y," in the very mouth of which now was Mary, standing up vividly against the sky-line in a bright-red frock, a figure of flame, with uplifted gun, turning this way and that on the back of a crazed colt that never stood for an instant on four feet.

Then the tail of the Y caught her, and she and the pony went down.

Constantly spreading, the Y became a "V." The cabin was still well in their path. Red-eyed, frothing at the mouth, the divided leaders burst upon my father's shack, clearing it on either side, the very warmth of their bodies brushing my mother, as they swept on. The V parted entirely before the last of them came upon the cabin, and they passed in two complete divisions, taking easterly and westerly directions.

My father and the doctor, riding wildly up to the cabin, found my mother in a dead faint. They had seen the herd from afar, had watched its hideous charge; had seen it part mysteriously.

My father went to find Mary. Her pony had fallen on her. He was dead. Though almost every bone in her poor body had been crushed, Mary was still alive when father brought her in.

And that night she lay on one bed, and my mother on the other in the "big room," and my mother wept more for the girl whose great hungry eyes never left her face than she did for the pain that racked her own frame. Nor did that Good-for-Nothin' Gal let one moan escape her, through the long night lest the doctor might leave my mother's side and come to her, as he sometimes did. Always she would wave him away, and point to my mother.

Dr. Taylor wanted to give her an opiate; but she stubbornly refused it.

"I got to stay awake till *he* comes," she said. "He's goin' to be a President or some other kind of a big man, and I want to see what he looks like."

My mother, too, refused an anesthetic to help her through her trial, choosing to suffer with Mary, in full consciousness. Toward dawn I sent up my first wail of rage against a burst of light and air. My mother, even

in her hour of greatest torture, clung with her eyes to the poor pain-racked face on that other bed so near her own, and from which came never a sound.

Over the drawn face of the girl dawned a smile as I let out that lusty yell. They wrapped me in a blanket, and Mary, the Good-for-Nothin' Gal, looked at my face before my mother did. Those who saw say that into her fast-glazing eyes there came a gleam of motherhood.

An hour later she beckoned to my father, bending down, he caught her words:

" Bury me in the back yard where I can watch him grow up. And don't put Morgan on my grave. It's a triflin' name. Jes' say: ' Mary, a Good-for-Nothin' Gal!' And please, papa, will you soap my hair down, so there won't be no curl in hit?"

My father promised and she motioned toward the bed and tried to speak; but her tongue was thickening. He caught " big man " and brought me to her, and laid me in her arms. Her eyes went to my mother's face. Then she signaled him again.

" Jes' a Good-for-Nothin' Gal—big man," she whispered—and closed her eyes.

Marvin stopped suddenly and flicked a bit of stubble-grass from the shining right puttee, crossed over his saddle-horn.

" Perhaps it's because my mother has told me so much about her that I see her so plainly," he added; " that I saw her Over There, when sometimes I was so damnably afraid. I didn't want to do any of the things for which they pinned medals on me; but I couldn't fail her. I had to be a ' big man '!"

Flinging his leg back into the stirrup, he pulled on his bridle-bit, and we rode on in silence toward the oil-fields.

IN THE GARDEN

THERE'S a light in the window; the curtains half drawn
Let a golden ray fall on the sweet-scented lawn;
And I see now and then at the window a face
Of the dear little angel who lends to the place
All the charm one imagines that paradise knows—
And it blooms in the night like an opening rose.

In the parlor I know there's mama with her book,
Too absorbed in the story to pause or to look,
Or to question or wonder, but here at the gate
I am waiting for courage and blessing the fate
That has brought me so near to the dear little lass
Who is watching for me, peering out through the glass.

It is eight by the clock in the old belfry tower,
And the moonlight is soft on the slumbering flower.
Quick, she slips from the window! I listen and catch
Pit-a-pat in the hallway, and *clock!* goes the latch,
And down through the arbor she hastens, and I
Am persuaded 'tis best to indulge in a lie.

" I was just coming in when I saw you come out "—
She is smiling—I wonder if that implies doubt,
When, alas for the fears of a too-timid youth!
She confesses: " Now, Paul, you're not telling the truth,"
And contributes a very unnerving " Ha-ha!"
And a hint that she thinks I'm afraid of mama.

Oh, you dear little woman, how well you divined
What it was that so troubled and worried my mind!
It was easy enough to ask you just to bless
With a word, when I'd reason to hope for a " Yes ";
But it wasn't so easy a matter to go
To mama when I'd reason to look for a " No!"

Paul Meders.

The Butt of Neptune's Jest

by George Mariano

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

LOSING the ship of which he was first mate through a moment of indecision, and later proving his unfitness as master of his own vessel, Dan Corwin, sunk to beach-combing at the South American town of Limanau, found inspiration for his regeneration in the words of a girl whose father, the courtly captain of the City of Altoona, offered Corwin a berth as first mate of his ship. Aboard the ship Dan again met one Panama Liz, who, at the town of Ancud, had bilked him of most of his wages.

Captain Hope had never been able to keep any of his first officers, and Dan soon discovered the reason: the captain was a drunkard. Yet his daughter was unaware of it. For, although rowed out to his ship in a state of intoxication, with wonderful control the skipper gained his cabin, the girl still ignorant of his true condition, where, when Dan had visited him, he lapsed into abuse and brutish drunkenness.

Then, once again Dan's initiative was tested, and for the first time he proved equal to the occasion, making a quick decision as to the disposition of cargo which had been lightered alongside. Then, two Spaniards coming aboard on an urgent visit, the captain miraculously arose to receive them, later giving Dan a taste of the real "quallty" which he possessed—which was not all suavity and polish. In fact, he cursed the mate roundly for what he termed his blunder in loading the cargo into the wrong hatch. Hope ordered peremptorily that it be broken out forthwith.

Dan saw it plainly; it was a case of "damned if you do, and damned if you don't"; and to make matters worse, it was equally plain that the crew would accord little deference to superiors whom they had come to regard as merely temporary. Resolved to leave, despite his promise to the girl, he renewed the promise, and his determination at her tearful entreaty. Somehow, they were in each other's arms; and then, at the approach of Panama Liz, they fell apart. The girl sought her stateroom, and Dan, turning to verify his suspicion that Edwards, the second mate, had purposely advised him wrongly as to the disposition of the cargo, ran foul of mutiny. The insolence of the Scandinavian bosun precipitated the clash—Dan's order and the man's sullen answer being followed by instant action. As the crew rushed him, Dan seized an ax. It split as he struck one of the men. The splintered club left in Dan's hand was no weapon with which to face the now thoroughly infuriated sailors.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FIGHT.

A GROAN that was more than half grunt roafed from the mouth of the man Dan had struck down. It was as a signal for the first yell of the men's wrath.

Had there been but two or three—or even half a dozen of them—the broken ax-handle would have been a better weapon than the ax itself. It was sufficient to knock a man senseless, and it was much more wieldly than the heavy thing Dan had picked up. But it lacked the moral force of being deadly.

Men ready to do murder may pause at the danger of being murdered themselves, even though they are numerous enough to get their man in the end. There is bound to be a little hanging back and leaving others to take the dangerous front, and some chance that this will amount to demoralization of the whole crowd. But all were ready to take chances with a mere tap on the head.

Dan struck and struck again. The ring -

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of the tough wood on their heads was fierce music in his ears. For he had the Irish trick of getting a certain joy out of being raging mad in the thick of a fight. One square-head went down entirely. Another of the big men reeled aside and tottered off drunkenly, apparently unable to see whither he was going.

Dan waved the stick in an effort to clear a little space before him. But a heavy hand snatched at it at the end of the arc. Dan wrested it loose, tried to swing it back at the head of the man who had caught it. That left things open too long on his other side. A crudely aimed blow landed on his left shoulder. Hardly a less vulnerable spot could have been struck, but the force of the blow spun Dan half around. A heavy boot caught his leg.

As he went down, he tried to land in a sitting posture—just because his fighting wrath was up, and he could not have stopped fighting until he had been rendered unconscious or killed. The men, turned brutes, were upon him before he could strike again. The stick slipped from his hand.

By all rights that should have ended the fight. There was no excuse for letting Dan get out from under. There seems to be something about being on the right side which always takes the heart out of those on the wrong side. If it were not so, policemen would have to patrol some parts of our towns in squads.

Dan could not have told how he wriggled out from under the five or six men who were struggling to get at him, to hit him with their fists, kick him, strangle him—do anything they could to injure or kill him. There was the feel of weakened pressure on his one arm and the opposite leg. He made instinctive use of it.

It was all instinct that simply moved where moving was possible, wriggled as a small dog wriggles for freedom from a strong man's arms. In the matter of quickness, Dan's build was as much to his advantage as theirs was in matter of sheer strength. He scrambled to his feet and ran.

It was a purely strategic retreat. Ten feet behind was the iron wall of the deckhouse. With that behind him, he could keep the fight in front. He made it, turned.

There were no rules for that fight. His first move was a quick, upward jerk of one knee, to send one of his antagonists doubled up with pain. He caught the next one with his fist in the eye. A third got a blow in the stomach, which did for him. Dan was hardly conscious of pain from a kick in the shins or a scratch from one of the wooden wedges hurled by a man in the rear and grazing his temple almost to lay the bone bare.

But the men in front were pushed up by those behind. One caught one arm; another warded off a blow by such a thrust that it sprained Dan's wrist almost helpless. He never struck again. A huge, hairy fist rose up before his face. The sensation was that of being struck by a speeding automobile. Dan's head banged back against the wall.

Things went black before him. He knew, dimly, that he was going down. He felt another blow—in the ribs at his right side. There was a terrific kick on one shin. He had no strength to resist. It came to him vaguely that this was the end.

Then there was another crash. Dan heard it rather than felt it. He wasn't sure whether it was a hit or a noise. He wasn't sure of anything. And then—

Dan hadn't been gone long. He was still half sitting, half lying, with head and shoulders propped against the wall of the deckhouse. Before him stood a row of sheepish-looking Swedes and Norwegians, their hands high above their heads. There were two or three breaks in the row. One was where a man lay sprawled upon his face, with a pool of blood around his head. Another man sat rocking back and forth, holding his side, and groaning with some strange agony. A third—but Dan couldn't quite turn his head enough to make sure whether there was a man down there or just a little more space between those on each side of the opening.

A voice was talking away off on the other side, a voice something between the sharp cracks of a pistol and the roar of thunder. Dan wasn't quite sure what it had to do with it all.

But he was sure of one thing. Those men were going to obey him. Slowly, with

infinite pain, he got himself straightened to a sitting posture. One of his legs seemed of no use at all; but he managed to help out with a hand and the other one. He got to his feet, got his back propped against the wall again. His eyes went over the row of faces twice before they could make out that of the boatswain. The man kept going up and down in front of Dan in a most unaccountable manner. But—he must go and head his men in opening that hatch behind them.

"You—Olaf—" Was he speaking or somehow doing it with a telephone? He tried to speak louder.

"You—get that—hatch open!"

"You wager your life, Olaf Jannsen, on getting it open," said the voice behind. "And, unless you want to brighten hell with that light hair of yours, you'll mind anything else my mate tells you to do. The next thing like this that happens will land you all ashore in irons. You'd never have time for a next thing, if I didn't know you'd always behaved before."

Dan saw that the big Swede moved. He moved toward the hatch. He seemed reluctant about lowering his hands; but he lowered them. Then it occurred to Dan that he might like to know who was doing the talking. He tried to turn and see—he got a glimpse of Captain Hope, a smoking pistol in each hand, a look of stern displeasure which might have been that of a great general, so cool and passionless did it appear.

But the glimpse went whirling round and round. Some one caught him on the other side. He was falling again. The one who had caught him could not hold him.

Yet his head did not strike the iron deck as he finally went down completely. It seemed pillowed—and very comfortable. And somebody was calling his name with a wonderfully sweet voice. He wasn't quite sure that it wasn't the angel calling him to start the long, last voyage. But he felt fairly certain that it wasn't—that; if he could only see, he would gaze into the face of the only girl he had ever dreamed of loving.

And then he was going down—down—down—to some unfathomable depth in nowhere. His last thought was that the tapping noises in his ears were made by men knocking wedges from the bars of a hatch. He had a feeling of grim satisfaction about it.

He came back up to earth—or the floating thing that was more homelike than earth to him—as they were getting him into his bed. He lay still for a moment. He was conscious of a very cool hand on his head. A sudden horror brought his eyes wide open. The hand was too cold for life. And he could think of no other hand likely to be on his forehead than that of Marion Hope.

He looked wildly about. Marion was not bending over him. She was standing at the foot of his bed. It was the captain whose face bent down—a face strangely white, almost blue. And it was the captain whose hand still rested on his brow.

What ailed the man? It puzzled him, worried him more than his own condition. It hardly seemed possible that a living, breathing, moving human being could feel so cold. But the captain was moving; he was taking a bottle from Marion's hand, then he was holding it to Dan's nose. The pungent odor almost choked for an instant, but seemed to send something like a galvanic current all through Dan's system. Dan sat up—and the captain demonstrated his life still further by talking.

"No—don't do that yet. I'm just hoping that you can let me have a look at that leg. I can't tell yet whether it's broken or not. Do you think you could stand a little pain? I'll try not to hurt."

Dan could not get over his amaze at the man. He could not reply for a moment, or put his attention upon anything else but the captain himself. It could not have been two hours since he had had this man cursing him in a most obviously drunken fury. Now he talked and acted like a physician accustomed to deal with cultured and wealthy patients. Nor was there now that seeming affectation of culture which had overdone the thing the first time Dan had met the captain. His manner was perfectly natural.

"Another little whiff of this, Mr. Corwin," Hope spoke again, when Dan had

failed to respond to his query. Dan got another breath of the pungent vapor from the bottle. This time the effect was unpleasant—it brought a sensation of constriction all over, and set the patient gasping a little for breath.

"Now—I guess you'll not mind," the captain spoke quickly. "I know you don't want to bother with one of these native doctors if we can help it. There are some good ones; but the good Lord only knows whether we'd hit the right one in two moons." He began hastily unlacing Dan's boot as he talked.

"But, captain"—Dan broke in now, getting his mind down to the matter in hand—"I don't think there's anything the matter with that leg. See—I can move the foot—ow-w! Oh, yes—it hurts. But it's only a bad bump on the shin. And I guess I must have landed hard on that knee in falling."

By the time he had finished this, the captain had his sock off and the trousers rolled high enough to see that Dan was practically right about it. The bump was a severe bruise, which had laid open the skin rather badly, and needed washing and wet packing. While Captain Hope performed these acts, Dan had a chance to observe the relationship between father and daughter. She waited on her parent with each article he needed. In that, she might have been a nurse in the early months of training.

But her face, as she saw the skill of her father's movements, was full of the sort of admiration that amounts to nothing short of delight in the accomplishments of one loved enough to be possessed by the love so as to make a lot of the delight genuine pride. Occasionally she looked at Dan in a way that almost asked out loud the question:

"Don't you see how wonderful he is?"

Dan couldn't resist it. He made the desired compliment full strength:

"Well, captain, I've had a cut or two fixed up on board before, by a skipper who thought he was an almost doctor. And I've seen several little jobs done by real medicos. But, if I had all the surgeons I ever saw and you to pick from for anything up to a broken neck, you'd get the job without any bidding beforehand as to price."

Marion looked so happy, Dan laid on some more:

"You really ought to hang out a shingle on Fifth Avenue or some other rich man's street. You'd make more in a couple of years than the company gets out of all the ships of this line. Why—that bandage is an ornament. The one I once saw a big gun of a surgeon put on a cut arm looked like a wad beside that. I—"

"Oh, stop," the captain interrupted him—"I know that tickles Marion almost to death; but you'll make me laugh and I'll jab you with this needle. Now—all that knee needs is a little liniment. You're not damaged much, after all. Is that eye comfortable? I'm afraid it will make a scar, all right, but I don't believe stitching would have saved that. You won't be quite so pretty. But that makes it all the safer for me to leave Marion here to look after you while I see what I can do for one or two of those fellows out there. You may be sure they're not going to have things so easy.

"I don't believe you'll need any more of this. I'll have to have it for one of those chaps."

He took the bottle of the pungent smelling salts, or whatever it was that had overbraced Dan, until he was finding its effects more irritating than those of his hurts.

The sensation in his head was hardly a pain, save where the bandaged cut smarted a little from a strongly antiseptic solution. It seemed rather a feeling of intense disquiet.

Dan wanted to get up at once and walk it off. The fleeting memory of the fight through which he had passed gave him an almost irresistible longing to go aft and murder a few of the men of the crew.

"You must lie still and try to sleep now," Marion suggested gently, laying her hand on his head.

He didn't want her hand there. Why must she bother him? Who was going through that passage, and why couldn't he walk a little more softly?

"Please don't," he cried peevishly, pushing her hand aside.

"Oh—does it hurt you?" Marion asked with instant solicitude. It didn't hurt, but

it annoyed. Why should she trouble him to tell her all about it? He wouldn't do it.

"Of course it hurts. Did you think my head was a bulwark rail?" he snapped. He was amazed at his own ugliness; but obsessed with the feeling that it was vastly less than she deserved. What did she want to get flushed up about it for? If that wasn't a woman! to bother one to death and then get angry over the least thing.

"I'm sorry," she was saying, in a tone that betrayed she was also hurt. It but drove him to more anger.

"If you're sorry, for Heaven's sake, keep quiet, and let me forget it," he cried fiercely. He was making a fool of himself. He couldn't help making a fool of himself. Something was wrong with him. But—

Why couldn't she see that?

"I'll be quiet," she murmured, trying to believe that he was really too ill to realize how rude he was getting.

"Well—begin now, damn it!" he snarled impetuously.

She stared at him. She could not believe her ears. He did not look delirious—only furious. He showed no fever flush. How could he be so amazingly ugly! There was no other word for his present talk and manner.

"Well"—he took her up again—"if you can't do anything but stare at me like an owl, for God's sake get out of here and let me have some peace."

She was going. In a way he was sorry. But he felt that, if she didn't go, he would get physically violent and throw something at her in a minute. He lay back, fairly panting with rage, yet conscious that the rage was unreasoning, blind, despicable in its expression.

"Shut that door!" he yelled, as she went out.

A dreadful misgiving assailed him that he had said or done something than which he would infinitely have preferred to cut off his right hand, if not his head. But—he couldn't bother with it now. Only one thing was of supreme importance. He was dying for sleep. And now—perhaps—he could—

He did. In five minutes, despite the iron door with its close fitted jambs almost air and water-tight, his snoring could be heard from far beyond either end of the passage.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DAN GETS SOME CLUES.

AS Marion left the room, she paused in the passage, swaying a little from sheer heart-hurt. It seemed impossible that any man could have treated her thus under any circumstance. That this should have followed upon a declaration of love that had thrilled her with response, with equal love, with a sense of confiding gratitude for what had seemed an almost bigger sacrifice than she could ask—it was incredible.

And then she knew it wasn't true. The man had gone delirious. And she was standing here, thinking about it, feeling hurt over it.

She must get her father—instantly. She could not quite summon courage to go back into the room alone. She ran through the after passage to the deck where Captain Hope was working over one of the injured sailors.

"Daddy," she cried, "come back, quick! Dan's gone delirious."

"Who?" he asked, without looking up from the work he was doing. Probably it was well she could not see that work. Probing for a bullet is not a pleasant thing to see, unless one is more or less accustomed to it. She flushed, realizing that she had called the mate by the wrong name again.

"Mr. Corwin—he's ordered me out of the room—he was swearing—he's out of his head."

"Oh." There was a note of relief in her father's voice, that she could not understand. "He got a little too much of the gungjah"—the word sounded like that to her—"and he'd had the brandy before it. Now—listen, Marion—I can't leave here this second. But, on the shelf of my medicine-locker you'll see a bottle of laudanum—right out in front. Put half a teaspoon of it into a half-teacup of brandy. The brandy's in the little cupboard over the desk.

"He may have gone to sleep already. If he hasn't, give him the whole dose. He'll

probably drink it as if he'd never wanted anything so much before. It won't hurt him after what he's had. It will just quiet him. If he's gone to sleep when you get there, leave him alone. Now—can my little girl do all that?"

She was off to do it as he finished. She had no trouble with anything but the pouring of a half-teaspoonful of the black liquid in the laudanum bottle. Her fingers trembled so, she could hardly manage that. Eventually it was done, though, and the brandy poured atop it. She ran with it across the deck and into the passage to Dan's room. Then she knew it was not needed.

She carried the cup on into the room, however. Dan was sleeping so soundly, he never missed a snore while she straightened the coverlet and his pillow. She left the cup of mixture on his bureau. He might wake up and get violent again and need it. She left the door ajar, that she or some one else might surely hear if he called.

For a while she sat on a deck-chair at the end of the passage. The sun had set, and the sea air was cooling now. She needed it. As the heavy breathing came to sound less labored, and relieved her of the last worry, she discovered that she herself was growing faint. The cabin-boy was hurrying the big, covered dishes from the galley to the saloon. She stopped him and told him to bring her a cup of coffee.

She was getting too ill to wait for it. She was going to faint. She did not want to faint here. She summoned her wavering energies and dashed for her room. She got the door shut—managed to fall across her bed with her face close to the open port-hole.

The ringing of eight bells at midnight woke Dan up from a horrible dream, in which he was chasing Marion Hope off the ship with a club. He was in a bath of sweat, panting, physically wretched. But the dream wrought a deeper misery of mind, while he slowly realized that it was a dream, only to recall that there had been a reality hardly less hideous.

What had he done? What had he said?

He had little trouble remembering. The trouble all came from the memory. He groaned as he repeated, with a stupefying horror at himself for its utterance, every ugly word he had used to drive the girl from the room. He sat up and stared wildly around, identifying the port-hole's circle of faint light from the moon, the open space where his door looked into the passage with its lamp.

Oh, he was awake. He was not dreaming that he had spoken thus. It was real. He—himself—had said those things—to Marion!

He climbed from the bed. He hardly noticed the pain it caused him. He found a match, lighted the lamp on the wall. Until the light showed all the familiar objects of an officer's room, he held a last hope that this awful memory was a strange sort of dream.

There was no hope of that. The thing had been done, the words said. He had said them. Over and over he came back to the stricken whisper:

"It's true—it's true—I did it—said it! Oh, God!"

He paced the room, limping about barefoot as he was. Suddenly he stepped out into the passage. He was going to her—on hands and knees—to beg her to believe that something had ailed him, some madness possessed him. He could not leave things this way overnight.

He got across the waist-deck to the other passage. There he started back, as the cabin-boy stepped to the middle of the way and blocked it.

"Excuse me, sir—did you want to speak to the captain? His orders is, sir—"

"No, I didn't want to speak to the captain," Dan answered a little angrily. He was not specially anxious to let the cabin-boy know that he wished to speak with the captain's daughter.

"And Mrs. Bartington is—engaged, sir," the boy vouchsafed.

"Who in the devil wants to speak to Mrs. Bartington?" snorted Dan.

"But—sir—the rest is all asleep, sir," argued the youngster.

"What time is it?" Dan asked. "I just woke up."

"Just gone eight bell for the dog-watch, sir."

Dan was on the point of turning back.

He had noticed that the captain's light still shone through the ventilating grate in the door. As he passed the closely shuttered window a voice, raucous, high, shrill—cackled inside the room.

"Glad you like him, Charlie. I didn't know, from the way you cussed him this afternoon. I really came only to tell you he was a friend of mine, and I wanted him to stay aboard."

Dan paused. The voice was Panama Liz's. The response was loud enough to reach the mate's ears.

"Great God! Bess, have you got your damned talons on that poor kid? Isn't any one safe who ever saw you?"

"I never miss a bet, Charlie. He's a poor one—but you never can tell."

Dan went on. Already he had probed the possibilities of danger from Panama Liz. Already he had heard that she had "something on" the captain. Beyond a spasm of sympathy for any other victim of that woman's, Dan was not seriously disturbed by what he took for references to himself. He had other more acute troubles in hand.

Back in his room he reflected that it was better that he could not reach Marion. He had no right to hope for a hearing. It would be sheer cheek to face her to ask for one. The best he could do would be to send her a note, pleading for a chance to make his feeble excuses. And then came the inspiration to play up delirium for all it was worth. He got out a piece of paper and began the laborious composition:

DEAR MARION:

An awful, vivid notion has come to me that I did or said something brutal and I don't know what more, to you this afternoon. I think I have been a little delirious, though I am miserably clear-headed now. If I didn't do anything out of the way, won't you let me come and hear you tell me so? If I did—

If it was as bad as I fear it was, I suppose you'll never let me speak to you again, or write, or anything else. You couldn't forgive me. And, in the fear that I'm not mistaken about it, I don't dare sign myself except with my name, lest any other words would be impertinent.

DANIEL CORWIN.

He experimented a dozen times about the heading. He had erased it, replaced it with "Miss Marion Hope," scratched that out, and written in: "Dear Miss Hope," gone back to: "Dear Marion," tried out: "Dear Miss Marion," tried so many other things that he suddenly found his way scratched through the paper, and realized that he must begin all over, and that he was almost exhausted and could hardly write at all—when he also realized that he was terribly, burningly thirsty.

He started for the pitcher of water by the wash-basin. His eye fell upon the hitherto unnoticed cup. He glanced into its brown contents—caught a whiff of its odor.

It was irresistible. He needed stimulation as he had never needed it before. He drained the burning draft almost at a gulp.

What was that stuff in it? It tasted like something he had once had for a toothache. Perhaps it was poisonous. No—not quite fatally so, unless one got a good deal of it. He knew now—it was laudanum. How had it got there?

He stared at the cup. He stared at the letter he must recopy.

He couldn't do any more to-night. He couldn't disturb her with it before morning. He couldn't—do anything—but—

He steadied himself to his feet and threw his length upon the bed. He was asleep when his head touched the pillow. He was good for a long stay asleep.

The captain, having done what he could for one of the sailors, and started another ashore in the boat, with instructions for taking him to the little hospital of the town, had gone to the saloon for his dinner. From the cabin-boy he learned that his daughter had not eaten. He hurried to her room, found her as she had managed to fall.

Bringing her back to consciousness was rather the least of the amateur medical efforts he had made. She was soon fast asleep and evidently little the worse for the trying experiences of the day. It was well on toward morning when she woke, with a startled memory of the patient she had deserted when the fainting spell had come on.

She hastily drew on a kimono, indulged a few feminine pats to put her hair into semblance of order, and tiptoed around to the other passage. The light streaming from

Dan's door rather startled her. But it demanded investigation. She went on, peered in, entered. Once more she played nurse to adjust his covering and his pillow. She stopped to the table to blow out the lamp over it. Her eye fell upon the sheet of paper with her name half erased and scratched to the board behind it.

A soft smile played over her face as she read. Poor Dan—he must have waked up and tried to write it—and—

It wasn't a very sorry tear that dropped on the page and got carefully folded inside and tucked into the kimono-pocket. The girl crept over again to the side of the bed, bent down—kissed the sleeper's forehead beside the bandage over the cut.

She caught the fumes of the brandy and laudanum on his breath. He seemed, however, to be sleeping easily. Her father had said it would not hurt him.

Back in her own bed she fell asleep without need of any drug. A soft happiness soothed away the worries which so often of late had kept her awake. But she was up and dressed and back in Dan's room long before he aroused from his rather strongly assisted slumber. She smiled again, as she saw the horror of recollection flash across his visage.

"Dan, dear," she whispered, "I got your note—the one you wrote me in the night. I knew before I got it—all about it. You weren't exactly delirious. It was that strong stuff father put under your nose to bring you around after the fight. He told me right away what was the matter."

It took two or three repetitions to assure him that all was well. Then she insisted on going for a grape-fruit to break his fast. For a moment, when she was gone, Dan lay still, too happy to think beyond the happiness. Then a sudden train of thought started.

The strong stuff in that bottle had been to blame. The captain had known right away why he became insanely furious over nothing. How did the captain know?

There crept into his mind the recollection of a story the drunken old third mate of the Castonia had told of how he had become hopelessly intoxicated on his way to take his examination for his master's ticket. The man had had sense enough to enter a house with a doctor's sign on it. The doctor had mixed him a little, biting drink. In ten minutes he had been quite sobered up.

Dan's mind, as Marion got back with the grape-fruit, was puzzling over the question as to just how many other things Captain Hope took for stimulants beside brandy. It looked as if a doctor might be needed even more seriously than Marion feared. But—could any doctor cure the ills a man deliberately inflicted on himself?

Why—why did a man of Captain Hope's ability wreck himself with such habits?

There flashed across Dan's mind the conversation about the woman with which Edwards, the second mate, had regaled himself at Dan's expense after the first meal aboard the vessel. The remembrance of last night's unintended eavesdropping was not quite so distinct. But—

Might Panama Liz be the cause of the captain's drinking? No doctor could cure him of Panama Liz. Dan looked at the beautiful girl sugaring the fruit for him. What if that other woman should throw some shadow of her baneful life across hers?

And then he saw. He held the power to save the day. Nothing that other woman could tell this girl would shake the girl's confidence in him now. If the boat could but be stopped at Ancud, he'd take the chance of having her arrested, and sailing away before she could arrange for bail.

CHAPTER XIX.

WITHOUT ORDERS.

THREE days later Dan stood on the bridge of the City of Altoona, the master for the time of her course. Occasionally little spasms of nervousness assailed him when he felt a physical oppression in the sense of the great thing throbbing and rushing forward with all its precious cargo and its lives under his control. But he found it easy to steady himself, to keep the oppression from approaching even near the utter loss of nerve which had brought to an untimely end his mastership of a vessel of his own. And he was glad of this chance, in perfectly smooth sailing, to

accustom himself to keeping his nervousness in check—if it should not prove even the opportunity to subdue the strain entirely and for all time.

Save for the abruptness of the demand upon him to come up here, only one thing of but slight significance had happened to mark the otherwise quite uneventful sailing of the ship from Limanau — unless one wanted to add the inspiration with which Dan watched the disappearance of the row of shanties on the beach behind the horizon line.

Dan had offered to take the bridge to relieve the captain as soon as they were at the end of the early afternoon watch during which they had got away. But the captain had bidden him rest up a little longer, and assured him that he did not in the least mind doubling up his own time of work.

He had seemed, too, quite capable of doing it. If he drank at all during those two days, he did not show the fact. Dan began to wonder if his drunkenness had not been exaggerated, at least as to the proportion of time he spent in a helpless condition. Of course Dan urged several times later that he was well enough to do his share of the watching.

Wherefore he had been a little startled by the manner in which Captain Hope had come to him, toward the end of the previous watch, with Edwards on the bridge. Without any preliminary greeting at all, the skipper had begun in a tone of injury bordering on anger:

"Mr. Corwin, I don't see how I can afford to charge the company for a mate to sit on the deck and watch the gulls. It seems to me it's about time you took a watch."

Dan took an instant to swallow his surprise and the obvious retort that he had no business on a bridge against the captain's orders. The thing was so unreasonable, there was no sense in attempting to argue with the man who could do it. Dan got to his feet. He really was feeling little remaining effect of the fight from which he had come out alive by sheer luck.

"All right, sir—shall I take the next watch, sir?" he responded. Even a man of Edwards's caliber and rancorous disposition must have given over his fault-finding at such soft answer. But Captain Hope retained his tone of displeasure:

"I should think it was about time," he snapped, and turned into his own quarters. Perhaps it had been lucky that, as he started up the stairs for a look at the course before taking the bridge, Marion had spied him in the act and run toward him.

"Oh," she cried, "you're going on watch. Now I know we're safe."

"You're making fun of me," he laughed back.

She smiled up at him—the kind of smile which, on the right woman's face, is more stimulating than any drug or drink the doctors know.

"I should feel safe with you up there, if we were in a thousand dangers, Dan," she said.

The one other occurrence of interest to Dan had been a visit from Edwards, snatched by the second mate from the busy moments just after the anchors had been taken up. Edwards had managed to avoid Dan until then. But, as the second mate hurried through the passage, Dan was coming out to get that joyously last look at the beach-combers' shacks, and they almost collided.

"Oh," Edwards grunted his surprise at the encounter. "How are you comin' on?"

"Better, I think, than I have any reason to thank you for," snapped Dan. The fact still rankled that Edwards had parted with the captain an instant before the skipper had begun his tirade of abuse over the loading of the third hatch. Dan still suspected that he had been misinformed as to the ship's load before that. The second mate was one of the two persons aboard with whom he need show no pretense of a friendly feeling for which there was no ground.

Edwards bristled up a little. "What do you mean by that?" he demanded.

"Just what I said—and that I shall expect hereafter to be allowed to make my own reports to the captain," Dan told him, giving him a stare that told the rest. Edwards dropped his belligerent attitude.

"I didn't report you to the captain," he growled defensively. "He called me in to

tell him what I was doing. Then he wanted to know what the men were doing. Then he went up in the air.

"If you think you can expect that man to act like a reasoning human, you're still off your course and in shoal waters. I suppose you ought to know he didn't ever do anything to that load. It's right where you put it yet—and where it ought to have went, if you ask me.

"I tell you, there's only one thing for a mate to do on this here ship—and that's sail it himself. You got to treat the skipper like he was some danged passenger who wanted to run things and who you didn't dare kick overboard. You got to give him the 'Aye-aye, sir,' and then go right ahead with what you think best. If you know enough about your business, you can get away with it what time he ain't on the bridge himself. If he puts the ship on the rocks it ain't your fault, anyhow."

Dan saw he must apologize. He did it reservedly.

"Well—I'm sorry, if I misjudged you, Mr. Edwards. You know yourself how it looked."

"You needn't have any fear about me butting into your end of the job, Mr. Corwin," Edwards finished the conversation over his shoulder, hurrying on to whatever task was waiting him aft.

That had been advice more closely in line then than now with Dan's own views as to the prospective voyage under Captain Hope. The glance at the chart, with the course marked on it, confirmed Dan's feeling that, thus far, the skipper had shown no need of a vice-skipper in the person of his mate, at least when the ship was under way. Dan had heard the second mate's report of the sextant reading at noon, and idly figured the position from the old book which, with his ticket, had been the two relics of his career he had retained through the months in which he had counted the career at an end. The patent log had shown a speed of ten knots. Dan could have stuck a pin within an eighth of an inch on the chart's surface from the exact position of the ship when he took the bridge.

It seemed a trifle odd that the course had not been lined clear down to Antofogasta, which, so far as Dan had heard, was the only stop scheduled to Valparaiso. But it showed well beyond the distance the ship could travel in the next six hours. It was a fair presumption that Captain Hope preferred to lay his courses from day to day, and to allow for any unforeseen shifts which might come up.

There was really almost nothing for Dan to do. The man at the wheel was a sturdy Swede who knew his business, and, in that still water, seemed able to keep the compass steady with hardly a move of a spoke for minutes on end. Dan's job consisted in being ready for the sort of emergency which might arise but was not at all likely to do so. He occupied himself, as he had occupied a good deal of time since first conceiving the idea, upon the details of his somewhat risky plot for getting rid of Mrs. Bartington, better known to him as Panama Liz.

The captain's sobriety rather spoiled the prospects for that plot. Unless the ship had orders to put into Ancud for cargo, which was unlikely, Dan had expected to get her in there without the captain's knowledge, figuring that Hope would excuse him in sheer relief at the loss of his undesirable passenger. He would take all the risks from the moment the woman was safely aboard a skiff for shore.

But, to get into Ancud, anywhere from three to ten hours off the ship's course, demanded that the captain should stay as soundly and indifferently asleep in his room as he had stayed through Dan's first night and morning aboard. And now there seemed much less likelihood of that than his previous experience and what he had heard had made him believe.

Beyond getting into Ancud the thing looked simple. Dan would go ashore and swear out a warrant or do whatever else was required by the law of the place—charging her with the theft of a hundred dollars from his person. He would arrange for officers of the law to come aboard and get the prisoner. Once she was off the ship and in their hands—well, if there were any trouble about it, he thought Captain Hope would be so grateful for the riddance, that

he would be backed up in an assertion that his plans for appearing against the woman had been thwarted by unexpectedly hurried orders from the skipper.

He intended to get away by the time Panama Liz had been rowed half the distance he would leave to shore. As a matter of fact, Panama Liz had lived long enough in Ancud to get the sort of reputation that leaves one defenseless against false arrest, anyhow.

There were holes in the plan. Dan had spent much time on these. Now it looked as if the whole plan would prove as vacuous as a hole. The captain was not acting up to Dan's expectations in the matter of keeping drunk.

Mr. Edwards came to relieve him at supper-time—Dan's watch had been but the first of the two-hour dog-watches, arranged to shift the night duty for the crew. Dan went below with what satisfaction there was to be got out of having stuck through one watch on the bridge, albeit a very calm and short one.

The second dog-watch is one in which little effort is made to keep the crew busy. Other day watches, they are generally kept scraping and cleaning and painting, whether the decks need it or not. Dan had affected a change of seats at table, whereby he occupied that next his sweetheart. Since it always fell to the second mate to be on the bridge during meal hours, he being the last in command, Edwards had readily agreed to take the place next that occupied by Panama Liz at the first table.

The captain was not in his place at the table's head. Dan did not worry over that, save as he saw that it worried Marion. She was not so happy as he liked best to see her. The instant he had finished eating, she ended what had been but little better than a pretense of eating, and followed him to the deck. There is little ceremony about staying at table on a freight-ship.

"Dan—did father say anything to you about—not coming to dinner?" she asked as soon as they had got out of hearing of any members of the crew, most of which was lolling about the deck away forward, engaged with after-dinner pipes.

"He hardly would, Marion," Dan told her readily. "It's not my business whether he eats or not, you know. He's been doing double duty, you see, and he looked tired to me. I shouldn't wonder if he decided he'd rather put in the whole watch asleep. It won't trouble me particularly if he stays out the next one. Only—" Dan caught himself, and veered from the sudden remembrance that no course had been marked to carry through that first watch, as the one from eight to midnight is counted.

"Only what?" she took him up.

"Only—I was hoping Mr. Edwards won't mind being on hand for the middle watch. Not that that would matter, either. You people have pampered me into the notion that I couldn't stand ten hours on a bridge. Of course I could. There really isn't a thing the matter with me."

She would not switch to talk of him.

"You didn't notice anything peculiar—about Dad? I didn't see him at all after dinner."

"No," Dan prevaricated boldly. What was the use of worrying her?

"He wasn't—oh, a little too careful in his manner? It seems to me he acts, just before some of these spells as if he made a big effort to control himself—so big that he overdoes it. Maybe you wouldn't notice it."

"I know what you mean," Dan hurried to assure her. "I saw it the day he sent me aboard. There was nothing like that to-day."

He congratulated himself that she seemed satisfied without further questions. If he had really stopped his worrying, he had but started himself. That the captain should live up to his reputation for drunkenness might, a month hence, assist him to carry out his little scheme for the advantage of all concerned but Panama Liz. But, in the immediate prospect there were other features to be considered.

Dan went to the chart-room at a few minutes before eight. It was as he expected. The charts had not been touched. He reckoned up the distance already covered since he had mentally checked positions before. They should be, and, at every human probability, were, just twelve miles from the point to which, on the chart, Captain Hope had ended his course-line.

The more Dan looked at that chart the less answer he could see to that end of the line, unless it had been deliberately arranged for a correction in case of any unforeseen or unintended shift of course, such as might result from cross currents insufficiently taken care of. And—why should any one anticipate a possible correction at that point, anyhow? They were running outside any view of landmarks. Nine o'clock at night would be about as poor a time as any in the twenty-four hours for getting bearings. Star sighting is not indulged in, so long as one can get a good look at the sun and horizon.

There must be some reason for stopping anything that would normally continue—and nothing on the chart showed a reason why the straight line should not go right on another foot and a half across it. That was the way to Antafogasta. Had the protractor been left on the chart, it would indicate a sudden call interrupting the drawing of the line. The protractor had been folded and put away with the rulers and pencils.

The line did not even show the sort of twist that might have come from reaching the end of the ruler, conceivably enough of an interruption to help a man conclude he might stop and call it enough of a job, if he were not specially pressed to go further with it. The mark simply came to an end, without so much as an emphasized dot to show any purpose in the ending. Eight bells sounded, with Dan getting more impressed with his own doubts every minute.

"Mr. Edwards," he asked the second mate, as he reached the bridge, "have you any information as to our next port?"

"Antafogasta," promptly responded Edwards. "Why?"

Dan reflected a moment before telling him. It seemed best to advise a little with the man, who had had more experience with the ship and its skipper.

"The course is doped out only twelve miles ahead from here," Dan said. "Know of any orders beyond that?"

"No, he's said nothing to me. There wasn't no dot or anything?"

"No—the line just quit."

"Well," suggested Edwards, "it'd be straight ahead off the edge of that chart anyhow, wouldn't it? I don't know as he'd figure on marking things up for nothing."

"But he went half-way across it. I don't know whether to keep on or wake him up," Dan admitted.

"H-m," laughed the second mate. "That's easy. You can't wake him up. Your choice lies between heaving to or going on, if you want to know. And then—damn if you do, and damn if you don't, as the parson said about predestination."

"Will you take the morning watch?" Dan then asked.

"Just as you say," Edwards assented readily enough.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CAPTAIN WAKES.

DAN paced the bridge for an hour. Was it the old fear of taking responsibility which worried him? Was it, rather, merely the sane precaution which his position demanded?

He felt no nervousness just now, as to the actual running of the ship. There was nothing ahead about which he should get nervous. A clear night, a smooth sea with no traffic, a course without a shoal or rock ahead for five hundred miles—at least the previous two hours had given him enough self-confidence for this.

As a matter of fact, he would have saved the Castonia, had he wakened the captain. There was no question of saving the City of Altoona just now, about as much decision on his part was involved in getting the captain awake now as in taking his own head for going on. Certainly a skipper should provide some idea of his intended course, and it was not the right of any one else to take a course until every effort had been made to ascertain the captain's plans about it.

Dan bade the wheelman keep straight on, while he went below. He went softly. He intended to wake the captain himself. If there was to be another tirade of abuse, the fewer of the crew who should hear it the better. As he turned into the forward passage, he saw that which made him the more cautious.

Marion's door into the passage was open, with a light shining inside. The cabin-boy was not on guard, whereat Dan took a little courage. He tried to rap so lightly that a man ordinarily asleep would be aroused, but without attracting Marion's attention.

Getting no response to a second knock, he tried the door. Though a catch had been set from the inside, it seemed not tight enough to hold the handle, as a very little extra exertion turned it. Dan entered and closed the door behind him. The first breath of the air of the room was enough to warn him to take that precaution against any possible following.

It seemed to him that the stale reek of the drugs he smelled was enough to put any one into a long sleep. Strongest of all was the odor of brandy. More noisome, though, was the pungent stench of that aromatic simulant which had so peculiarly affected Dan himself—no longer aromatic, but dead on the breath of the man sleeping heavily on the bed. Dan was not sure whether he distinguished the fragrance of laudanum mixed with the other smells or not. But the combination was well-nigh stifling.

Dan stood a moment in the middle of the room, hesitating as to the next move. Success in waking the sleeper was not likely to be attended with pleasant results. Captain Hope would hardly take kindly to a mate's intrusion into his room. But Dan had a most excellent reason for the intrusion, one which ought to break any storm of protest it might start. At least he would investigate a little further before giving up.

He struck a match and lighted the lamp. One glance about was enough to end his hopes of obtaining any instructions from his skipper. A quart brandy-bottle lay broken on the floor. Apparently there had been little in it when it broke, for the wet spot where it had mostly evaporated, was hardly two feet wide. That it had been recently opened was evidenced by the torn tin-foil cap on the floor a little distance from the glass.

But more had gone to produce the skipper's stupor than mere brandy, though it was Dan's first intimation that a man could drink so much of that at once and live. On the table stood a bottle of laudanum such as one might expect to find in a big drug-store. The cork had been left out of it. There was a little brandy mixed with the darker fluid in the bottom of a glass beside the bottle.

Dan stared down at the sleeper. It was hard to believe that this was the man he had met in the plaza eating-place in Limanau. Of the almost feminine fineness of feature nothing seemed left at all. The face was startlingly red, and looked swollen to Dan. Had it not been for the heavy, regular, though rapid breathing, the sight would have been thoroughly alarming.

A sudden rage of disgust seized Dan. What right had any man to besot himself like this? How could he have so little respect for the father of his own daughter, if he had none for himself on any other ground? Dan was ready to fight, as he stepped to the side of the bed, after a glance that assured him the captain had closed all windows to shut out any possible sound that might betray his condition.

"Wake up, here!" he called, shaking the sleeper's shoulder. "Come out of it!" he added roughly, his gorge rising as he gave vent to it. He shook harder. "Captain!" he yelled, close to the skipper's ear.

There was a slow flutter of the heavy eye-lids, the evenness of the breathing broke, a half groan, half grunt came from the open lips. But that was all. With a final, almost vicious thrust that turned the man half over, Dan started away.

Then he bethought him to provide air for the man, whose condition might readily be regarded as dangerous illness, however self-inflicted. There was another room forward of this and opening into it—a little sitting-room or private saloon, as one might choose to call it, with a port-hole giving on the forward deck. Dan opened the port and left the door propped open between the rooms. To assure a draft, he pushed down the square window-light toward the midships deck.

He examined the door. Beside the catch which had been ineffectual in keeping him out, he found an ordinary night-lock had been put on. Dan set the spring. In case of too prolonged a slumber, it might be necessary to break that lock in; but it

would be better than any chance of having Marion satisfy her anxiety by a visit to the room. Finally, Dan picked up the pieces of the broken bottle, dumped them into a waste-basket. Marion might follow inside any one who had to break in that door. Putting the lamp out again, he started to slip away.

"Oh," Marion cried from her door, as Dan tried to let the catch in softly on her father's, "you've been in?"

Dan nodded. For the instant he was taken aback to be caught thus surreptitiously leaving her father's quarters. Then, catching himself, he said:

"Yes—I wanted to get the course from him. He hadn't told me."

"Is—is he all right?" she asked falteringly.

"Oh, yes," Dan endeavored to say convincingly.

"I wanted to see him about—" She broke off very unconvincingly. But Dan knew well enough what she wanted to see her father about.

"He's in bed," Dan told her hastily. "I guess the double work has got him pretty tired. I tried to get him to let me relieve him before. But he's so overconsiderate—wouldn't hear to it—" Dan was talking against time, against the fear that he wasn't sounding so reassuring as he wanted to.

"Dan—what *is* the matter with him?" she suddenly interrupted his eulogy.

"Nothing." He tried to lie very positively.

"That's a very white little story, Dan Corwin," she told him. "I know you don't want to worry me. But—I must have the truth. He's a sick man, Dan. We must get a doctor to him. Where can we get one?"

"Yes—I'm afraid he's sick," Dan told her, seeing that the other sort of story did not satisfy her. "We're headed now for Antofogasta. It's a pretty good town. If we can't get a good doctor there, Valparaiso will have several."

"Antofogasta is days away yet," she mourned. "What can I do in the mean while? I'm going in to him."

"You can't, Marion. I—he locked the door when I came out. You'd only disturb him by getting him up to unlock it. He's sound asleep by this time, if I'm not mistaken—he looked sleepy enough."

Dan left her and went to the bridge. For two hours afterward he saw her on the forward deck. Occasionally she walked a few paces fore and aft. Mostly she stood by the rail, looking out over the sea. He wished he were a more artistic liar.

As for himself, he considered his course clear now. There was nothing to do but steer straight ahead—if need be right into anchorage off the Chilean port. He had done his best to get instructions. To stop and lie here until such time as the captain might wake up and come on deck once more was a thing too absurd to consider.

"Straight ahead?" Edwards asked him, coming up at midnight.

"Straight ahead," Dan responded. "Allow about half a point more to eastward than in the dog-watch. The current sets a little stronger off shore, according to the chart."

"Aye, sir," Edwards responded. There was no danger that he would monkey with the course. That would betray itself too quickly at the next taking of position. Dan slept his four hours soundly, and had hard work to get himself wide-awake for the morning watch.

A hard day lay before both the mates. Even with a competent captain there should have been a fourth man capable of taking the bridge. Edwards said Harvey had been third mate as far as San Francisco, where Hawks, the mate next before last, had left. Hawks had talked after getting off the ship, and given the skipper such a name as had made it imposible to get any other mate, which had led to Harvey's promotion to the position.

The crew must be kept busy, and ordinary sailing really provides very little necessary work for the number of men who may be required when the sailing is extraordinary and for the tasks connected with entering and leaving ports, as well as for loading in some instances. Mostly they are kept painting. The deck of an iron freight steamer is probably the most painted thing in the world. About the only time it ever needs painting is when the thickness of the paint already on it starts to blistering.

Dan had a feeling that there was something of malice in Edwards's suggestion, at the end of the watch, that the forward derrick had shown signs of needing an overhauling just before he had come on. Any boatswain's mate can keep his men painting. The ship's mate has to watch a job like the replacing of rivets in an iron boom. There certainly was malicious pleasure in having to hand the job half finished back to the first mate when Dan took the first afternoon watch.

The position at noon figured to Dan's reckoning of the course with satisfying accuracy. He had snatched time to finish the long line across the chart. But these reassurances as to his navigating ability did not make up for the fact that he was desperately tired by the time the watch was ended. He was beginning to realize that he lacked a little of full strength.

The first dog-watch, with supper to be eaten in it, left no time for sleep. He had intended, earlier in the day, to suggest that he would take the second dog-watch and the first watch, immediately following it, so that Edwards could put in six hours of rest, after which they would split the morning watch between them, to give him six hours of unbroken sleep.

But now he knew he could not stay awake six hours. He was too tired to stand up. Sitting down, he caught himself nodding half a dozen times. He pulled himself awake, only to start nodding again.

Suddenly he woke, staring wide. He had dreamed that he was in a boat rowing ashore from a sinking ship. It was the Castonia —and he had sunk her. And the captain was looking at him—only it seemed to him that the captain was not old Davids, but Hope. He knew what the man was about to say. He shrank back from those words—and bumped his head against the rail behind the bench.

Hurried footsteps—none too steady—were rushing up the stairs from the next deck below. Dan got to his feet, largely by an almost reflex action of instinctive desire to cover up the fact that he had been asleep on watch.

The captain's face burst into view as his head reached the deck level. It was terrible in its wrath—a blind, drunken wrath such as Dan had already encountered in the man once before. He came on without speech until he had reached the bridge's level floor and stepped away from the stairs. There he paused for breath. Dan decided to take the interview into his hands as far as he might:

"Good evening, captain," he spoke, as if in greeting of the most ordinary appearance of a skipper on the sea.

"Good evening, hell!" the ship's master roared hoarsely. "What I want to know is where in the devil you've got us to?"

"About ninety miles east by a point north of Guallato, sir," Dan replied stiffly. "I figure," he added, while the captain gasped for more breath, steadying himself at the forward rail and staring wildly at him, "that we should be able to anchor off Antofogasta before midnight to-morrow, sir."

"Oh, you damned, infernal son of a jackass! You impertinent upstart! Who in all blazes cares when we get to Antofogasta? Who gave you any course to get to Antofogasta? You tell me that!"

"I simply went on with the course you ordered, sir." Dan's teeth were on edge, but ship's discipline is ship's discipline.

"Who wanted you to go on with it? You —son of a cur—who d'y' think's running this ship? Why in hell can't you come for an order?"

Dan went hot, held himself in check until he was cold with rage the hotter for the checking. He stepped forward a pace, his blazing eyes fixed on the other's, which were barely visible in the swiftly descending dusk of the tropics.

"I did go for an order, sir," he fairly hissed. "I went clear into your room, sir, at nine o'clock last night. I opened the port and the after window to keep you from smothering with the fumes of your own filthy breath. I picked up the pieces of the brandy bottle out of which you had pickled your brain, and then I corked up the laudanum bottle you'd finished off with. Then I locked your door so that your daughter shouldn't come in to see the dirty sickness that ailed you. I couldn't wake you—you were too near dead, as you ought

to be. Now—is there any further explanation you want as to why we're in this position?"

The captain had shrunk back before his hot accusations. But he was too drunk yet to admit a fault, to do anything but bluster.

"Get to hell off this bridge," he thundered in his rage. "It's one place you're not fit for."

He could hardly have expected the effect his words had on his mate. Dan felt suddenly weak, faint, giddy. He could barely stagger to the stairs, clutch its rail, steady his feet down it. He stood on the little deck over the house, turned toward the steps and shook his fist upward.

"Damn you!" he muttered hoarsely. "Why—why did you say that? Now—"

He staggered on down the second stairs. His eyes were blinded with weak tears; he almost ran into the girl, who halted him with his name.

"Dan! What's the trouble now?"

"Oh—everything," he answered wretchedly. "I guess you heard."

"Dan—why do you persist in doing things without orders? It's this wretched assumption of authority—just because father's sick, imagining that the ship is to run without him—that has spoiled every mate we've had. Why do you do it?"

She hadn't heard him tell her father why he had done it. He had kept his voice down for just that end. He would not tell her now.

"I won't do it again, Marion," he answered, from the depths of his dejection. "I'll never go on a ship's bridge again."

"Dan—what did you say?" She had caught him by both shoulders and held him from passing her to reach his own room.

"I can't," he groaned.

Still she held him.

"Dan," she whispered, "you said you loved me. And—and I love you too well to call you a quitter until—you're sure you deserve it. Now—go get some sleep."

She had kissed him and sprung away from him before he quite realized it. Her last movement had carried a little thrust that propelled him toward his door. Inside, he dropped dejectedly upon the bed.

Over on the other side of the ship Marion Hope, face down on her bed, was sobbing the pillow wet with tears.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SPRING OF THE TRAP.

THE captain sailed the City of Altoona for thirty hours on end after that. The last four hours, beginning a little before dusk of the next day, were run at half speed.

Edwards came the morning after and told Dan of the night. The second mate was as much in the dark as Dan about it. He had reported for his watch on the bridge, and been told he was not needed, before he had time to get a look at the compass. The sun was on the starboard side—they were sailing north again. They held their course, so far as Dan could judge without instruments, almost exactly reversed from that of yesterday.

There was an hour of sailing in the dark the next evening. Then, quite unexpectedly to Dan, who had not troubled to report for any watch at all since he had been so unceremoniously ordered off the bridge, he was sent for and bidden to come up. He had been in the act of undressing for another night's sleep. Marion had seemed to avoid any conversation with him, save the ordinary table-talk and a passing nod if she chanced to approach some spot in which he was idling away the day. The nods had been given with an expression of face which did not invite any of the arguments Dan would have liked to put up in his own defense.

He knew what she thought. He was carrying out his wretched promise of last night, never to go on a ship's bridge again. He had slept over that promise since, rested his nerves a bit, and somewhat modified it. He would have liked to tell her that he had decided to return to his place if ordered to do so. It had come to seem unlikely that he would ever receive such an order, as the day wore on without it.

Dan started up as soon as he could pull his habiliments back into place. He had indulged a little snort of laughter as he heard the message. Plainly the captain was

not to be taken very seriously—least of all in his ugliest moods. He had never changed the load after the tremendous fuss over Dan's job of it in the number three hatch. Now he was recalling to the bridge the mate he had sent off it twenty-four hours earlier with a consignment to eternal obloquy.

"Yes, sir?" Dan tentatively announced his presence, as he reached the bridge. Captain Hope turned quickly. There was not enough light up there to give any indication of his expression or the effects of his prolonged vigil.

"Mr. Corwin," he spoke rapidly, clearly, in the most ordinary tone of easy command, "you will make ready to drop anchor. Please have a man out with the lead-line."

"Aye, sir." Dan gave the formal assent to the command. It was the end of the first conversation between him and the man who had so unreasonably reprimanded him the night before. Dan hardly expected apology.

He met Edwards coming up as he went down to attend to the duties assigned him. The boatswain had whistled for all hands; the preparations were well under way for the lowering of the big anchors; men were just placing the little platform for the use of the man with the lead, when Edwards came back, glanced about the deck a moment, then approached Dan.

"Mr. Corwin"—he spoke hardly above a whisper—"can you spare me those two men, and the big one over by the winch?"

His manner was so secretive that it rather astonished Dan. Edwards was, like most small men, generally inclined to swagger a bit. The men wanted were especially busy at the moment. But—

"The skipper wants me to take them particularly," the second mate explained.

Five minutes later, between the singsong calls of the boatswain as he chanted the measurements he found on his line, Dan could hear the clack of axes driving the wedges from one of the after-hatch bars. A sudden light dawned upon him.

That was true in more ways than one. For, quite unexpectedly to Dan and all the rest, a red flare was suddenly set off by the captain on the bridge, throwing everything on the deck into strong relief that was startling. Dan turned his eyes instinctively ashore.

The moon, well into the last quarter by now, was not up yet. The line of high hills back of the shore was barely distinguishable. Not a light of any sort shone below the stars.

"Get me another flare—two of them—quick!" Dan caught the tense tremor in the voice of the man on the bridge. The boy to whom he had apparently spoken dashed down the steps and up them again. Dan, watching from below, saw the light of the match shake so that it went out before its flame had connected with the flare's fuse. A muttered oath came through the stillness. The work had been done now—the men were simply standing by to await the order to lower away. The engines were almost silent at quarter speed.

Once more Dan watched the shore. As the second flare began to wane, there was a splutter from a rocket well up in the hills. Dan heard the sigh of relief from the man above him.

"What bottom, Mr. Corwin?" came in a steady voice from above.

Dan took the lead, as the boatswain drew it in, calling in his bass canto—"B' the deep—five." He glanced into the little hole at the base of weight, shook a bit of the contents into his palm, and rubbed it with his fingers.

"Mud, sir," he called back.

There was so quick a jerk of the telegraph that Dan knew they had run closer than intended to something. The reversal of the engines confirmed this opinion. The ship backed slowly off shore. There was another sigh of relief from above. Five minutes later the order came for the dropping of the anchors.

Dan was not surprised at the course of immediately succeeding events. The swarm of little boats that came swiftly from shore—a few under sail, but mostly being rowed by men obviously in great haste—the fact that the whole crew of the City of Altoona was kept forward of a dead-line drawn before the after cabin, and the passages through it curtained off with tarpaulins from any prying eyes, while the men in

the boats worked in total darkness and even the running lights of the ship were dimmed —Dan expected every move before it was made.

It had been for this that the Spanish gentlemen had so strenuously demanded interview with the captain in Limanau. The cargo being so silently hustled aboard such ineffectual lighters was one of ammunition. And—unless another surmise of Dan's was amiss—the owners of the ship would be kept in ignorance of the fact that it had ever been carried.

But he had a surprise coming to him when, about four o'clock in the morning, the ship had been once more plowing for an hour in a straight course for the point at which Dan's direction of her had ended. There was a knock on his door. The captain had bidden him leave the general straightening up until daylight, and to get some sleep. Dan rose hurriedly, concluding that the skipper had changed his mind and wanted him to take the bridge for the watch.

The light in the passage had been turned lower than usual, but it showed him that his visitor was the captain himself.

"Don't mind about dressing, Mr. Corwin—I just wanted a little talk with you. Mr. Edwards is on the bridge."

The tone was more like that in which Dan had been engaged for his present uncomfortable position than any in which the skipper had addressed him since. The man came inside, and closed the door behind him.

"Shall I light up?" Dan asked.

"Why—yes," the captain decided. It seemed to take him an instant to do so—"if you will," he added, in that tone of exaggerated politeness Marion thought a prelude of one of his "spells." Dan motioned him into the only seat the room contained, and himself sat on the edge of the berth, and waited for the next turn of things.

"I'm afraid," Captain Hope suddenly opened up, "you're finding me a hard skipper. I wish you'd believe that—well, that I'm not quite as well as I should be at times; and that I cannot always keep my temper when I should. I hope that you'll be able to distinguish between these off moods of mine and such times as I might have to be serious—which I hope won't come."

Dan was glad to accept the explanation as apology in full for past unreasonableness. He hoped they were approaching an understanding upon which it might be possible to run things a little more smoothly.

"I'll try not to deserve anything serious, sir," he promised.

"I want to make it really worth your while to try. I have reasons—I guess some of them are obvious enough to everybody—for counting this my last voyage. I don't want to end it in disgrace. I want to tell you that, if we reach New York successfully, there will be a check for a thousand dollars for my first mate at the voyage's end."

Dan flushed with surprise and more hope than even Marion had succeeded in inspiring. A thousand dollars! He knew plenty of places around Newark where that would give a good grip on such a home as any ship's captain might return to with pride, such a home as he had vaguely wondered if he might ever possess, rather than imagined he really would; such a home as should satisfy even such a girl as Marion Hope.

The captain interrupted his attempts to express his future gratitude.

"You haven't reached the end of the voyage yet," Hope smiled. "But just to show the confidence I have that you will —I want you to let me advance you—say a quarter of the amount. It's too long a trip for you to have to run without some little conveniences I see you haven't. You won't mind its being in Chilean money, will you?"

Was it because the hand that held out a previously counted roll of paper money trembled, that Dan suddenly felt suspicious? Certainly there was nothing in the face of the captain but the benignant smile of a slightly affected gentleman enjoying the playing of the Lord Bountiful part in the properly offhand manner.

"Hadn't you better wait until I've—delivered the goods?" Dan asked, mostly to cover the suspicion he felt. "I might make another mistake like that of running a day beyond a stop, and—"

"It's hardly likely we shall have any more stops for such secret commissions as

this one was. Antofogasta is our next port. Unless we receive new orders there, we head for Valparaiso." He hesitated a moment. "By the way—we've been running at half speed on account of a fog bank for the past four days, in case you should ever be asked about the delay in reaching Antofogasta. I was afraid we might encounter icebergs in such a fog."

"In case I'm *ever* asked?" Dan queried, his suspicions instantly coming to a head. The fog-bank story might be all right for Antofogasta, which might telegraph back and nip a nice little revolution—or hinder the quelling of one, as the case might be. It would be all right for Valparaiso; for any questioner in South America, or anywhere else—except in case of an investigation of the delay by the members of the company who owned the ship and paid its running expenses.

"Certainly," the captain answered. Their eyes searched each other. Two questions were in the captain's mind—whether Dan understood that his answer covered everything, and whether he agreed to make it cover everything. He seemed to help answer the first by the faintest flicker of a smile and wink.

Suddenly Dan pushed the roll of Chilean bills back toward its donor.

"I'm afraid I can't accept this," he said slowly, "on that basis. I've had a few chances to take money—like that. I haven't begun yet."

Captain Hope studied his face more. He seemed struggling for some argument that would change Dan's position. Gradually his extreme affectation of mildness seemed to fade from his face. There was a glint of something hard in his eye.

"I shouldn't have expected to find such an—almost unique—sense of honor"—he spoke very slowly, but without much of the dainty drawl left—"in a man who pleaded sickness in securing another berth as excuse for the loss of one through a most inexcusable sinking of the ship on which he had it. I'm afraid I shall find it difficult to retain a man of your peculiar type of honesty to the end of the voyage." He gathered up the bills as he spoke.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

JIM HANNEFORD never quite understood that first plunge of his into the oil game. Afterward, when he was stony-broke, he tried to analyze the thing. "I must have been mentally fagged," he told himself, "and it sure was a wonderful day."

There were times when he blamed Marian Ross for the impulse, and other times when he blessed her. And, despite the hazy uncertainty of his actual motive, he carried, and will carry to his death a vivid picture of the Thames field as he first saw it from Musgrave's car.

They had turned away from the river, when, passing a spruce windbreak, the field came into view suddenly—a low expanse of marshland, so vast that the tall derricks seemed dwarfed. Faint smoke-puffs rose from weather-beaten shacks; and as the car bumped over a rutty road across the marsh, there came to Hanneford's ears a faint *puff-puff!* of steam from a dozen closely drilled wells.

"That's the Amalgamated lease," explained the geologist. "See"—he indicated a weather-beaten derrick in the foreground—"there is their Discovery well."

Musgrave was black-browed, but distinguished-looking, with a black mustache and a little pointed beard and gold-rimmed glasses.

"There, to the north," pursued Musgrave, "is your lease—the Torby."

"But how can you tell one lease from another, without fences?" demanded Marian Ross.

She was bright-eyed, vivacious, contrasty, and intensely interested in it all. She knew the subject a great deal better than Jim Hanneford did; for she was society editress of the Carisford *Meteor*, and on a friendly footing with the wives of various local oil magnates.

Her question was pertinent; except for the derricks—one bit of swamp, here humped up, there dipping slightly, now barely above and again barely under water—all looked alike. A year before the swamp had been tenanted only by muskrats and snakes, good for nothing except marsh hay. Then the Amalgamated had come in and drilled their big gasser.

"See that dip?" said Musgrave. "A hundred yards north of the derricks? That's almost our south line. Our lease—the Torby—runs north to the second dip. Then, just past the second dip, comes the Fingal. I tried to hook up old man Fingal for you, but he refused to lease."

They descended from the car. In places, the marsh-grass was dry underfoot; blue violets, huge and sweet-scented, grew in the black muck; and on the distant lake fringe brown bulrushes nodded like sleepy sentinals amid the green reeds. They came presently to the first long dip, running lakeward. Marian gazed in dismay at the six inches of stagnant water.

"We wade here," said Musgrave.

The girl gazed appealingly at Jim Hanneford.

"There's only one way to cross," said Hanneford, practically; and gathered her in his arms.

She flushed and protested; and, once more on terra firma beyond the dip, gazed tragically across the water, toward the gray skeleton derricks on the Amalgamated lease dancing in the June heat waves. Then she shrugged her shoulders, resignedly.

"I suppose it's part of the game," she said.

A man in tall rubber boots was wading across the marsh. Musgrave hallooed and beckoned; and the man came to him.

"You working here?" demanded the geologist.

"I had intended to work here," said the man in a curiously gentle voice, "but Sauvey did not agree with me."

"We're going to start a test in a few days," announced Musgrave.

That, thought Hanneford, was a bit premature. He wanted, first, to know where he was at.

He regarded the man curiously, however. This was no ordinary man, he told himself—but then, nothing was ordinary this June day. The sky was wonderfully blue, the air was clear and warm, the violets he trod heedlessly underfoot were bigger than violets had any right to be, and Marian Ross, gathering a huge bunch of them, fitted into the picture. Jim Hanneford felt the thrill of high adventure—he, who in the hard years overseas, had known so many thrills.

His native caution put a question to the extraordinary driller in the tall boots.

"It costs a bit to drill to the Trenton?"

"It does," agreed the extraordinary driller. "Ten thousand—but nowadays, if you fail, you pull the casing and sell it on a rising market. And if you get Trenton oil, it lasts next door to forever."

No ordinary driller, mused Jim Hanneford again. For the man, with his grimy overalls and tattered straw hat, wore an indescribable air of gentility.

He spoke to Musgrave after the man had gone. Musgrave laughed his contempt.

"That old galoot!" he exclaimed. "Why, he's just old Captain Kibosh. He picks up a sort of living pottering around as an emergency man when one of the regulars is drunk. That is, if he isn't drunk himself."

"He seemed such a gentleman—"

"Gentleman!" roared Musgrave. "You should see old Kibosh when he's pickled. D'you know, that man was once worth a million—he drilled a bunch of gushers down in Pennsylvania—and he lost every damned cent of it."

"That being so," said Hanneford, in a tone curiously clear, "this oil game is something to keep away from?"

Musgrave showed traces of uneasiness.

"Oh, but," he expostulated, "you're different. *You* have sense enough to leave the bottle on the shelf. A bottle is a god or a devil to old Kibosh—it's a god when he's dry at night, and a devil when he comes to next morning."

He laughed, unpleasantly; and they followed the Torby lease lakeward till they were ankle-deep in water at the fringe of rushes.

The young man reflected, with vague misgivings, of genteel old Kibosh, once a millionaire, now pottering about these drilling rigs. Then he glanced across the swamp and saw the Amalgamated derricks dancing through the heat-waves. The violets at his feet were big and blue, and the sky was blue as the violets.

He ferried Marian across the dip once more. She clung to him this time without protest.

Musgrave talked much as they drove homeward. Musgrave had tied up the lease for him—a thousand dollars cash for as many acres, plus a stipulation to start drilling within a year. It was a sure thing, said Musgrave. The Amalgamated had struck both oil and gas within a mile, and were drilling a dozen more wells.

"What's the verdict?" concluded the geologist.

Hanneford smiled.

"I was just calculating," he returned. "I like to know just where I'm at."

He knew where he was at, however, to his own callow satisfaction. One of these deep wells might cost as much as ten thousand dollars. He had the lease, to begin with; he would drill just one well. If he failed, he'd quit then and there, with half his capital left. If he won, he'd get back his investment many times over.

But he couldn't lose, for the Amalgamated, a mile away, had won handsomely on their first venture.

Thus he worked out the simple equation to his own satisfaction. He glanced now at the girl. Her eyes glowed with the eager light of speculation.

"I'd do it myself," she said, "if I were a man."

Hannaford nodded to Musgrave.

"You go to it!" he said casually.

II.

JIM HANNEFORD had brought back from France two wound-stripes, and a clear-cut invitation from Marian Ross to visit her at Carisford. The invitation was the outcome of a crumpled note in the toe of a well-knit sock, that had come among three thousand others, and, as luck would have it, had fallen to Jim Hanneford.

Such are the whims of chance.

His old job waited for him in an office at Schenectady. But he didn't want it. He had a vague idea of going on the land. Then he found himself heir to twenty thousand dollars left by Uncle Jim, without a single string to it.

After possessing himself of the money, his first impulse was to visit the girl at Carisford. At the Carisford Hotel, before ever he saw her or made the startling discovery that she was merely the society editress of a small-town daily, he ran into Musgrave. Then Musgrave told him of the new field on the Thames, and tied up the Torby lease for him at a dollar an acre.

The enthusiasm of the wonderful day faded, however, after he returned from the Thames. Hanneford grew cautious. He was shocked, in recollection, at the fashion in which the alluring gamble of oil had seemingly gripped Marian Ross.

"I mean to drill just one well," he told Musgrave firmly. "If that fails, I quit. I

want you to be absolutely sure of the best location."

For Jim Hanneford himself had just one hazy idea of oil, that a well drilled at the right spot would double and triple his money for him.

Musgrave entered into a learned dissertation on the geological formations of the Thames field. Most of it was Greek, or worse, to young Hanneford; but he did gather a certain salient fact from the discourse, that Musgrave was singularly well informed.

"Go right to it!" he said, largely; and was almost annoyed that Musgrave insisted on having him discuss the details of the drilling contract with Ben Sauvey, who did most of the drilling in the Carisford country.

"By the way," he added on afterthought, "we must be absolutely sure of our line between our lease and the Fingal."

Musgrave agreed.

So next morning and afternoon they spent in the field with certain surveying instruments that Hanneford only half understood. Musgrave uncovered what he called a "monument" close to the dredge-cut; and working from this he staked the line between the Torby and the Fingal leases, along the western edge of the second and shallower of the two dips.

"I'll drill on the rise," said Musgrave. "If the underlying formations are conformable, it indicates an anticline."

"Try again to get the Fingal lease," suggested Hanneford. For it occurred to him that if he struck a good well here, he might as well have more territory tied up.

"I've been trying," growled Musgrave. "But Fingal's still in California, and he writes that he positively won't lease."

"All right," concluded Hanneford munificently. "There's a bonus for both of you if I strike it rich. Go to it."

Then he went back to Carisford, and to society, on the fringe of which hung Marian Ross with her pad and pencil and her busy chronicling of small functions. Except for rare trips over the ten miles of rutty roadway, he left the drilling operations pretty much to Musgrave and Sauvey.

Once or twice, in idle moments, he thought of the job in the office of Schenectady. That day of small things was past. He enjoyed being an oil-magnate. Being an oil-magnate involved easy hours, though often late ones, with motor outings to the lake where the roads were good, and occasional trips to Detroit, to take in the shows. Just now he was spending without earning; he'd recoup himself handsomely when the well came in.

The drilling, Musgrave said, went slowly. More slowly, it seemed, than the other wells; first one, then another, of the ventures started before his had since finished dry.

One day in October Musgrave telephoned that the drillers had got a spurt of gas in the Trenton. He would stay on the ground, though; the well might come in big at any moment.

For the first time Hanneford fretted. His fine face wore an anxious look. He smoked half a dozen cigarettes in the hotel lobby. Then he telephoned for a car. He would see the field himself—of course. Queer that Musgrave hadn't asked him to come out.

Then he remembered Marian Ross that first day. But Marian Ross, he mused, wouldn't do, now. Then he was a stranger; he had not appreciated her place in Carisford society, or their relative positions. No; she wouldn't do.

So he telephoned Ada Ringold. Ada was pretty and petite, and had accompanied him more than once to the Detroit shows.

"Can I bring a friend?" asked Ada.

Jim Hanneford laughed.

"Sure—provided she's not a man."

He called for her ten minutes later. Around the next corner, at Ada's direction, they stopped to pick up Marian Ross.

That nettled him. "Miss Ross wanted to see your well come in," explained Ada. "She'll write it up for the paper."

That brought Hanneford back to good humor. His well was coming in big. It was just such a show of gas in the Trenton that had started the Amalgamated gusher. He dilated on his well—the clean bit of drilling it had been, the ease with which it would make him a fortune, his own shrewdness in linking up with a man like Mus-

grave, who knew the exact spot to locate—and what he meant to do in the world after he made his pile.

Marian Ross interposed a serious question.

"And if it fails?"

Jim Hanneford stared at her incredulously.

"Why, it can't fail," he exclaimed. "But if it does—I'm not broke. I can try something else."

They came at last to the derrick in the marshland. No steam-puffs rose to greet them, and everything was silent. A man came toward them across the marsh. Hanneford had expected Musgrave to greet him, but this was the genteel old tool-dresser nicknamed Captain Kibosh.

"What luck—eh?"

At Hanneford's cheery hail, Kibosh came close. He had a clear, friendly blue eye; but his face was a bit concerned.

"When I drill another gusher, Friend Hanneford," he said, "I'll buy this well from you for a cigar-lighter."

He smiled his ironic smile.

Then he seemed sharply to sense that Hanneford was still a beginner in the oil game, and not accustomed to shocks.

"We got a little gas in the Potsdam sand, at the bottom of the Trenton," he explained. "And there was just the slightest trace of oil. We were scratching granite when we quit."

"You're done?" asked Hanneford, in a tone strangely quiet.

Captain Kibosh nodded. There was a feeling silence between the two men. Marian Ross looked on, a trifle concerned. Ada Ringold sat back, stiff and straight, as though she had sensed in Hanneford the fool he was.

Hanneford said something that surprised him. He had not intended to say it, yet at the moment it seemed the one thing to say.

"Tell Musgrave to come right here," he said, "and bring the well-log. I'm going to get to the bottom of this business. Then we'll make a new location."

III.

It was a different Jim Hanneford who drove back to Carisford from his first great failure, just as it was a different Jim Hanneford who had come back, eight months before, from France. Men throughout their lives cannot change the basic materials of their souls; yet such experiences stir the depths of them, and bring out and develop unthought-of qualities that are latent there.

He was not careless, this time; he had failed deservedly; this second time he would win, and he would win by playing the cards right. Musgrave, coming down from the derrick, sensed the difference in him.

They spent some time in argument. Musgrave had not the logs; he would get them and bring them to Carisford. "We'll go toward the lake next time," said Hanneford.

Musgrave tried to argue; and found the young man stubborn as granite. So he acceded, with an ill-grace, and politely complimented the ladies, and watched the car vanish in the distance.

He turned to Kibosh, his brow blacker even than normal.

"Well," he demanded, "what are you butting in for?"

Kibosh shrugged his shoulders, in a fashion suggesting Parisian boulevards and better days.

"I just told him that when I drilled my new gusher—"

"Damn your gusher!" snarled Musgrave. "You keep out of this—or I'll put you in a nice, cool place where the flies won't trouble you."

With which ultimatum, Musgrave turned, and crossed to the bunk-house. There he locked himself in. From the derrick came the sounds of dismantling; but he shut them out of his mind. A letter needed to be written; and he wrote it, in fine chirography with many fancy curls and twists:

> Old Kibosh almost queered things by telling our friend the well was just a cigar-lighter. But Hanneford surprised me by going ahead with another, nonchalant as you please. We got a puff of gas here, and a trace of oil. So we're on the track.
>
> I think Hanneford is stuck on Bert Ringold's girl, and wants to make good. We all want him to make good. He's a nice young man, and still has ten thousand, I think. That is good for one more well.
>
> He insisted on seeing the logs. Well, I'll show him all the logs he wants, so long as he keeps on drilling. I intend to show him logs

of the Amalgamated wells, too. I'll get them from the same place as I'm getting our own log, a fertile imagination. As long as the drawing supplies and the imagination holds out, I can give Hanneford any amount of drilling logs.

I think old Kibosh *knows;* but I've got the drop on Kibosh. That little forgery down in Mosa was put across very nicely, and he knows I can pinch him on it.

Your benevolent friend,
MUSGRAVE, C.E., M.I.M.M.; B.D. Ph.D., Geologist.

He smiled in a dark sort of fashion, did Geologist Musgrave, folded the letter, sealed the envelope, and addressed it to

MR. ROBERT FINGAL,
Long Beach, California.

The second well, toward the lake, was finished in midwinter. "Dry as the seven brass doors of Hades," said Captain Kibosh. Musgrave, however, dipped some crude-oil from it when Jim Hanneford came.

He came alone this time; Ada Ringold had refused to see him for months, and he was too stiffly proud to invite Marian Ross.

Hanneford took the logs back to Carisford with him; Musgrave urged him to do so. The geologist saw him later at the Carisford Hotel, and they had several long talks.

"You'll try again?" he urged. "We've had oil in two holes. We'll get a gusher the third time."

"I'm broke," said Hannaford simply.

Musgrave was genuinely concerned.

"That's too bad," he said; and meant it. "We're on the trail of the oil—we've got the dip of the structure—if you could only raise the money."

"I'll try," said Hanneford, unsteadily; but knew quite well he could not raise the money anywhere.

As it chanced, he met Marian Ross that evening on the street. She stopped him, when he would have passed by unrecognizing; she asked him about his venture when he would have preferred to keep silent.

"It's all my fault," she exclaimed, "for I encouraged you."

She put her hand in his, consolingly; and he told her he was stony broke, and didn't blame her—a fool and his money were soon parted. They both laughed at that, feebly; it was an old jest in the oil game.

"What would you do if you were in my place?" he demanded.

There was no hesitation in her answer. Her eyes flashed.

"I'd try—and try—and try—and keep on trying." She gripped his hands, and looked into his eyes.

So he did try, remembering Musgrave's suggestion. But it is difficult—nay, impossible—to borrow money on your note, with the security of a lot of second-hand casing and a lease that has two failures chalked up against it, even in a proved field.

Yet he tried, and failed, and tried again, and failed again, to raise the money; and kept Musgrave off with promises.

One morning a marked advertisement came to him in a newspaper, through the mails. "Money to loan—on your own note. N. P. Murray, Attorney."

Musgrave, manifestly, was the good angel who had thrown this advertisement his way.

He saw N. P. Murray. Murray hemmed and hawed a great deal. He refused Jim Hanneford the ten thousand dollars he wanted, but could let him have seventy-five hundred. The rate, eight per cent, was not bad; the security was everything he had in the world. He told Musgrave to make the third location; and saw Musgrave drive the stake on a little hump of ground. There was nothing to do after that but wait for the rig-builders to move the derrick from the No. 2 well to the new site.

IV.

A GRIMY bit of oil-boom débris, perched on top of a wagon-load of casing, Captain Kibosh jogged down the road toward the Thames swamp.

At the bend he met Jim Hanneford in a car. Marian Ross was with him.

Politely, but ineffectually, Captain Kibosh tried to persuade his horses to give the car the road. They might have been mules for all the response they made. But Jim Hanneford slammed down the brakes.

"Well, old friend," he cried, cheerily, "it's three times and out. We've just driven the stake for No. 3."

He lingered to chat. Marian Ross put in a word or two. Captain Kibosh, jogging along five minutes later, glanced around, and a sort of mist swam before his eyes.

"Played for a sucker!" he muttered. "Damned shame—and the pretty girl, too!"

He headed his horses down the side road, slowly crossed the dredge cut, and passed the first bunk-house. A subtle, alluring scent came to his old nostrils—something a sixth or seventh sense had learned to detect where normal man could not. He pulled up his horses, and painfully descended from his high perch.

Spencer, one of the Amalgamated tooleys, blundered out as Kibosh hurried in. He greeted Kibosh hilariously. The scent old Kibosh had subtly suspected at a distance was strong on the young fellow's breath.

"Whoop-ee!" yelled Spencer. "Say, old bird, I'll bet you're dry!"

"Dry?" cackled Kibosh. "I'm dry as the seven brass doors of Hades. Got a nip?"

"Sh!"

Spencer turned up the blankets, and produced a black bottle. "Not more than one nip," he urged. Kibosh took the nip—a long, devastating nip. "Musgrave," explained Spencer, succinctly. "He's toting the stuff. This put me back twenty dollars." He took another nip himself, also long and devastating. "I'm saving a little bit for to-morrow," he explained wisely.

"To-morrow," repeated Kibosh. "Never put aside till to-morrow what you can imbibe to-day." He took the black bottle, and turned its bottom toward the bunk-house rafters. "Augh-h!" he snorted.

Spencer grabbed the bottle, put it to his lips, and made a wry face.

"Empty!" he shrieked.

Kibosh beamed urbanely.

"I was afraid you might get drunk, young man," he said. "Drink and the devil have done for me, but you are not too old to save for better things. When I drill my second gusher, I want you for head-driller. You're a bright young fellow, and I like you. If you live to be a thousand years old and steal some brains somewhere you may be a real driller by the time Gabriel herds you with the other goats—and that 'll be time enough. You're a damned fine fellow."

He made as though to hug Spencer; and Spencer, barely sober enough to remember his duties, went stumbling down the bunk-house steps.

Musgrave had been there. The scattered cards were proof of that. From the other side of the partition came the steady snoring of the day-shift, who had come off tower an hour earlier. Musgrave, presumably, had sold the booze, and then had cleaned out the night crew at seven-up, just before they went on tower. There might be a fishing job at Amalgamated No. 13 before the night was through, if the rest of Musgrave's bootlegger booze had the same kick as the dregs he had just sampled.

Outside, the team and the casing waited; but indoors Captain Kibosh, happy for the first time since Ontario went dry, glanced dizzily about him.

Then he crossed to the table, and picked up a wallet. He knew it—Musgrave's. With fingers slightly unsteady, he went through it. There was money in plenty. "Oh, you poor sucker!" he exclaimed as he thought of Jim Hanneford. Musgrave was not usually this careless; he must have done some interior decorating with his own booze.

Kibosh found what he sought in the wallet, a check signed with the name of Francis Carfax, and endorsed by R. B. Musgrave.

He remembered when he had signed the name of Carfax to that check. He was working for Carfax in Mosa, and Musgrave had just called with some liquid comfort. He had volunteered to pay Musgrave a trifle of five dollars, and had declared that Carfax trusted him implicitly, even to the extent of giving him full power of attorney.

That recollection almost sobered Kibosh.

Next day Musgrave, all apparent innocence, had come to him and pointed out that, as he hadn't any power of attorney, the signature on the check constituted sheer forgery. By that time Kibosh had no very clear recollection of how he ever came to sign it; but that stunt put him just where Musgrave liked to have other people, in Musgrave's grip. And Musgrave had com-

pelled him to do some mighty mean things since then—things the recollection of which made him writhe.

He could have denied the check from the very first—he could have told the truth, that he signed it for a joke when he was drunk—but who would have believed the word of a drunken tool-dresser against the evidence of a substantial citizen like Musgrave?

Captain Kibosh, fingering the check, deliberated as to what a gentleman should do under the circumstances. For, drunk or sober, he was still a gentleman; and his inflexible code almost compelled him to replace the forged check in Musgrave's wallet.

"No," he adjudicated at last, "this document has made Musgrave a blackmailer and this poor old gentleman a forger. It will relieve this poor old gentleman of the unjust stigma of forgery and may make Musgrave temporarily an honest man—if I burn it."

Which he did, very carefully, in the cook-stove; and destroyed the ashes.

Then he tugged a huge trunk from beneath his bed. He had thought he would die in the winter cold, on top of that load of casing. Well, if he died, he would die like a gentleman.

So he unlocked the trunk, discarded his overalls and outer garments, and donned a black suit and a stove-pipe hat, both rusty with age. He brushed himself carefully before a cracked mirror on the wall, put away the discarded work-clothes, and sallied out.

He climbed unsteadily upon the load.

"G'up," he hiccuped to the horses.

They plodded away through the twilight toward the half-dismantled derrick of Hanneford No. 2.

"To-morrow," mused Kibosh, "I'll tell that young fellow the whole truth. Musgrave can't touch me now."

Then qualms assailed him. He had a keen, though somewhat blighted, sense of honor. He remembered now that in return for continued immunity he had positively promised Musgrave never to whisper so much as a word of certain things he knew or suspected of the Hanneford drilling, including such details as padded pay-sheets.

That the forged check was now ashes abated not one whit what was due his own standing as a gentleman.

He shut his mind resolutely to the recollection of Marian's eager face and Hanneford's cheery greeting.

"No," he said, simply, "I can't tell."

He let the horses pick their way across the humpy, frozen ground, now stumbling over little hillocks, now knee-deep in drifts.

One of the wheels rattled and balked. Kibosh could not make out what was the trouble, so he just purred drunkenly to the horses: "G'up! G'up!" till they came to a level stretch.

Then he got down. He had decided to call it a day; he unharnessed the horses, and left the load standing. A few paces farther, as he drove off the horses, he stumbled over a stake.

He picked up the stake, and gazed with an air of stupid questioning across the marsh. Then he retraced the path of the wagon across the lease till he came to a little hummock where he found a slight depression. Into this he fitted the stake.

He thought again of Jim Hanneford, who had always been decent to him, and of Marian Ross, smiling at him with friendly eyes.

"And I can't tell him," he mourned desolately.

He felt miserable in his impotence, and was sorry that the black bottle was empty. He sat down on the frozen hummock, and let the horses stray, deviously, across the swamp. They knew where the stable was better than he did. He had come down some since the great days at Bradford, but—he would once more walk erect before all mankind when he drilled his second gusher, and got back all the money he had lost. Then he would make things right with Jim Hanneford.

V.

THROUGH the weeks and months that followed Jim Hanneford grew hawk-eyed in his study of the tailings from the sand-pump and his mental chronicling of each foot of hole made and each dollar laid out.

Hanneford fretted at times, for the dollars went fast, and the drilling was tedious.

He had lost his dream of sudden opulence; he bore burdens. Now he shunned the hotel, and the gossip of other oil men; instead, in the Thames marsh, he helped now and then with a drilling shift. He got to like the grimy men who did his work and drew his pay, though a bit puzzled by their occasionally pitying attitude toward him.

"I can't understand it," he once told Marian Ross.

He had gravitated toward her, as he had gravitated toward the drillers; she was the oasis of comfort in the lonely desert which became his after Carisford society whispered the story of his second failure.

Did she, too, pity him; had she, somewhere, the clue to the secret which made men in the oil-fields regard him askance?

He put the question up to Musgrave.

"We'll jolt them all a month from now," laughed Musgrave, confidently. "I know—I've studied those logs till they're written on my brain. The oil here isn't usual; it lies in a narrow syncline, and a hundred feet one way or the other may be totally off the line. No. 1 was too near the dredge cut and No. 2 was too near the lake. This time we'll hit the syncline where the oil lies."

Hanneford only half believed; he fancied flaws in Musgrave's high-sounding geology.

One June night as he came out of the Carisford theater with Marian Ross—Detroit shows were now a thing of the affluent, distant past—a man in a high-powered car beckoned them. He was J. Randall Putterby, a big man in the Millbury oil-field, whom Hanneford knew by sight and repute.

"How're you fixed?" he demanded.

Hanneford hesitated, fancying in Putterby's manner an ominous note; then voted unamimously for frankness.

"Between you and me, No. 3 is drilling on borrowed money."

"The deuce!"

Hanneford questioned himself: had this oil-operator fancied him a man of unlimited capital, and thought to interest him in some new venture? Putterby cogitated long.

"Musgrave?" he demanded jerkily.

"Well?"

"What did you know of him before you met him?"

"Why, he's an experienced geologist, and—he seems to know his business."

"U-m!" grunted Putterby.

Marian drew closer, sensing ill-omen in Putterby's words and tone and manner.

"But what independent information had you?"

The man's persistence nettled Hanneford. "I didn't ask any."

"No? Too bad. I wish you'd asked me. I might have saved you money."

Marian spoke clearly:

"An end to enigmas, please, Mr. Putterby. What are you driving at?"

"Just this. Musgrave is a fake geologist. He hangs around the oil-fields, and lives off suckers who don't know the game."

"Suckers!" breathed Marian.

Hanneford felt the same pitying look in her eyes that he had fancied in the eyes of the drillers. So they, all along, had known him for a sucker, and had liked him and been sorry for him!

Marian spoke.

"But why shouldn't we strike oil down there, Mr. Putterby?"

We. The word thrilled Jim Hanneford.

"Your chances are better than the man who's stringing you. I'd call No. 3 a good gamble—if I didn't know Musgrave."

Hanneford remained unconvinced. There were numerous cross-currents of professional jealousy among oil men, as he had already learned in his short experience. Then as they walked on together down the shady street, he turned to Marian.

"*We?*" he repeated. "Girl—if I strike it rich down there—you'll marry me?"

"Don't talk of that," she said quietly.

At his hotel he found that a telephone call had come for him two hours before, from Musgrave. He got Musgrave on long-distance.

"Mr. Hanneford." Musgrave's tone quivered with excitement. "It's good news. She's still spouting, but we're getting her shut in."

Jim Hanneford could not sleep. He got hold of a car, and drove the ten miles to the field. He would not believe Musgrave, or what Musgrave showed him. "It's fifty barrels, sir," said Captain Kibosh, softly. "On the word of a gentleman."

Three days later Lawyer Graham waited upon Hanneford at the hotel. He represented Robert Fingal, formerly of Thames Township. Fingal had just come home from California, and Fingal declared that Hanneford No. 3 was on his property.

Graham, having made his demand in person, as the importance of the issue seemed to require, refused to talk. So Hanneford summoned Musgrave.

"Fingal is a liar!" blustered Musgrave. He talked much in the same strain. "But if he's right—of course he isn't—why, darn it, we'll give him the well and drill an offset on the Torby lease!"

Thereafter was silence from Musgrave, who had ostensibly gone back to the field to investigate. Hanneford, impatient, at last drove down to the well and ran his geologist to earth in the Amalgamated bunkhouse, playing seven-up with a bunch of drillers. At sight of Hanneford, Musgrave looked uncomfortable.

"Well?" demanded Hanneford harshly.

Musgrave plucked up some semblance of courage. "I'm damned if I know how it happened."

"It's true?"

"Yes—the well is on Fingal's side. Say, where did I tell you to drive the stakes?"

"On the second rise."

"That explains it—you got me wrong." Musgrave's manner showed relief. "The first rise, that's where I yelled to you to drive the stakes for the line."

He rose, and drew Hanneford outside.

"About the Torby lease?" he demanded. "D'you know where you're at?"

Hanneford stood staring at him.

"Your time limit for drilling on the Torby has expired. Your lease has gone flooey. I knew that at once, so I jumped in and got a new lease from Torby—in my own name, of course. I hadn't time to get you," he protested. "But if you'll put in your money, we'll go fifty-fifty—"

Jim Hanneford jumped for the man's throat. Musgrave shrieked for help; and the drillers came out and separated them.

Jim Hanneford, broken and bankrupt, drove back to Carisford in the night. He tried to think of what had just happened; but all he could see in fancy was a cluster of huge blue violets and the girl in his arms, as he waded through the marshy dip.

VI.

On afterthought, Jim Hanneford's spirits came back resilient. He was beaten, but he refused to recognize it. Musgrave might be wrong in his law just as he had been mistaken in his survey.

The logical first step was to consult a lawyer. He did not go to N. P. Murray, because he owed Murray, and telling the truth in that quarter would precipitate a crash.

Instead, he consulted young Robert Craig.

"Are you sure No. 3 is on Fingal's property?" demanded Craig.

"There's not the slightest question as to that."

Craig cogitated. "I'll look up the law," he said. "Come back this time to-morrow." He made an entry in his diary, and turned to the next client.

Next day Craig, with his uncanny faculty for getting to the root of things, had on his desk Judge Thornton's digest of the law of oil and gas.

"They've got you, boy," he announced bluntly. "Listen to this:

> "If oil has been unlawfully taken from the soil, the owner, whoever he may be, has the option either to recover the oil or its value. Where the act of taking is a trespass, according to one line of cases concerning solid minerals, the wrong-doer is not entitled to be credited with the cost of taking out the mineral, if he knew it belonged to the plaintiff.

"That means," commented Craig, "that Fingal gets not merely the oil, but the finished well, and doesn't have to repay you a cent of the cost of drilling."

"But I didn't know—"

"In that case, here you are:

> "In the case of a wilful or negligent trespass the rule should follow the rule first above enumerated, without any deduction for the cost of taking it out; but if the tresspasser was innocent—

"As in your case," interpolated Craig:

> "—innocent of the fact that he was a trespasser, and is not guilty of negligence in entering upon the ground and taking the oil or

gas, the cost of extracting should be allowed him. This is the general rule where the trespasser is innocent of any intent to do wrong, or has not been guilty of negligence."

He closed the book.

"So there you are," he concluded. "As a matter of fact, Graham has just phoned me, for Fingal, that he will repay us the amount, less certain allowances which seem reasonable."

"And you told him—"

"I told him," said Craig, "that first and foremost, I'd go down there and size up the situation myself. I'll take my car—leave here about one thirty this afternoon. We may," he added, dubiously, "get something to hang a nice, fat lawsuit on." He grinned.

"Is there any chance?" Jim Hanneford's last spurt of hope leaped up in the words.

"Not in a lawsuit. But I may bluff Fingal."

Jim Hanneford realized the bitter truth only when he stood outside in the June sunshine. His grim determination and his resilient hope of an hour before were now just pin-pricked bubbles. He had to face N. P. Murray, he had to turn over to him whatever money he might get from Fingal, he had to go out from Carisford dead broke and a failure—and first of all, he had to face Marian Ross.

He found her at noon, at the *Meteor* office. He told her.

"Complete smash, isn't it?" he commented.

"Pretty complete," she rejoined; and her calmness told him that his failure meant nothing to her.

She excused herself and went to the telephone.

"Come down and lunch with me?" he invited, when she came back. "We'll have a final, grand blowout to celebrate our failure."

She eyed him approvingly.

"You're improving," she said. "You're beginning to learn what life is—and that it isn't just easy money. I'll meet you at twelve forty-five—I have to do some shopping."

While he waited at the hotel, a messenger-boy handed him a sealed envelope with the card of N. P. Murray in the corner. Hanneford thrust it into his pocket. He meant to postpone the bitterness of facing this issue till after the last meal together.

Marian was in gay spirits. He gazed across at her, queer thoughts coursing through his brain—of the tiny bit of paper tucked into the toe of a khaki sock that had started all these things. He put out of his mind the failure and disappointment; life, after all, was a game to be played, whether one won or lost. He gazed into the girl's bright eyes, and their look thrilled him with courage.

"I just got this letter," he said frankly. "I borrowed seventy-five hundred from Murray to finance this last well. When I get the money from Fingal—if I ever do—it goes to Murray. Then I'll be broke."

"Then," she said, with perfect frankness, "I can say 'yes' to that question you asked me the other night."

"You mean it."

"I sure do."

Jim Hanneford tore open the envelope. A slip of paper fluttered down upon the table—the seventy-five-hundred-dollar note, with Murray's endorsement, thus:

Paid in Full

N. P. MURRAY

Hanneford gazed at Marian. This, he knew, was assuredly no work of Musgrave's.

"You—"

"What is it?" she demanded, her tone nervous, her manner feverishly excited. She took the note and studied it, puckering her fine forehead. "Oh, I can't make head nor tail of it!" she exclaimed.

"You"—he leaned close—"you precious little—*liar!*"

She laughed merrily.

"The truth?" he insisted.

But it was long before he got the truth.

"I had the money—lying there in the bank—a legacy. I had a notion you wouldn't take it direct, so I turned it over to Murray to—to put into our venture. And we lost."

"*I* lost," insisted Hanneford, punctiliously.

At which she grew petulant.

"When will you learn to say *we?*" she demanded.

They met Lawyer Bob Craig at the station that evening. His flivver had broken down, and he had crossed the river by ferry and come up to Carisford on the 9.30 eastbound. He took in the situation instantly:

"Bless you, my children!" he exclaimed paternally. "And now for the facts. Friend Hanneford, you've been drilling dusters on Fingal's lease, but No. 3 is just nicely across the line on the Torby. I took down a surveyor, and he went over the ground three times to make absolutely sure, and I watched him every minute to make sure he wasn't a crook. Musgrave's stakes were almost right, and No. 3 was three feet our side of the stakes."

"That means—"

"That means," said Craig, "you own the well, and the oil, and you hold the Torby lease, and Musgrave's raw stunt of lease-jumping gets him nothing—and after those two dusters that *were* drilled on his land, Fingal will have a devil of a time leasing on any terms. Dear me," he concluded softly, "it struck me that both Fingal and Musgrave were puzzled as to how it ever happened."

VII.

THAT night Captain Kibosh, sober but urbane, sat in for a few hands of seven-up at the Amalgamated bunk-house. He had indifferent luck, but through it all he beamed seraphically.

By and by, divested of all his available funds, he meandered aimlessly out into the twilight, and along the rutty roadway toward Hanneford No. 3. The dark, skeleton framework served to guide his steps.

Out of the distant shadows a will-o'-the-wisp came dancing toward him. On impulse he diverted his steps, pursuing the will-o'-the-wisp. It proved a lantern; Kibosh crouched behind some rushes as it drew close. He heard a grumbling voice:

"Musgrave, ye'r a scoundrel!"

"But," protested Musgrave, "I laid down that line all right. Yes, and Hanneford helped me. There was no mistake. Just to be safe, I put my line six hundred feet over on your property. I may be a bum geologist, but I do know a little about surveying."

"Augh-h!" scoffed Robert Fingal. "Then, if ye're not a scoundrel, ye're an ass!"

"But I tell you—"

A shifting of the breeze drove Musgrave's protest lakeward. But Captain Kibosh waited, beaming into the darkness.

"Those stakes to-day were almost on the correct line," grumbled Fingal. "And the minute you calculated Hanneford couldn't hold the Torby, you jumped in and got a lease. You were calculating to double-cross the both of us—"

"But I tell you, those first two wells were drilled on your land," protested Musgrave earnestly. "That proves I played square. I tell you, *my* stakes were shifted all along the line. That's why I never caught on to the fact that the No. 3 location stakes were shifted, too. See here—just come with me—"

Snatching the lantern, he hurried Fingal along, till they came to a hump of ground a few hundred yards west of the derrick. "It's one of these humps," Musgrave said. "This one? No? Then try over there."

"I'll be damned!" Fingal on hands and knees scrutinized the mucky soil by lantern light. "Here's a stake-hole filled with pebbles. Now, how in—"

A harsh command rang across the marsh. "Get to blazes out of there!"

Then *bang! bang!* went a double-barrelled gun, followed by twin shrieks, and an oath from Musgrave. The two men were lost in the gloom.

Kibosh had ducked, though he knew the charge was nothing worse than rock-salt.

"And who the deuce," he took up Fingal's questioning, "shifted those location-stakes—and the line-stakes, too?"

He sat on a hummock, rocking his old body pleasantly to and fro.

"And to think of it!" he murmured. "You, Captain Kibosh, destined to drill two gushers, one in the distant past and the other in the remote future—when your honor as a gentleman squeezed you into a corner, you had to wait for a team of horses to show you the way out!"

The Trail Horde

by Charles Alden Seltzer

Author of "Riddle Gawne," "Beau Rand," "Square Deal Sanderson," etc.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

SYMBOLS.

FROM his desk in the big, quiet room in the capitol building, Lawler could look out upon a wide sweep of orderly landscape. There were trees—now stripped of their foliage—in serried array around the spacious grounds that surrounded the building; bushes arranged in attractive clusters; a low stone fence with massive posts that rose in simple dignity above white cement walks that curved gracefully toward the streets.

For nearly two months the huge building—representing the seat of government of a mighty State—had been Lawler's throne. And he had ruled with a democratic spirit and with a simple directness that had indicated earnestness and strength. There had been a mass of detail which had required close attention; many conferences with the prominent men of his party—in which the prominent men had been made to understand that Lawler intended to be Governor in fact as well as in name; and a gradual gathering up of all the loose ends of administration which had become badly tangled through the inefficiency of the former incumbent. And now the Legislature was in session.

Lawler had not been able to seize time to visit the Wolf River section. Work, work—and more work had confronted him from the moment he had taken the oath of office on the capitol steps until this minute, when he sat at his desk looking out of a window at the bleak, artificial landscape.

There had been times when he had longed for a glance at the Wolf River section; and there had been many more times when he had sat where he was sitting now, thinking of Ruth Hamlin.

Something lacked—he was not satisfied. In the old days—when he had visited the capital and had entered the State building to sense immediately the majesty of it and to feel the atmosphere of solemn dignity that reigned within—he had thought that any man must experience the ultimate thrill—the tingling realization that he stood on a spot hallowed by the traditions of the republic.

The thought of serving the people of a great State had thrilled him mightily in the old days. It still thrilled him, but it brought with it a longing for Ruth to share it with him.

Thoughts of Ruth this afternoon brought Gary Warden into his mind. And he frowned as a man frowns who watches a pleasant scene turn into tragedy.

Only his collapse as he faced Warden that day in the latter's office had prevented his killing the man. He had left the Dickman cabin lusting for Warden's life. The terrible passion that had surged through his veins during the long ride to Warden's office had been the only force that could have kept him going. It had burned within him like a raging fire, and it had upheld his failing strength until he had sunk beside the desk with his passion unsatisfied.

He had thought much of the incident during the days he had lain in the room at the Willets Hotel, and later, while convalescing at the Circle L. And he had been glad his strength had failed him before he did what he had set out to do. For while there was no doubt in his mind that Warden had been implicated in all the attacks

This story began in The Argosy for March 13.

that had been made upon him, he had no legal proof—except the confession, signed by Link and Givens—that Warden was guilty.

And, now that he had been elected, he intended to keep silent regarding the confession. He hated Warden, but it was with something of the passion a man feels who treads upon a poisonous reptile that attacks him.

He meant to be generous in the moment of victory. Those men — Warden, Perry Haughton, Hatfield, and the officials of the railroad company—had performed according to their lights, using whatever power and influence was at hand to gain their ends. But they had failed. Several bills now pending in the Legislature would effectually curb the powers of those men and others of their kind; and he would see to it that there would never be another opportunity for that sort of practise.

Lawler got up after a time and walked to one of the big windows, where he stood for some minutes looking out. Then he returned to his desk, dropped into the chair, pulled open a deep drawer, and took therefrom a cartridge belt, completely studded with cartridges. Suspended from the belt were two ivory-handled pistols that had seen much service.

They had belonged to his father. Later he had worn them himself—in the days when his character had been in process of development, when he had earned, with them, a reputation which had made him respected throughout the State.

They were, he felt, symbols of an ancient time. The day was coming when men would ride the open range without guns, when the wearing of guns would bring upon a man the distrust and the condemnation of his kind. Law and order would supersede the rule of the gun, and the passions of men would have to be regulated by the statute books.

He had brought the two guns with him upon the impulse of a moment. He would be away from the Circle L for at least two years, and he wanted the guns where he could occasionally look at them. For they brought into his mind a picture of his father as he had seen him, many times, wearing them; and they reminded him of days when he, too, had worn them—days that had a romantic charm all their own.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE UP-STAIRS ROOM.

WHEN Ruth regained the use of her senses she was lying on a bed in a small, evil-smelling room. An oil-lamp burned upon a little stand in one corner. A door—the only one—was closed—locked. She saw the stout, wooden bar in its sturdy side slots.

At first she thought she was alone; and with a hope that made her breathless, she lifted herself, swinging around until her feet were on the floor, intending to leap to the door, open it, and escape.

A sound arrested her, a chuckle, grim and sinister, in a man's voice. She flashed swiftly around to see Slade sitting in a chair near the foot of the bed. He was bending forward, his elbows on his knees, his knuckles supporting his chin, watching her with a wide, amused grin!

For a long, breathless space she looked at him; noting the evil light in his eyes, and the cruel, bestial curve of his lips. She saw how his gaze quickened as he watched her; how he had drawn one foot under him—obviously to be used as leverage for a rapid leap should she try to reach the door.

"It ain't no use, ma'am," he said; "you're here, an' you're goin' to stay for a while."

He got up and walked to the door, placing his back against it and grinning widely as he looked down at her as she yielded to a long shudder of dread.

During the silence that followed Slade's words, Ruth could hear faint sounds from below—the clinking of glasses, the scuffling of feet, a low murmur of voices. She knew, then, that they had brought her to a room above the saloon—to which led the stairs she had seen from below.

She watched Slade fearfully, divining that he meant to attack her. She could see that determination in his eyes and in his manner. He was still grinning, but

now the grin had become set, satyric, hideous. It was a mere smirk. No mirth was behind it—nothing but passion, intense, frightful.

She glanced swiftly around, saw a window beyond the foot of the bed with a ragged shade hanging over it. She knew the Wolf was only two stories in height, and she knew, too, that if she threw herself out of the window she would suffer injury. However, she meant to do it. She got her feet set firmly on the floor, and was about to run toward the window, when Slade leaped at her, seeing the reckless design in her eyes.

She had been moving when Slade leaped, and she evaded the arm he extended and slipped away from him. She heard Slade curse. She was almost at the window when he rushed at her again; and to keep him from grasping her, she dodged, bringing up against the farther wall, while Slade, losing his balance, plunged against the window, crashing against the glass and sending a thousand broken fragments tinkling on the floor of the room and into the darkness outside.

She was alert to the advantage that had suddenly come to her, and she ran lightly to the door and tried to lift the bar. She got one end of it from a socket, but the other stuck. She pulled frantically at it. It finally came loose, with a suddenness that threw her off balance, and she reeled against the bed, almost falling.

She saw Slade coming toward her, a bestial rage in his eyes, and she threw herself again at the door, grasping it and throwing it wide open. She tried to throw herself out of the opening to the stairs that led straight downward into the barroom. But the movement was halted at its inception by Slade's arms, which went around her with the rigidity of iron hoops, quickly constricting.

She got a glimpse of the room below—saw the bar and the men near it—all facing her way, watching her. Then Slade drew her back and closed the door.

He did not bar the door, for she was fighting him, now — fighting him with a strength and fury that bothered him for an instant. His strength, however, was greater than hers, and at last her arms were crushed against her sides with a pressure that almost shut off her breath. Slade's face was close to hers, his lips loose; and his eyes were looking into hers with an expression that terrified her.

She screamed—once—twice—with the full power of her lungs. And then Slade savagely brought a big hand over her mouth and held it there. She fought to escape the clutch, kicking, squirming—trying to bite the hand. But to no avail.

The terrible pressure on her mouth was suffocating her, and the room went dark as she continued to fight. She thought Slade had extinguished the light, and she was conscious of a dull curiosity over how he had done it.

And then sound seemed to cease. She felt nothing, saw nothing, heard nothing. She was conscious only of that terrible pressure over her mouth and nose. And finally she ceased to feel even that.

CHAPTER XL.

"GOVERNOR!"

SHORTY and a dozen Circle L men—among them Blackburn and the three others who had been wounded in the fight with the rustlers on the plains the previous spring—had been waiting long in a gully at a distance of a mile or more from the Hamlin cabin. Shortly after dark they had filed into the gully, having come directly from the Circle L.

Hours before they had got off their horses to stretch their legs and to wait. And now they had grown impatient. It was cold—even in the gulley, where the low moaning, biting wind did not reach them—and they knew they could have no fire.

"Hell!" exclaimed one man intolerantly; "I reckon she's a whizzer!"

"Looks a heap like it," agreed Shorty. "Seems, if Hamlin couldn't get him headed this way—like he said he would—he ought to let us know."

"You reckon Hamlin's runnin' straight, now?" inquired Blackburn.

"Straight as a die!" declared Shorty.

"If you'd been trailin' him like me an' the boys has, you'd know it. Trouble is, that Singleton is holdin' off. A dozen times we've been close enough to ketch Singleton with the goods—if he'd do the brandin'. But he don't, an' Hamlin has to do it—with Singleton watchin'.

"We've framed up on him a dozen times. But he lets Hamlin run the iron on 'em. Hamlin eased that bunch into the gully just ahead, especial for to-night. I helped him drive 'em. An' Hamlin said that to-night he'd refuse to run the iron on 'em—makin' Singleton do it. An' then we'd ketch him doin' it. But I reckon Hamlin's slipped up somewheres."

"It ain't none comfortable here, with that wind whinin' that vicious," complained a cowboy. "An' no fire. Hamlin said ten o'clock, didn't he? It's past eleven."

"It's off, I reckon," said Shorty. "Let's fan it to Hamlin's shack an' say somethin' to him."

Instantly the outfit was on the move. With Shorty leading, they swept out of the gully to the level and rode northward.

When they came in sight of the Hamlin cabin there was no light within, and the men sat for a time on their horses, waiting and listening. Then, when it seemed certain there was no one stirring, Shorty glanced at the horse corral.

Instantly he whispered to the other men:

"Somethin's wrong, boys. Hamlin's horse is gone, an' Ruth's pony!"

He dismounted and burst into the cabin, looking into the two bedrooms. He came out again, scratching his head in puzzlement.

"I don't seem to sabe this here thing, boys. I know Ruth Hamlin ain't in the habit of wanderin' off alone at this time of the night. An' Hamlin was tellin' me that he sure was goin' with Singleton. It's a heap mysterious, an' I've got a hunch things ain't just what they ought to be!"

He turned toward the plain that stretched toward Willets. Far out—a mere dot in his vision—he detected movement. He straightened, his face paled.

"Somebody's out there, headin' for town. I'm takin' a look—the boss would want me to, an' I ain't overlookin' anything that 'll do him any good!"

He leaped upon his horse, and the entire company plunged into the cold moonlight that flooded the plains between the cabin and Willets.

The ivory-handled pistols were still on Lawler's desk when his secretary softly opened a door and entered. The secretary smiled slightly at sight of the weapons, but he said no word as he advanced to the desk and placed a telegram before Lawler.

He stood, waiting respectfully, as Lawler read the telegram. It was from Moreton:

GOVERNOR LAWLER:

There's something mighty wrong going on in Willets. Slade and his gang struck town this morning. He was with Warden all day in the Wolf. Don't depend on the new sheriff.

Lawler got up, his face paling. He ordered the secretary to arrange for a special train, and after the man went out he stood for several minutes, looking down at the pistols on the desk.

At this minute he was conscious of one thing only—that Slade was in Willets. Slade, who had led the outlaw gang that had killed his men—Slade, whose face haunted Blackburn's dreams—the man the Circle L outfit held responsible for the massacre that day on the plains above the big valley.

Lurking in the metal cylinders of the two weapons on the desk was that death which Warden, Singleton, Slade, and the others deserved at his hands. He took up the pistols, nestling their sinister shapes in his palms, while his blood rioted with the terrible lust that now seized him—the old urge to do violence, the primal instinct to slay, to which he had yielded when Shorty told him of what Blondy Antrim had done.

Another minute passed while he fondled the weapons. Twice he moved as though to buckle the cartridge-belt around his waist—shoving aside the black coat he wore, which would have hidden them. But each time he changed his mind.

He knew that if he wore them he would use them. The driving intensity of his desire to kill Warden, Singleton, and Slade

would overwhelm him if he should find they had harmed Ruth. The deadly passion that held him in a mighty clutch would take no account of his position, of his duty to the State, or of the oath he had taken to obey and administer the laws.

While he silently fought the lust that filled his heart, the secretary came in. He started, and then stood rigid, watching Lawler, seeming to divine something of the struggle that was going on before his eyes. He saw how Lawler's muscles had tensed, how his chin had gone forward with a vicious thrust — noted the awful indecision that had seized the man.

As the secretary watched, he realized that Lawler was on the verge of surrendering to the passions he was fighting—for Lawler had again taken up the cartridge-belt and was opening his coat to buckle the belt around him.

"*Governor!*"

It was the secretary's voice. It was low, conveying the respect that the man always used in addressing Lawler. But the sound startled Lawler like the explosion of a bomb in the room. He flashed around, saw the secretary—looked steadily at him for an instant, and then dropped the belt and tossed the pistols into the drawer.

"Governor," said the secretary, "your train is ready."

The secretary stood within three yards of Lawler, and before he could turn to go out, Lawler had reached him. He seized both the man's hands, gripped them tightly, and said, hoarsely:

"Thank you, Williams!"

Then he released the secretary's hands and plunged out through the door, while the secretary, smiling wisely, walked to the desk, and, picking up the cartridge-belt, dropped it into the drawer with the pistols.

CHAPTER XLI.

TO A FINISH.

THE Wolf Saloon was in a big frame building that stood at a little distance back from the street, with a wide, open space on each side of it. Lights were flickering from some of the up-stairs windows of the building when Shorty and the other Circle L men reached town.

Shorty and his men had ridden hard, and they had seen a horse and rider halt in front of the building while they were yet a mile or so out on the plains. And when Shorty's horse struck the edge of town, Shorty headed him straight for the Wolf, veering when he reached it and passing to the open space from which ran an outside stairway.

The other men followed Shorty's example, and they were close at his heels when he slipped off his horse and ran around to the front of the Wolf.

Warden had come out shortly before; he was now in his office farther down the street, congratulating himself upon the outcome of the incident in the saloon. He had struck a damaging blow at Lawler.

Several other men had emerged from the saloon. When Shorty reached the front door four men were just emerging, carrying another. Suspicious, alert, Shorty halted the men and peered closely at the face of the man they were carrying.

"It's Joe Hamlin!" he said as he recognized the other's face.

Shorty's eyes were glowing with rage. "What's happened?" he demanded.

"Rukus," shortly replied one. "Hamlin, here, tried to draw on Slade, an' Slade—"

"Slade!"

Shorty almost screamed the words. He straightened, his face grew convulsed. Pausing on the verge of violent action, he heard Hamlin's voice:

"Shorty!"

Shorty leaned over. Straining, his muscles working, his eyes blazing, Shorty heard low words issuing from Hamlin's lips:

"Slade done it, Shorty. An' he's got Ruth—took her up-stairs. Shorty—save her—for God's sake!"

Shorty straightened. "Take this man to the doctor—he's hit bad!" The words were flung at the four men, and Shorty was on the move before he finished.

Blackburn and the others were close behind him when he burst into the front door of the saloon.

The saloon occupied the entire lower floor. A bar ran the length of the room from front to rear. In the center of the room was a roulette wheel; near it was a faro table; and scattered in various places were other tables. Some oil-lamps in clusters provided light for the card and gambling tables; and behind the bar were several bracket lamps.

There were perhaps a score of men in the room when Shorty and the Circle L men burst in. Shorty had come to a halt in the glare of one of the big clusters of lights, and his friends had halted near him.

The giant made a picture that brought an awed hush over the place. He stood in the glaring light, a gun in each hand, the muscles of his face and neck standing out like whipcords; his legs asprawl, his eyes blazing with awful rage as they roved around the room, scanning the faces of every man there. The other Circle L men had drawn their weapons, too.

But Shorty dominated. It was upon him that all eyes turned; it was upon his crimson, rage-lined face that every man looked. He was a figure of gigantic proportions—a mighty man in the grip of the blood lust.

"You guys stand! Every damned one of you! Don't move a finger or bat an eyelash! I've come a killin'!" he said in a low, tense voice, the words coming with a snap, jerkily, like the separate and distinct lashes of a whip.

Not a man in the room moved, nor did their fascinated eyes waver for an instant from Shorty's face.

"Where's Slade?"

He shot the words at them. He saw their eyes waver for an instant from his as they looked toward the stairs in the rear—the stairs that Ruth Hamlin had seen when for an instant, after throwing the door of the room open, she had glanced down to see the room full of men, all looking at her.

The concentrated gazing of the men at the stairs told Shorty what he wanted to know. He spoke to Blackburn, throwing the words back over his shoulder:

"Hold 'em right where they are—damn 'em!"

Then with a few gigantic bounds he was at the foot of the stairs. In a few more he had gained the top, where he pressed his huge shoulder against the door. It gave a little—enough further to enrage the giant. He drew back a little and literally hurled himself against it.

It burst open, Shorty keeping his feet as the wreck fell away from him. And he saw Slade, with a hand over Ruth's mouth, standing near the foot of the bed.

Evidently Slade had been about to release Ruth when he heard the door crashing behind him; for at the instant Shorty emerged from the wreck he saw that the girl's body was already falling—toward the bed—as Slade drew away from her and reached for his guns.

They came out—both of them—streaking fire and smoke. But they never came to the deadly level to which Slade sought to throw them; for Shorty's guns were crashing at Slade's first movement, and the bullets from the outlaw's weapons thudded into the board floor harmlessly.

Slade lurched forward—almost to Shorty's side—his guns loosening in his hands and falling, one after the other, to the floor. He grinned, with hideous satire, into Shorty's face as he tried, vainly, to steady himself.

"You've got me—damn you!" he said, with horrible pauses. He lurched again, still grinning satirically; and slumped to the floor, where he turned slowly over on his back and lay still.

Shorty glanced at Ruth, who was huddled on the bed; then he wheeled, and leaped for the stairs.

Before he reached the bottom, Ruth sat up and stared dazedly about. She had heard the crashing of the pistols, though the reports had seemed to come from a great distance—faintly, dully. But when she reeled to her feet and saw Slade lying on the floor, his upturned face ghastly in the feeble light from the oil-lamp, she knew that some one had saved her, and she yielded, momentarily, to a great joy that weakened her so that she had to sit on the edge of the bed to steady herself.

It was not for long; and presently she got up and swayed to the door at the top

of the stairs, holding onto the jamb while she looked downward.

In the big room were many men. She saw Shorty standing near other men—whom she recognized as Circle L cowboys. Shorty's guns were out; in fact, the men in the group near Shorty seemed to bristle with weapons.

Near the rear of the room was another group of men. They stood motionless, silent, and had no weapons in their hands. But some of them were crouching, their faces grim and set.

And then Ruth heard Shorty's voice—hoarse, leaping with passion:

"You guys that don't belong to Slade's gang, get out! Fan it! You Slade men stand! I know every damned one of you!"

There was a short silence, during which several men slipped away from the group at the rear of the room and bolted for the rear door. And then, suddenly, as Shorty muttered words that Ruth did not hear, both groups of men leaped into action.

Ruth saw the men in the group at the rear reach, concertedly, for their weapons; she saw smoke streaks stabbing the heavy atmosphere of the big room; heard the roar and crash of pistols; saw men falling, to land in grotesque positions; saw Shorty, huge and terrible amid the billowing smoke, shoot a man who tried to leap over the bar, so that he fell across it limply, as though sleeping.

She observed another man—one of Slade's—dodge behind a card table, rest his pistol for an instant on its top, and shoot at Shorty. She saw Shorty snap a shot at the man, saw the man's head wabble as he sank behind the table.

And then she was suddenly aware that it was ended. A ghastly silence fell. Through the heavy smoke she saw Shorty, standing where he had stood all along—near the cluster of lights just inside the front door. It seemed to her that the room was full of motionless figures of men, strewing the floor.

She was sick and weak, but she knew she must get out into the air or she would faint; and so she began to descend the stairs, holding to the slender railing for support.

She got down without any one seeing her. No one seemed to pay any attention to her. As she reached a side door—opening into the space from which the outside stairs ran—she looked back, to see Shorty and a number of Circle L men clustered around Blackburn—who was sitting in a chair, looking very white.

She got out into the open and ran toward the street, hardly knowing what she intended to do. Whatever happened, she did not want to stay longer in the Wolf. She had a feeling that if she could find Moreton she would be safe until Shorty and the other Circle L men completed the grim work upon which they were engaged.

For she knew that the Circle L men had sworn to square their account with the outlaws—and, knowing the circumstances of the fight on the plains the previous spring, she could not blame them for what they had done.

And yet she wanted to get away from the scene—anywhere.

She halted in front of the Wolf, and saw a number of men on the street—and others running toward the building. She moved down the street toward the station, and as she passed a group of men she saw a man running toward her, shouting loudly:

"Lawler's here! What in hell is comin' off? Lawler just got off a special train! He looks like he looked that day he rode into town lookin' for Gary Warden!"

Far down the street Ruth saw him coming. He was running, and she leaped to meet him, unaware that Shorty and the other Circle L men had emerged from the front door of the Wolf and were listening to the man who had brought the news of Lawler's arrival.

She was aware of nothing but the fact that Lawler was coming. And when, running toward him, she saw him stop dead short, she cried aloud in an excess of joy:

"Oh, Kane—Kane!"

And then his big arms went around her, and she nestled close to him, shuddering, sobbing, laughing.

She had told him—as coherently as possible—the story of the night's adventure, by the time Shorty and the others came up. She and Lawler were standing in front

of a store, in a glare of light that came out through a big window; and she saw his lips straighten when she told him what Slade had done.

"Shorty," he said, grimly, "take care of her."

And then, despite her struggles—for she knew that he was going to seek Warden—she found herself a captive in the giant's arms, while Lawler went down the street toward Warden's office.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE LAST ACCOUNTING.

WITHIN fifteen minutes after he had left Ruth Hamlin with Slade in the Wolf, Warden had sent a telegram to Lawler, at the capital, informing him that the girl might be found at the brothel with the outlaw. He had signed no name to the telegram, but that did not lessen the venomous satisfaction he felt over sending it.

It had been nearly eleven o'clock when Warden sent the wire, and, allowing for some minutes of waste time before the message could be delivered, and the space of time that must elapse before Lawler could reach Willets—even if he came on a special train—he knew that Lawler could not arrive before the early hours of the morning.

Lawler, Warden knew, would be in a killing mood when he reached Willets. And he knew, also, that Slade would kill Lawler on sight.

Slade would have to kill Lawler, for Lawler, as Governor, had the power to be revenged upon the outlaw for the abduction of Ruth; and Slade would know that Lawler would use that power to the limit. If Slade killed Lawler, that would be another matter. The outlaw would have to hide to evade the clutches of the law. But hiding was not more than Slade had been accustomed to for years, and that necessity would work no hardship upon him.

That was Warden's reasoning. Perhaps it was faulty, for it hinged upon the vagaries of a wanton character who could not be depended upon. But Warden had to take that chance.

And Warden's reasoning, of late, had been influenced by his passionate hatred of Lawler. That hatred had warped his judgment until he had become a creature guided by the savage impulses that filled his brain.

When he left Slade and Ruth in the Wolf, he went directly to his office, taking Singleton with him. He lit a kerosene lamp, built a fire in the small stove that stood in a corner; seated himself in a chair, motioned Singleton to another, lit a cigar, and smoked—his eyes gleaming with the vindictive joy he felt.

However, the cigar in his mouth was not half smoked, when from a distance, on the steady west wind, was borne to his ears the faint, wailing shriek of a locomotive whistle.

The cigar drooped from his lips, and he looked swiftly at Singleton. Singleton had heard the sound, too, for his eyes had narrowed and his attitude had become strained and tense.

That both men had the same thought was evidenced by the glance they exchanged—incipient apprehension.

"It's a freight, likely," muttered Singleton.

Warden took a nervous puff at his cigar. Then he got up, walked to a window, and stood, looking out into the night. He stood there for a few minutes, Singleton watching him—until the whistle shrieked again and a muffled roar reached their ears. Then Warden turned, his face ashen.

"Singleton, it's a special!" he said, jerkily; "an engine and one car!"

Singleton got up and walked to the window, beside Warden. As they stood there they saw the train stop at the station. They saw, in the dim light from the coach, the figure of a tall man alight and dart across the platform, to vanish in the shadow of the station. Simultaneously, there came to their ears the staccato reports of pistols, the sounds rendered faint and muffled by distance.

Singleton flashed around, his face pale and his eyes bulging.

"It's Lawler! I'd know him among a million! An' somethin's happened at the Wolf. That's where the shootin' is! War-

den," he said, nervously, "it looks like there's goin' to be hell to pay!"

Warden's face was ashen, but he laughed.

"Don't worry, Singleton; Slade will take care of Lawler," he said. But the words carried no conviction with them—they had been uttered without expression.

Warden walked to the door and gazed down the dimly lighted stairway. There was suppressed excitement in his manner, nervous anxiety in his eyes. He walked back into the room, threw his cigar into a cuspidor, and stood with his back to the stove, listening.

Singleton said nothing, though his lips had settled into a pout and his eyes had a sullen, malignant expression. He, too, was wishing—what Warden was wishing—that Slade would kill Lawler. The death of Lawler would make the future safe for both of them; it would remove a menace to their lives and a barrier to their schemes.

But they doubted. Deep in their hearts lurked a fear that something had gone wrong—which thought was suggested by the sounds of the shooting they had heard.

Singleton had become afflicted with the nervousness that had seized Warden. The pout on his lips grew; he cast startled, inquiring glances toward the door. And at last, as they stood silent, looking at each other, there came a sound—close; the sound of a man running in the street.

As they listened the sound came closer, reached the front of the building. Then they heard it on the stairs.

Warden stiffened, and Singleton drew his gun. An instant later the door crashed inward, and Lawler stood in the opening, his eyes flaming with the cold wrath that had been in them on the day when, after he had killed Antrim, he had come to Warden's office for a like purpose.

There was no word spoken. Lawler saw the gun in Singleton's hand. He leaped quickly to one side as Singleton pulled the trigger — the smoke streak touching his clothing as he moved. He leaped again as Singleton shot at him a second time. This time he was so close to Singleton that the powder burned his face.

And before Singleton could shoot again Lawler struck—with the precision and force that he had put into his blows that day in the schoolhouse.

Singleton reeled headlong across the room, bringing up against the farther wall, striking it with his head and tumbling to the floor beside it.

Then, his lips set stiffly, his eyes flaming with a fire that brought terror into Warden's heart, he faced the other.

"Now, damn you; I'll teach you to make war on women!" He leaped forward, striking at Warden with terrific energy.

Still struggling in Shorty's arms, Ruth heard Singleton's shots. She broke away from Shorty, noting with dull astonishment that Shorty seemed almost to have permitted it, and ran down the street toward Warden's office. As she ran she heard a tumult behind her, and steps close beside her.

She glanced swiftly over her shoulder, to see Shorty. The giant was taking steps that dwarfed hers, and while she looked at him he drew past her. She heard him muttering as he passed—caught his words:

"Lawler ain't got no gun—I seen that!"

She ran faster than ever at that, and when Shorty reached the foot of the stairs leading to Warden's office she was at his heels.

There were other men behind her—a multitude. She felt them pressing close behind her as she ran up the stairs. But she did not look back, for she heard sounds of a conflict in Warden's office—the thud and jar of blows, the crashing of furniture overturned and smashed; the scuffling of feet on the floors—and screams of rage—in Warden's voice.

When she reached the top of the stairs and looked into the room between Shorty's shoulder and the door jamb, she screamed with apprehension. For she saw Singleton, with blood dripping from a huge gash in his cheek, in the act of picking up a pistol that, evidently, had fallen on the floor during the fight that must have raged in the room.

Singleton's face was hideous with rage. It was evident that he did not see Shorty and herself at the door—and that he had not heard the tramping of the many feet on the stairs. He was apparently oblivious to

everything but the fact that the pistol was there and that he had a chance to use it.

Ruth saw Warden and Lawler fighting in a corner. Warden's back was against the wall, near the stove. He was facing the door. His lips were macerated, drooling blood, his eyes were puffed and blackened, and he was screaming and cursing insanely.

As Ruth watched, her gaze taking in the wreck of the room—and Singleton picking up the pistol—she saw Lawler strike Warden—a full, sweeping blow that sent forth a sodden, deadening sound as it landed.

Warden sagged, his eyes closing as he slid to the floor and sat, in the corner, his legs doubled under him, his chin on his chest.

The scene had held only for an instant—merely while Ruth screamed. The sound had hardly died away when Singleton succeeded in grasping the pistol. Ruth tried to squeeze past Shorty, to prevent the tragedy that seemed imminent. But Shorty's quick, flashing motion checked her—made interference by her unnecessary.

There was a glitter at Shorty's side, and the crash of the pistol rocked the air in the room and the hallway.

Singleton straightened, turned slowly, looked full at Shorty. Then, without uttering a sound he pitched forward, almost at Lawler's feet.

The roar of the pistol brought Lawler around so that he faced the door. He saw Shorty and Ruth and the others behind them, but gave no sign. His rage had left him; he seemed cold, deliberate. The only sign of passion about him was in his eyes. They were narrowed, and pin points of fire appeared to flame in them.

As though there were no witnesses to what he was doing, he stooped, lifted Warden, and threw him over his shoulder. The crowd gave way before him as he started for the stairs—even Ruth and Shorty stepping aside to let him pass. They watched him wonderingly as he carried his burden down the stairs and out into the street. And then as he walked they followed him.

He went straight across the street, past some low buildings, and over a vacant stretch between the buildings and the station. The crowd followed him—Ruth and Shorty closely, silently watching.

The special train in which he had come was still standing beside the station platform, the engine panting as though from its long run eastward. Ruth noted that the train crew was on the platform near the engine, interestedly watching the approach of Lawler carrying his burden.

Lawler walked to the rear end of the coach and threw Warden bodily upon it. Then he turned and motioned toward the conductor. The latter approached warily, seemingly doubtful of what might be in store for him from a man — a governor — who thus carried the body of a man on his shoulder. But he listened respectfully when he observed the clear sanity of Lawler's eyes.

"This man is leaving Willets—immediately!" said Lawler. "He's going east, to the end of this line—at my expense. When he regains consciousness you will tell him what I have said."

"It's Warden, ain't it?" grinned the conductor. "Well, I'll be glad to take him. But I'll have to wire for orders."

He strode to the telegrapher's window. There was a short wait; and during the interval Warden stirred and sat up, swaying from side to side and staring about him in bewilderment Lawler stepped forward, leaned over the platform.

"Warden," he said; "you are going east. You are not coming back. If you ever set foot into this state again I will send you to prison for a term that will make you wish you were dead. I have a signed confession from Link and Givens that convicts you of a crime for which this state provides an adequate penalty. Do you understand?"

Warden nodded, wearily, and dropped his chin to his chest. After an interval, during which the crowd watched him intently, he staggered to his feet and reeled into the coach, and the crowd saw him no more. An instant later the conductor went toward the coach, grinning, signaling the engineer.

A low cheer rose from the crowd as the train started, and a man far back toward the station shouted, loudly:

"If they hadn't been in such a damned hurry, we'd have raised a collection to send him to hell!"

A little later Lawler and Ruth and Shorty

formed the van of the crowd that walked down the street toward the Wolf—where the Circle L men had left their horses. Ruth walked between Lawler and Shorty. She was very pale, and her lips were quivering. In front of the Willet's Hotel—in the flood of light that came through the windows, she clutched at Lawler's sleeve:

"Hurry, Kane!" she begged. "They have killed daddy!"

"Don't you believe it, Miss Ruth," said Shorty, softly, into her ear. "When I left Joe Hamlin he was a whole lot alive—an' gettin' more alive right along. I left Andy Miller with him—an' Andy's got more sabe of medicine than any doctor in these parts!"

"Shorty!" she breathed, springing around in front of him and catching him by the shoulders—standing on tip-toe to do it. "*Shorty*, you don't mean it?"

Shorty laughed lowly. "I'm reckonin' to mean it, Miss Ruth."

"But how," she questioned, her hands still on his shoulders, her eyes wide and questioning—"how did you happen to go to the Wolf?"

"Well, you see, Miss Ruth," laughed the giant—while the crowd which had followed them stood off at a little distance and watched, "it was like this: Me an' the boys—an' your dad—had been tryin' for a long time to ketch Singleton runnin' an iron on the Circle L cattle. Your dad an' me had run a bunch into that gully near the Two Bar, an' to-night me an' the boys was waitin' in the gully for your dad to bring Singleton there. Your dad had been brandin' stolen stock—at my orders—an' to-night he was goin' to refuse—makin' Singleton do it. For Singleton was really doin' the rustlin'. An' your dad—"

"Was doing it all for you? Is that what you mean, Shorty?"

"Why, I reckon, Miss Ruth. You see—"

Ruth had to leap upward to do it. But somehow the height was achieved. Two arms went around Shorty's neck, and Ruth's lips were pressed against his with a resounding smack.

"Oh, Shorty!" she exclaimed as she hugged him tightly, after kissing him; "I just *love* you!"

Shorty blushed furiously. As soon as Ruth released him he grinned with embarrassment and walked with giant strides down the street to where he and his men had left the horses, the laughter and gibes of his fellows following him.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE GOLDEN FUTURE.

AS upon another day that was vivid in his memory, Governor Lawler sat at his desk in his office in the capitol building. A big, keen-eyed man of imposing appearance was sitting at a little distance from Lawler, watching him. The big man was talking, but the governor seemed to be looking past him at the bare trees that dotted the spacious grounds around the building.

His gaze seemed to follow the low stone fence with its massive posts that seemed to hint of the majesty of the government Lawler served; it appeared that he was studying the bleak landscape, and that he was not at all interested in what the big man was saying.

But Lawler was not interested in the landscape. For many minutes, while listening to the big man—and answering him occasionally—he had been watching for a trim little figure that he knew would presently appear on one of the white walks leading to the great, wide steps that led to the entrance to the building.

For he had heard the long-drawn plaint of a locomotive whistle some minutes before; he had seen the train itself come gliding over the level plains that stretched eastward from the capitol; and he knew that Ruth would be on the train.

"The proposed bill is iniquitous," said the big man. "It is more than that, Governor Lawler; it is discrimination without justification. We really have made unusual efforts to provide cars for the shipment of cattle. The bill you propose will conflict directly with the regulations of Federal Interstate Commerce. It will be unconstitutional."

"We'll risk it," smiled Lawler. "The attorney-general is certain of the constitutionality of the bill."

"We'll never obey its provisions!" declared the big man, with some warmth.

Lawler looked at the other with a level gaze. "This is a cattle-raising state," he said. "The interests of the state's citizens are sacred to me. I intend to safeguard them. You run your railroad, and I will run the state. Previous railroad commissioners have permitted the railroad companies to do largely as they pleased. We are going to have some regulation—regulation that will regulate."

"The proposed bill may seem drastic to you," he added, as he leaned forward the better to look out of the window he had looked out before—to see that the trim little figure he had expected was now coming up one of the white walks; "but if you fight it, we shall introduce others. The people of this state are pretty well worked up, and are demanding legislation that will curb the power of the railroads—that will make impossible a situation such as existed under the régime of my predecessor. What would you say to a law that would compel you to construct grade crossings at every street intersection along your right of way in every city and town in the state through which your railroad passes?"

The big man's color fled; he stared at Lawler.

"Also," went on Lawler; "there is an insistent demand for electrification of railroads, especially from city governments. Then, too, there is some agitation regarding rates—both freight and passenger. But I want to be fair—to go at these improvements gradually. Still, if your company insists on fighting the bill which is now pending—" He paused and looked at the big man.

The latter got up, smiling faintly.

"All right, governor; we'll be good. I never really favored that deal—which almost set the state afire—and made you governor. But my directors—"

"They'll be sensible, now, I hope."

The big man grimaced. "They'll have to be sensible." He extended a hand, and Lawler took it.

The big man went out. As the door closed behind him Lawler got up and walked to it, standing there, expectantly. The door slowly opened, and Ruth stood in the opening.

It was her first visit to the office, and the atmosphere of solemn dignity almost awed her.

After a little, when she had seated herself in the governor's chair, from where she looked gayly at the big, smiling man who watched her, she got up, and Lawler led her to one of the great windows.

"Father is much better, Kane," she said. "In another week he will be able to ride. Your mother sent you her love, and Shorty told me to tell you to take care of yourself. Kane, Shorty actually loves you!"

"Shorty is a man, Ruth."

"Oh, he is wonderful!" And, then, with a direct look at him, she added:

"Della Wharton has gone East, Kane."

Lawler's eyes narrowed; he was silent.

Ruth's voice was tremulous with happiness as she stood close to the man she had come to marry on the morrow, in the big house which was awaiting both of them—the governor's mansion. "Kane," she said, "I used to dream of this day—to-morrow, I mean; but I never thought it would be like this—so terribly, solemnly happy."

Lawler drew her closer to him—and nearer the window. "I wonder if you know how lonesome I used to feel as I sat at my desk, there, trying to look out over that great waste of world, stretching between us?"

"I know," she said, lowly; "I used to feel the same way. There was a time—right after you went away to begin your campaign—when it almost seemed to me that you had gone to the farthest limits of the earth."

"And now?" he asked, smiling. And when she did not answer, he added: "The world seems to have become very small."

"It is a wonderful world, Kane," she said, solemnly.

For a time both were silent, gazing out of the window. In the foreground were the bare trees of the capitol grounds; the white, curving walks, the low, stone fence with its massive posts; the broad streets of the city animated by traffic; the roofs of buildings.

But straight down a street that intersected the broad thoroughfares, skirting the

capitol grounds on the east, they could look beyond the limits of the city at the mighty, level country that stretched into the yawning gulf of distance — toward Willets; straight to the section of world which had been the scene of the conflict that had tried them sorely.

It was a bleak picture; the plains dead and drear, barren of verdure—a dull, drab expanse of waste world with no life or movement in it, stretching below gray, cold clouds.

But while they watched a rift appeared in the clouds. It grew, expanded, and a shaft of sunlight streamed down, lighting the plains brilliantly.

(The End.)

Loaned for Protection

by Vlasta A. Hungerford

MRS. REDFIELD looked on, while the man led the horses out of the barn, tied them to the back of the buggy he had come in, and slowly drove away.

Regret crept into her eyes. She had helped raise the two mares from colthood, had petted and babied them until her attachment was genuine.

And now they belonged to a stranger. She looked down at the crisp roll of bills in her hand. Carefully she counted it over again. Two hundred and fifty dollars.

It was a large sum of money for her to take care of, and she suddenly wished her husband was at home.

Her anxious eyes strayed down the lonely country road, after the disappearing stranger. She hadn't liked him. He looked like a mean, brutal sort of man. She hoped he wouldn't ill-treat Nelly and Fan—they were such good, willing horses.

As she started thoughtfully toward the farmhouse, the sharp click of the front gate arrested her attention. Coming up the graveled path was old Abe, the peddler, his huge pack forming a grotesque hump on his stooped shoulders, his golden collie stalking sedately at his side.

Mrs. Redfield smiled welcomingly.

"Hello, Uncle Abe," she called out. "I didn't expect you so early this summer."

He grunted some reply, while the dog leaped forward and, with smiling eyes and laughing mouth, fawned upon her. She patted the tawny head with her right hand, her left clutching the bills.

The old peddler had put down his heavy load, and was now staring in open amazement at sight of so much money.

Mrs. Redfield explained. "Mr. Redfield sold Nellie and Fan last week, and the man just came for them. It's hard to part with horses you've raised yourself, even when you get a good price for them." She thrust the bills into the front of her dress.

"Ain't Mr. Redfield home?" asked the peddler gruffly.

She shook her head. "He's serving on the jury in that murder case—at Milton."

"I've heard about it." The old man nodded his head slowly, as he unfastened the buckles and straps of the bulging pack and began laying the shallow trays, containing his stock of notions and cheap jewelry upon the grass.

"Now, see here, Uncle Abe," she said good-naturedly, "we're going to have a bite of lunch first."

A quick gleam of satisfaction lit his leathery face, and he grinned sheepishly.

For fifteen years he had received that same invitation when he came around on his semi-annual trips. In the cool of the fall he was invited into the warm kitchen and thoroughly fed. In summer he partook of his repast out on the porch.

"You sit right down in that rocker and rest while I get you something," said Mrs. Redfield.

With a deep sigh of satisfaction the old man complied, while she disappeared into the house, followed by the expectant eyes of the collie. The dog knew he would come in for his share of something to eat, and kept his intelligent gaze fastened alertly on the screen door, waiting for her to reappear.

When she came out again he got to his feet, his plumelike tail waving airily, his ears pricked forward.

"Shame on you for a beggar, Bruno!" rebuked his master sharply. "*Down!*"

With a little whine, the dog dropped his tail and slunk apologetically to the peddler's side, his eyes plainly asking wherein he had displeased.

"Oh, don't scold him," said Mrs. Redfield. "I always feed him, and he has a right to expect it. Come here, Bruno!"

The dog started up, then looked for permission.

"Go ahead," said the peddler, with a wave of the hand. "If she wants to spoil you, I can't help it."

The collie hastened toward her and the meaty bone she was offering. With daintily lifted lips, he took it into his fine, white teeth and, picking himself out a patch of green grass, sat down to eat it.

"Here's some fried chicken left from dinner, and a piece of apple pie, and some bread and butter and milk."

She spread the food upon the small porch-table at his elbow. The old man's eyes lit greedily at the sight.

"While you eat I'll just pick out what I want," she said, going down the steps toward the stock of goods spread out on the grass. His narrowed eyes followed her speculatively.

"When will Mr. Redfield be home?" he asked suddenly between mouthfuls of food.

"Not before to-night." She went on: "I want a dozen spools of this thread and some of these pins and needles. And how much is this toweling a yard now, Uncle Abe?"

"Twenty cents," he replied in an indifferent voice.

"I'll want about five yards of that," she said, fingering the cloth. "It makes such good dish-towels."

The peddler continued munching his food in silence. The collie, finished with his bone, came over to her and laid his head in her lap to be petted. She stroked the silky ears gently, and ran her fingers through the thick ruff on his neck.

"You're a nice dog," she told him approvingly. "How old is he now, Uncle Abe?"

"Four year. I've had him two."

"I guess nobody bothers you since you have *him* along," she said.

The peddler snorted. "They better not!"

Two years before, on a lonely bit of road, he had been set upon, cruelly beaten and robbed. He had got the collie soon afterward, and the dog had accompanied him ever since, evidently ample protection against a repetition of the outrage.

He wiped his mouth on the back of one powerful, hairy hand, and looked at Mrs. Redfield keenly.

"Maybe Mr. Redfield not come home to-night. Ain't you afraid with all them money?"

Mrs. Redfield shook her head emphatically. "But Mr. Redfield will be home, all right. There is small chance that he won't."

"Anybody know you got it here?" persisted the old man.

"Nobody but the man who brought it,

and our neighbor, Clay Hershel. He came to borrow the ax while the man was getting the horses."

For a time the peddler sat wrapped in silent thought.

"Well, I must go," he said finally, getting up. "You say you want five yards of the toweling?"

"Yes," she replied, "and these things," pointing to the little pile of notions she had set aside, and covering it with a five-dollar bill.

His eyes lit hungrily at the sight of the money and he began to undo the oilcloth roll in which he kept his embroideries.

"You want some of these?" he asked in a wheedling tone, displaying a stock of Mexican drawn-work and Assyrian laces.

Mrs. Redfield frowned. "Uncle Abe, you know I never buy such things. No, this is all I want, besides the toweling."

Silently he measured off the five yards, and then gave her back her change out of the five-dollar bill.

"How is business this summer?" she asked, gathering up her purchases.

"Very bad," he replied gloomily. "Nobody buy. Fifteen year I come, summer and fall, and they know I come. But they buy from town."

"Well, that's too bad," she said consolingly. "I hope you don't carry your money around with you any more."

He shrugged his bulky shoulders, spreading out his big hands, palms upward.

"Yah," he said expressively. "I got no money these day. Two year ago they beat and rob me — seven hundred dollar they take from me. Old Abe got no money now."

Mrs. Redfield looked duly sympathetic. "But you know Mr. Redfield and I always told you not to carry your money around with you, Uncle Abe. Don't do it again, no matter how *little* you have. Banks are the only safe place to keep money."

He had been dexterously putting away his goods, and now had the pack ready, strapped and buckled. He straightened from his task, and looked at her sharply.

"Suppose Mr. Redfield don't come to-night. All them money—ain't you afraid?"

She smiled at his apparent anxiety. "Nobody knows I have it. No, I'm not afraid."

For a long moment he stood, evidently cogitating with himself, then he spoke again:

"I go now up the side road. To-right I come by. If Mr. Redfield not here, I leave Bruno. Bruno good watch-dog. He keep away thief. Eh, Bruno?"

The dog had pricked up his ears at the mention of his name, and now walked to his master's side, looking up keenly, trying to understand.

"That would be nice!" exclaimed Mrs. Redfield. "I wouldn't be a bit afraid with Bruno. Are you sure it wouldn't put you out, Uncle Abe?"

He shook his head bruskly.

"Shake hands with the lady, and say thank you for the lunch," he ordered sharply.

The collie advanced, and, sitting down before her, offered his paw, emitting two short, sharp barks—a trick his master had taught him.

"Good-by, and don't mention it," said Mrs. Redfield gravely, accepting the peddler's thanks, thus cleverly given through the dog. "And come again!"

Without further words, the old man shouldered his heavy burden, and, escorted by the collie, staggered off down toward the gate.

She watched them until they got well out in the road, and Uncle Abe began kicking up his customary trail of dust, as he plodded on his way. Then she entered the house and began to busy herself with her household tasks, and for the time forgot all about the money.

As evening drew near, however, she began to get uneasy. Her husband had not yet come.

For some reason, certain sinister poses of the old peddler kept coming up in her mind. She dismissed them each time as absurd. Old Uncle Abe, although uncouth and villainous enough looking in his way, was withal honest and trustworthy. In all the fifteen years she had known him, never had there been a word said against him. The fact that he had offered her the collie for protection seemed proof enough of his sincerity.

Then it suddenly occurred to her that

Bruno would be small protection against *his own master.*

She became very thoughtful and a little provoked at herself. She needn't have told old Abe that Jake was away and that there was any likelihood of him not getting home that night.

She strove hard to put out of her mind the look of avarice and greed with which the old peddler had regarded the roll of money.

When, just before dark, there came a soft knock upon the kitchen door, she nearly dropped the dish she was wiping.

With nervous hesitation she opened the door. It was Clay Hershel, returning the borrowed ax.

"Goodness, how you scared me!" she exclaimed half crossly. "Just lay it there by the door-step."

She had never liked Clay Hershel.

He set the ax down and stood looking at her. "I went to town this afternoon," he said. "And they sent word by me to tell you that the jury can't agree, and Jake won't be home to-night."

Mrs. Redfield gasped a little, and an apprehensive look came into her face.

Clay Hershel readily interpreted her anxiety.

"It might be dangerous for you to be here alone, with all that cash," he said solicitously. "Ain't you afraid?"

"Well, to tell the truth, I am—a little," she admitted. "But of course it's foolish of me. Nobody knows I have the money except"—she hesitated, in spite of herself—"except old Abe, the peddler."

Clay Hershel shook his head doubtfully. "I wouldn't trust old Abe," he said. "I've heard some bad things about him. Has he any idea that Jake isn't coming home to-night?"

"Yes," she admitted reluctantly, "I believe I did mention that Jake *might* not get home."

She kept to herself the offer of Bruno for protection, realizing now how foolish it would sound to Clay Hershel.

"You have no way to protect yourself—no *gun?*" he asked again.

She shook her head.

"I didn't think so," he replied, taking a weapon from his pocket and handing it to her, butt first, "so I brought you this."

With a gasp of appreciation, mingled with dismay, she took it gingerly.

"Handle it carefully," he warned her. "It goes off very easily. I hope you won't have to use it, but you'll feel safer with it."

"I'm very much obliged," she told him, a glow of thankfulness suffusing her face. "I already *feel* safer." She looked at him gratefully.

"Now, don't fool with it, but keep it handy in case you do need it, and don't put your money in the clock or the broken pitcher in the cupboard, or some other such easy place."

"I won't," she promised. "I shall keep it right under my pillow, beside *this,*" significantly tapping the revolver with her forefinger.

He shrugged. "It isn't likely that you will need it. Well, good night—and good luck!"

"Good night!" she replied. "And *thank* you!"

A few steps away he was blotted out by the dusk. She closed the door, then glanced uncertainly at the ugly weapon in her hand.

"I'll get rid of it right now," she said, passing on into her bedroom and slipping it under her pillow with a little shudder.

The shadows were thick in the house now, and she hastened to light the sitting-room lamp. Its warm, cheerful glow dispelled her nervousness.

With a sigh of relief, she settled herself to do her mending, when slow, heavy footsteps crossed the front porch.

Her heart jumped to her throat, and she sat tense, while a heavy knock sounded loudly through the quiet house.

Controlling her agitation, she went to the door.

It was old Abe. In the lamp-light streaming out from the room behind her, he looked positively wicked, as he stood regarding her steadily.

"Ain't Mr. Redfield come?" he asked bruskly.

She felt a sudden wave of anger against this impertinent questioning, and it immediately reflected itself in her face.

"No, he didn't come, but I'm not

afraid," she told him shortly. "I have a gun to protect myself."

"You keep Bruno to-night," he ordered gruffly, wincing before the open distrust in her eyes.

"Bruno," he turned to the dog sternly, "you stay here to-night; take care of lady." The peddler reached forward and opened the screen door, and the dog slunk in, crowding against Mrs. Redfield.

Taken aback by this boldness, she stood staring, half frightened at the sinister old man, then hastily hooked the screen door.

"You stay and take care of lady," he admonished the dog, and ignoring her action. "You understand?"

Bruno responded with a short, sharp bark, and pounded the floor with his tail.

"I guess you do," muttered the peddler. "Now, I go back to town. I come to-morrow. Good night!"

He turned abruptly, and the darkness swallowed him almost instantly. A few moments later the front gate slammed shut, and she heard his whistling grow fainter and fainter down the road.

"Bruno," she said, closing the door, "I see where I don't get much sleep this night. But with you and the gun, I oughtn't to be afraid, ought I?"

She reseated herself and took up her work again. Calling the collie to her, she let him lay his paw in her lap among the stockings she was mending, occasionally stroking the silky ears.

Nine o'clock came, and she substituted the mending for a book. She read until eleven o'clock. The collie had curled up at her feet, and was sleeping lightly, opening an eye or lifting an ear at her slightest movement.

"I'm going to bed," she told him finally. Taking a cushion from a near-by chair, she dropped it on the floor outside her bedroom door.

"You lie down there. I'm not going to shut the door tight. Do you understand?"

He understood enough, in so far as the cushion was concerned, for he immediately sat down upon it. But he looked crestfallen when he realized he was being excluded.

She patted him on the head. "Good old Bruno!"

Leaving the door ajar, so that she could see whether he accepted the post assigned him, she made ready to retire.

The oppressive hush which gripped the old farmhouse had deepened as the night advanced, and the occasional creakings of settling joists and rafters but emphasized it.

Mrs. Redfield was nervous, but resolutely putting aside all thought of uneasiness, finally drifted into a light sleep.

She suddenly found herself, some time later, staring into the dark, wide-eyed and breathless, gripped by a dread premonition of danger. Swiftly she realized what had wakened her. Somebody was outside the door, leading from her bedroom to the garden, stealthily fumbling with the lock. At the same time she heard the key, pushed out, drop to the carpet with a soft thud, while another was cautiously inserted into the lock.

Too terrified to move, she lay motionless, her gaze straining toward the door. The next moment it swung slowly open, and, plainly silhouetted against the lighter square of the night outside, there appeared the crouching figure of a man.

Her heart was pounding suffocatingly, filling her head with a confusing roar of blood, as she strove to break the rigid fear that bound her, helpless.

Where was Bruno? This flashed through her mind, then a counter-thought left her with a sense of utter helplessness.

Bruno would certainly not protect her against his own master!

Paralyzed with fright, she lay, her hands convulsively clutching the bedclothes, unable to move or make an outcry.

The man had noiselessly closed the door again, and in the pitch blackness she felt him feeling his way stealthily toward her. The blood seemed to recede from her head as swiftly as it had mounted, leaving her acutely conscious of every sound as she lay listening. She heard distinctly the soft whisper of his clothes as he advanced slowly, and the restraint of his excited breathing.

Like the snap of a whip-lash, came recollection of the pistol beside the money, under her pillow, breaking the spell that had held her. Swiftly she reached for it, and the

next instant fumbling fingers caught at her throat, and a hand was clapped over her mouth. The contact seemed to bring her completely to herself, and she fought desperately.

With a furious twist of the head, she temporarily freed her mouth from those suffocating fingers.

"Bruno! Bruno! *Bruno!*" She screamed hoarsely, her voice fraught with that blood-curdling essence always present in the cry of a woman in mortal danger.

A startled curse came from the panting figure above her, and the hands crushed viselike about her throat again, making impossible any further outcry. Then came a snarling growl, and the bedroom door flew back on its hinges, crashing into the wall behind it.

As from a great distance, she became conscious that the terrible pressure of those hands had ceased, and but dimly she felt the impact as the powerful dog hurled himself upon her assailant.

Half swooning, she lay, unconcerned by the terrible struggle between man and dog, as it crashed about in the dark, knocking over furniture and colliding violently with the bed, the collie keeping up that vicious snarling, deadly to hear, and above which the man's wild cries began to penetrate her numbed brain with new significance.

"Call 'im off! Call 'im off!" he was screaming hoarsely. "*Call 'im off!*"

It brought her back to full consciousness, and cold horror gripped her anew. For she recognized the voice. *It was Clay Hershel!*

Her mind filled with confusion, she called to the dog, but the beast either didn't hear her, or wouldn't heed.

Scarcely realizing what she was doing, she searched for the revolver again, and, finding it, made her way blindly through the dark, toward the corner where the struggle seemed to have centered. She couldn't possibly stand by and allow the man to be torn to death—even if he had tried to rob her.

"Stop, Bruno!" she commanded hysterically. "Stop! *Stop!*"

No response but those horrified cries, and the snarling onslaught of the collie.

Half delirious now, she threw herself forward, and feeling the dog's shaggy side, pressed the weapon against the tense, strain-muscles. Thrice she pulled the trigger. But each time it snapped without result.

The collie careening violently, threw her back against the wall, to which she clung, fainting, the struggle raging at her feet.

For some moments she wavered on the edge of consciousness, then roused by the need of the screaming man, who had struggled to his feet again, and was desperately thrashing about the room, trying to beat off the dog, she staggered into the next room, convulsive shudders passing through her, the revolver still clutched in her hand.

She dropped it on the table, and with palsied fingers lighted the lamp. At the same moment she heard Clay Herschel break away from Bruno, and stagger toward the outside door, where the dog again sprang to the attack.

Picking up the lamp, she started for the bedroom, when the outside bedroom door slammed shut, and Bruno, snarling angrily on the inside, apprised her of the fact that the man had escaped.

Mingled with her confused realization of the man's treachery was gratitude now at his escape from the vicious fangs of the dog.

Bruno came to her now, panting, his tongue lolling, with brightly glowing eyes. He plainly expected to be praised for what he had done, but she saw that his tawny coat was smeared with blood, and a shudder passed through her.

Going back to the table, she set the lamp down upon it and sank weakly into a chair. Herschel's attempt to rob her, after giving her the gun to protect herself with, confounded her completely. In the shock and confusion of her mind was a strong element of incredulity. She picked up the weapon, and for the first time examined it closely. Then her mind cleared of its conflicting emotions, and swift understanding lighted her face.

Herschel had played safe enough, for the gun wasn't *loaded!*

The collie was looking up at her with anxious eyes, and this time she didn't repulse him.

"Good old Bruno!" she said, patting him on the head. "*Good old Bruno!*"

The Beloved of Allah

by Eugene A. Clancy

THE Little Soko, or small market, is the heart of Tangier, Morocco. Whenever you have nothing to do—which in Tangier means most of the time—you go and sit at one of the tables in front of the Café Española in the Little Soko.

If you have arrived in town only recently, you are pop-eyed with interest and excitement; but if, like Steve Marsh and myself, you have been in Tangier a month or two, you merely sip a glacé of coffee and fall into a trance. The whirligig and foolish Morocco world goes on around you, but you give it little attention.

I went and sat thus one morning. Gibilo, the young Moor with whom Steve and I lodged for the present—our finances being in a very weak condition, and hotels out of the question—was still sleeping in our room, so far as I knew. Steve had not been seen since the previous evening. He had not come home to the nice oriental rug on which he slept on the floor. I wondered, so far as my trance would permit, where Steve was. I was saved from overthinking myself by his suddenly looming up in the Soko and sitting down beside me.

"Bill," he exclaimed, "he's the most interesting character in Morocco!"

"Is he, indeed!" I remarked, not caring in the least who the most interesting person in question might be. I was used to Steve Marsh, and I was also quite familiar with Morocco by this time, and no longer expected any one, native or European, to talk or act like a sane, human being.

"Most interesting!" Steve went on, paying no attention to my indifference. "I was never so entertained in my life! Half the night I sat listening spellbound to the eloquent and elevating discourse of Mahjub—Mahjub, the cave-dweller, the all-wise eater of mystic herbs—"

"Steve," I asked, this stuff being enough to bring any self-respecting man out of a trance, "are you talking about a human individual or a Moorish circus?"

"I am speaking," he continued with great enthusiasm, "of my new and respected friend, Mr. Mahjub al Larabi—the surname meaning, as you know, the Beloved of Allah. Mr. Mahjub is an ancient citizen of Morocco, and a true philosopher. He has seen much. He has served under many great sultans, and suffered much. In fact, he served one sultan so well that the royal and anointed one, in a fit of wild gratitude, tipped him good and proper—with his royal sword he cut off the tip of the beloved of Allah's nose, that the beloved might always show in public a lasting mark of the royal favor and esteem. While my friend is, therefore, not exactly what you would call a handsome man—"

"For the love of Allah," I put in, "cut out your friend's mutilated biography and let us have some sense!"

Steve glared at me. "What a dull, pro-

saic mind you have, Bill!" he remarked, and then resumed: "Astride my intelligent mule, I was returning home last evening from Cape Spartel. I had lost fifteen cents in a poker game in the lighthouse, and naturally I was feeling downcast. I came by way of the donkey path over the mountain, and I was half-way down the Tangier side when an old Moorish gentleman rushed out at me from the solitude and shrieked Arabic words at me—words which might be translated: 'Alms, for the love of Allah!' In my best Spanish—which the old gentleman evidently understood—I politely explained that I hadn't any alms about me just then, and offered him a cigarette. He graciously accepted the gift, and asked me if I would come in awhile and rest up in his humble abode.

"The humble abode was a quaint and simple cave, lighted at the moment by the charcoal fire over which the old gentleman's supper was boiling in an iron pot. He invited me to partake of his meal, saying the pot contained some of the choicest herbs to be found in that region. He was much surprised when I informed him that my doctor had strictly forbidden me herbs as being too rich for my American stomach.

"After the old gentleman had stuffed himself with herbs, I led off with the remark that I supposed he was the Moorish brand of hermit. He said no; he said he was not officially a hermit; rather, he was an exile—and then he told me the story of his life, as I have hinted.

"What most interested me was the last part of it. He had been a henchman and graft-getter for our mutual friend, Mulai Hafid, the only living ex-sultan. When Mulai was deposed, all his crowd were bounced with him, including Mahjub, the cave-dweller. At that time, Mahjub had a nice, paying bazaar in Tangier, it seems, but the new Moorish governor of Tangier sold him up, chased him away from here, and pinched his wives!

"Since then, deprived of home, wives and fortune, poor old Mahjub has been living quietly in his cave, reciting the Koran, piously cursing the governor of Tangier, and eating rich and delicate herbs.

"When Mr. Mahjub told me this, he finished scouring the inside of his iron pot and sighed deeply. He said he longed to have his bazaar again. He did not care so much about his wives—he had learned to do the housekeeping himself—but he yearned to lie asleep in front of his shop again, in the mad whirl and bustle of Tangier business life. The dear old cuss completely won my sympathy. I told him so, and let him know that I happened to be a friend of the Governor of Tangier, and that I would see if I couldn't do something for him.

"The old gentleman toppled right over and wept. He grabbed the iron pot and placed it in my hands as a token of his gratitude. It was most affecting. I handed back the pot, and, as delicately as I could, I explained that I couldn't think of depriving him of his cooking utensils—that it would be a real pleasure to help him without any thought of reward.

"He said that never before had he met a man like me. He handed me a pipe of keef and begged me to tell him the story of my life. I proceeded to do so, and, the stuff I was smoking being pretty strong, I believe I constructed quite a romantic and adventurous past for myself. Concluding, I chanced to mention that I, too, had once almost met my death at the hands of Mulai Hafid. The old gentleman looked at me with a sudden light of understanding in his eyes.

"'My dear young friend!' he cried. 'Now it is I see why you ask nothing for the great favor you offer to do—you, too, are a seeker for revenge! How well it is we meet—I show you how to make the great rage in Mulai Hafid!'

"Well, with many pledges of undying friendship, I finaly remuled and took my departure in the breaking dawn, having assured Mahjub of my speedy return with a free pardon, properly signed by his nobs, the gov. Now, as I know you are consumed with an eager desire to have a part in this good and pious deed, Bill, will you accompany me to the Kasbah and help me put it over?"

I looked at Steve suspiciously. You never can tell—Morocco has a way of doing things suddenly to a man's mind. If ever a liar looked like a man with a holy mission,

it was Steve. I might even say his expression was beautiful to behold.

"Steve," I said, "I have listened to the story-tellers up in the grand Soko, and in the Moorish café, with the tom-toms and gimbri going a mile a minute, but they've got nothing on you! However, much as I like romance and sentiment, I should like to know, from the viewpoint of the accounting department, just why you stay out all night in a cave, playing angel and swapping keef-inspired lies with an old gentleman who eats herbs out of an iron pot?"

"Well," Steve replied slowly, and still trying to look like a man with a mission, "I will admit that there is some sense in your somewhat coarse way of putting things. I shall further admit that before leaving, I extracted a guarantee from Mr. Mahjub—that should I succeed in getting him back in business again, he will turn over to me a fair percentage of his profits for a period of one year.

"He would not tell me what his business was—you never can find out just exactly what some of these bazaar keepers are selling—but he assured me his line is most profitable. I feel certain it is contraband—smuggling, and that is why I naturally did not press him for further information, as he might suspect my motives. Now, come on up to the Kasbah—I think we are on the track of something that will relieve the financial stringency!"

We left the café and, stepping into the gutter, wound and twisted our way through Tangier's leading alleyways—Tangier would not know what to do with a street—and climbed the hill to the Kasbah, or government buildings.

We were fortunate enough to find the governor in his office. His excellency was squatting on the floor and playing a game of chess with his secretary. He received us with such gracious smiles and kind words that you would imagine we were his dearest friends on earth. As a matter of fact, however, his excellency was constantly sitting up half the night, figuring out how best he might murder us and get away with it.

In Tangier there is always more plotting, grafting, and subtle double-crossing going on than in all the big and little capitals of Europe put together. We happened to be on to some of his excellency's pet graft, and he was always afraid that we might whisper something in the ear of the American consul.

Steve related the sad story of Mr. Mahjub with fine eloquence, carefully suppressing the percentage angle, and playing up the moral and altruistic side. His excellency listened with a benevolent and childlike smile; but I could tell from his eyes that he was positively hurting his brains in the effort to discover what was back of Steve's story.

But he couldn't make the idea at all, for we had learned to play the game the Moorish way—always smile and murmur gentle words while you are selecting the precise spot in which to stick the knife.

"Excellency," Steve concluded, with tears in his eyes, "it is indeed a noble thing we ask you to do! Allah will bless you and you will prosper! Poor old Mahjub will love you, excellency, and every day he will go to the big mosque and call the prophet to witness how great is the Governor of Tangier!"

"Dear amigo Americano," the governor replied, with his benevolent smile, "I cannot find words to tell you how much I thank you for bringing this woful affair to my mind. Poor Mahjub—I had forgotten him, alas! I cannot tell you now what agony I feel when I think of what injustice has been done him! He shall come back to Tangier at once—and may Allah protect him, and you, and your friend!"

He turned to his secretary. "Mohammed al Kali," he directed, "make writings like this: Mahjub al Larabi, lately compelled to be in hateful and accursed service of Mulai Hafid, is by this pardon invited to return freely to Tangier in care of our most distinguished and cherished American friends and visitors. Make special note in public book that this is done by the governor out of goodness and soft kindness of his heart."

"Now," said Steve, with the pardon in his pocket as we walked back to the Soko, "we must not say anything to Gibilo—it is not good for his simple soul to know too much."

Accordingly, we said nothing at all about it to our host, and we were greatly relieved to hear that he was going to the village of Alcazar for a day, to see a new Holy Man who had bobbed up there.

In the late afternoon Steve and I went to the Big Market to get our mules. To my surprise, Steve hired six instead of three.

"Why the caravan?" I asked. "Are we going to bring back the cave and the pot and the quarry as well as the Beloved of Allah?"

"Mind your own business!" Steve retorted. "The three extra mules are for Mr. Mahjub's store fixtures—he has them stowed away somewhere, and asked me to bring extra mules to carry them. As no bazaar in Tangier is larger than a postage stamp, I guess three will do the job."

The evening was falling as we wound down into the quarry. It was just as Steve had described it. The cave was also there up-stage, and the iron pot was in the limelight. The Beloved of Allah, however, was not to be seen.

"I suppose," Steve mused, as he leaned against his mule, "the gentle old exile is out herbing. What a thing it must be to have to pull up one's dinner by the roots!"

The supposition was evidently correct, for in a little while I saw a gaunt and gray-bearded old Moor come creeping down toward us, a sack over his shoulder. Steve introduced me, and Mr. Mahjub prostrated himself as he had done to Steve.

"And now," said Steve, when all the preliminaries were over, "let's get started! Mr. Mahjub, where are the fixtures? You know—the counter boards, the cash register, the fake scales, and the burglar-proof safe?"

The old gentleman's reply caused me much disquietude. He proceeded to explain that when he had been sold up and run out of Tangier, a life-long enemy of his, a rival for the royal favor, had stolen the goods in question, and that at the present time they were reposing in an outhouse in the grounds of Mulai Hafid's villa, just outside of Tangier. The ex-sultan was not allowed any guards about his place, the old fellow explained, and, as it was now dark—we could regain his precious goods without any trouble.

I did not like this, but Steve seemed tickled to death. It is an annoying way Steve has—whenever things take a fool turn, instead of pulling out like any ordinary human being, he has to run right up in front and lead the circus.

"Bill," he cried, "this thing gets better every minute! Let me help you board the mule, Mr. Mahjub. Off for the ex-sultan's back yard!"

I was disgusted, but I silently joined the party. I went along merely to protect Steve if I could—I did not want his relatives to blame me for his sudden taking off.

Our caravan wended its way down the mountain. The old gentleman had insisted on bringing his iron pot, and we had it tied to his saddle. Making a detour, at length we brought up in the rear of the villa in which Mulai lived in ex-royal seclusion.

Leaving the mules a little distance away, we crept up to the garden wall to a spot which Mr. Mahjub said was near the out-house which contained his belongings.

The wall was not very high, but the top was covered with broken glass. Mr. Mahjub, however, was right on the job. From the folds of his burnoose he drew forth an implement which proved to be some near relative of a pickax. With this Steve cleared a space and climbed up.

A few minutes later, nobody seeming to be around or interested in our proceedings, Steve and I were following the old gentleman through a grove of date trees to the out-house. We were surprised to find that the shed had no door and that we could walk right in. Steve took a flash-light from his pocket and turned it on.

"Mr. Mahjub," he said, "I'm afraid some one is wise—I don't seem to see any valuable goods lying around loose in here."

But evidently Mr. Mahjub did see what we had come for. Muttering something to himself, eagerly he pointed to half a dozen ordinary potato sacks on the floor and assured us that these were what we wanted. They seemed to me to be merely stuffed full of straw, and I was about to enter a vigorous protest, when Steve suddenly gripped my arm and whispered:

"He's right! Don't you see? It's as

I thought—he's a little old smuggler guy, and these bags are full of stolen or counterfeit customs stamps and such things! The consul was telling me that they caught a chap in the Soko a couple of months ago with just such bags in his cellar. But they'll be safe in that room of ours—let's get busy!"

As the old gentleman had already carried two of the sacks out to the wall himself, we grabbed the remainder and followed. I may say that I followed most quickly—I didn't care just then whether the fool bags contained thousand-dollar bills or merely old nails. The whole program was getting on my nerves. We tied the bags together, two and two, and, slinging them across the three extra mules, we started for town.

Without consulting my personal convenience at all, Steve had decided that Mr. Mahjub, until such time as he found suitable quarters and was properly launched in business, should reside with us in our room. Now, Gibilo was fairly civilized and quite all right; but I must here state that I did not relish the prospect of living in family with Mr. Mahjub.

Our room was not in any way large or well ventilated. Like many Moorish rooms, it had been built about six centuries earlier, and you entered it by going up a dark, dank stairway and then crawling through a hole in the wall.

I had all this to think of as we rode along, and also the painfully obvious fact that Mr. Mahjub showed no evidence of being a bath-taking man. So far as I could see, herb-eating was the one and only virtue he possessed—besides the doubtful distinction of having lost the tip of his nose by the touch of a royal sword.

But Steve was in his element, and all wrought up over the enterprise, so there was nothing for me to do but to play whatever humble part was assigned me.

We entered Tangier late and by devious ways. Reaching our house without attracting more than ordinary public attention, we carried the bags up-stairs and put them on the floor. When we got them laid out, there was just room enough left for our rugs, on which we lived and slept when at home. Steve detailed me to take the mules back to their boss in the Soko.

When I returned, I found the Beloved of Allah making himself quite at home on Mr. Gibilo's rug and smoking much keef. Steve was reclining on his rug, smoking cigarettes and thoughtfully regarding the potato bags.

"Well, Mr. Mahjub," he said, as I sat down on my rug, "now that we are safely here, and all met and comfortable, I think, before we repose in well-earned slumber, we might talk a little business and incidentally examine the contents of these bags—no fear of prying eyes up here."

The Beloved of Allah, however, did not seem to be in a mood for business. In fact, he began to conduct himself in a most uncalled for and childish manner. He rocked to and fro, singing to himself. I wondered how much keef Steve had foolishly let him smoke while I had been taking the mules home. Then, his eyes falling on Gibilo's gimbri in the corner, he reached for it eagerly and picked the strings, meanwhile wailing discordantly.

"Mr. Mahjub," said Steve, "I really do not care for any music this evening, well and correctly as you play. Some other time—"

But the Beloved of Allah went right on playing and wailing with greatly renewed gusto, not to say artistic passion. I started at him, fascinated. A strange light had come into his eyes, and his tongue wagged right out of his mouth.

It was then that I felt an arctic chill creeping up and down my spine. With chattering teeth, I turned to look at the bag against which I had been idly reclining. Even as I looked, a fat, dark green snake stuck his head through the loosely tied end, and then humped himself slowly out into the room! Wildly I looked around at the other bags, and what I saw was enough—they were coming thick and fast!

At that precise moment Steve and I dived together through the hole in the wall, and together we rolled to the bottom of the stone steps, Steve screaming and kicking me all the way, while I resorted to biting his neck. I don't know how we got through the ground-floor door, but when I came to I

was sitting in the gutter and Steve was lying flat on his back in the alley, still waving his arms wildly and begging me to "chase 'em away!"

In the course of time we grew calm enough to stand up and look at each other. I was about to speak, when our ears caught the frenzied wailing of Mr. Mahjub above. With one accord, we fled. It was a fine race and ended in a dead heat at the Café Española.

"Cognac!" said Steve hoarsely.

We swallowed two big ones, and then became aware of the unexpected presence of our Moorish host, Mr. Gibilo.

"I have just come back from Alcazar," he said; "and I am glad to see—but what is matter, eh? You look like you been having much movings on!"

As Steve was still incapable of speech, I briefly narrated the facts—as clearly as I could. At first, Mr. Gibilo fairly screamed with laughter—ribald laughter! Then, with an obvious effort to control himself, he exclaimed:

"Oh, my dear friends! You really not know? What a joke the Governor of Tangier now have on you—he make very big fool of you! This man, Mahjub, he is not exile! He is one of those what have the sacred fire—what you call crazy. If you had tole me what you plan to do! Everybody know him. We call him Mahjub the Mad—the Mad Charmer of Snake! He all time think things—he very famous big liar in Tangier!

"What he tell you is all lie. Mahjub, he live for one thing; he have just one wish in world—to charm snake. He do anything to get chance to charm snake—I guess he hear that Mulai Hafid have got new lot of very fine snake for his private charmer, and old Mahjub he just dying to have those new snake hisself! But my dear friends, now he will stay in our room for many days—we no get in or out! What you have done!"

"Bill," said Steve weakly, "I ask your pardon! I think we'd better go around and ask the American consul to lend us a spare room—until Mr. Mahjub has exhausted his passion for snakes. Meanwhile, I shall plan a couple of murders!"

"Gibilo," I asked, as we walked to the consulate, "how *did* Mr. Mahjub lose the end of his nose?"

"Huh!" said the Moor. "When he very young man and not know much about snake-charming business. One day, he not charm snake enough, and snake he bite him good on nose! Mahjub, he hold nose tight and run for doctor. Doctor jump on him and make cut off quick before Mahjub know what happen!"

TRAIL O' THE YEARS

WITH the tump-line taut o'er my forehead
And the dunnage upon my back,
I plod through the mire o' the carry
Where the shadows are grim and black;
With the ash blade's rhythmic swinging
And the song that the forest hears,
I paddle the sunlit rivers
That thread the trail o' the years.

Sometimes the checkering sunbeams
Weave patterns of gems and gold:
Again, in the drifting tempest
The woodland droops drenched and old:
The moods of Dame Nature vary;
Her laughter, her guile and tears;
While I, the slave of a woman,
Pursue o'er the trail o' the years!

Paul Steele.

The Log-Book

By the Editor

THREE young men were talking about picking a vocation in life. One was rather keen on getting a sort of phrenologist to read his head and tell him what he was best fitted for. Another declared natural inclinations ought to point out the groove to follow, while the third came out with this dictum:

"The line of work any man should take up ought to be that in which he finds himself happier in the doing than if he was spending the same amount of time enjoying himself in the ordinary acceptation of the term."

This, you see, is a bolt between the eyes for the clock-watchers. To love one's work is to be a better workman. What has been the experience of my readers in the matter?

* * *

One could shake all the adjectives together, such as "baffling," "unaccountable," "fantastic," "curious," "odd," "bewildering," "amazing," "extraordinary," and yet fall far short of the really stunning climax of

"A NURSE NAMED ALLENBY"

BY BERTRAM LEBHAR

Author of "Come Across!" "Thumbs Down," etc.

It is a story whose ending I absolutely defy you even to suspect. There must be a reason for everything—but an empty house that was yet not empty; a disappearance arguing the existence of a fourth dimension; a detective that was a criminal; and a press-agent who was believed because his story could not possibly be true—these are some of the paradoxes which would make it appear that truth is treason, and that things are never what they seem. The first of four instalments begins in THE ARGOSY for May 1.

* * *

Moon madness, some call it; the tropic leaven that works like a subtle fever in the blood, stifling little by little the echoes of the past, blurring the home pictures until they fade into a diminishing perspective of vanished dreams.

"THE ROSE PARASOL"

BY PETER WARD

Author of "Ali's Revenge—and Allah's," etc.

is a subtle study, yet withal filled with the heady wine of excitement, told by a master realist, who achieves the seemingly impossible: a romance without a hero; and yet a story convincing, gripping, breathlessly alluring, in a suspense which is at times almost painful. A Puritan maid who tasted of the lotus and found it sweet; a man, ruthless,

yet possessed of a sort of engaging deviltry of charm, and—*Constellacion,* of the slumberous eyes, pools of the past, in very truth. These are ingredients of our complete novelette for May 1.

Political stories, as a rule, bore me, but in "LET THE PEOPLE RULE," by Rufus Steele, a feature of next week's ARGOSY, you are going to get a wonder of a tale. And, coming as it does in a Presidential election year, it is not only a find in fiction, but a mighty timely one into the bargain. So be sure you don't miss it. Wolcott LeClear Beard invariably has a worth-while idea back of the yarns he writes, and he has based "FOUNDATION SOAP" upon a most unusual one, which I feel sure will keep your attention taut to the end.

SELTZER CAN'T COME TOO OFTEN

Boone, Iowa.

This is my first letter, so don't be indignant if I don't say things that you don't like. The only thing I don't like about Seltzer's Western stories is that they don't come often enough. His "Drag Harlan" was excellent, bar none. Bechdolt's "The Torch," promises to be a very interesting tale. Be sure and don't forget to give us some more of "Peter the Brazen." THE ARGOSY would lose half of its value if it lost him.

PAUL J. CHAMBERS.

THE PENALTY OF POPULARITY

Mill Hall, Pennsylvania.

Enclosed please find postal money-order to cover subscription to THE ARGOSY for one year. I am tired chasing from one stand to another for my favorite magazine, only to hear, "Sold out!" unless I get there the very first day. Have been a reader for about three years, and have only praise for THE ARGOSY. I pass by the stories that do not appeal to me, and they are very few. "Yellow Soap" is wonderful. The Log-Book always gets its share of my attention, though I have never seen my home county represented there.

With best wishes to THE ARGOSY and its editor and staff, (MISS) L. FAY MILLER.

"THE ONLY INTERESTING MAGAZINES"

Chico, California.

I reckon I need not say that Western stories are my favorites, need I? And I like Northern stories, too. Oh, I like any kind of an interesting story. But I consider THE ARGOSY and *Munsey's* the only interesting magazines. I think "Yellow Soap" very good, and I liked "The Red Road" in the January 31 number, and "Crossroads" I think is going to be as good as "Luck" and "Cold Steel"—which is going some. I enjoy the Log-Book a great deal. Wish it were twice as long.

Mr. H. D. Rettburg, aren't you making rather a sweeping statement when you say girls all use the stuff, meaning rouge and powder? I, for one, do not. But I think it is a girl's own business if she wishes to use it, and if we girls would stand together and have nothing to do with a man who uses tobacco, I'm sure you'd all quit using it. Am I right? Surely it is no more wrong to use powder and rouge, in moderate quantities, than to smoke. (MISS) LUCY WILEY.

TWO OF THE SIX NUMBERS WITH "SANDERSON" OUT OF PRINT

McKay, Oregon.

I am writing you again to let you know I received THE ARGOSYS O. K., and to thank you for your prompt attention to my order. They came much sooner than I expected they would. I was able to finish "Beau Rand," and I think it is a splendid story. *Bud* is sure some Cupid, isn't he? How any one can find fault with THE ARGOSY stories is beyond me. I find them all so interesting. I have had many a hearty laugh over some of the short stories. I always turn to the Log-Book first, as I enjoy the letters so much.

Can I get the books containing "Square Deal Sanderson" and what would be the charges? Please let me know, as I have heard so much about the story I want to read it. You may print this in the Log-Book. EVA M. HALL.

THE RARITY OF THE IMPOSSIBLE

Savannah, Georgia.

I note your inquiry in the January 31 issue of THE ARGOSY: Do people like bright, cheerful love stories? And, speaking for myself, being a rambler, and lonesome man, who has not found the one woman, I will say there are a great many people who like to read a real bright, cheerful love story, and dream of the ideal future. I do not mean a story of fighting and all kinds of heroic deeds, but just a tale of two people, man and woman, who meet and love. Having been a rambler the world over since boyhood, I think there are only three things on earth for a man. These are honor, friendship, and the love of a true woman. And if a man has not the first, then he is not worthy of the other two. But I like to read all the other stories that are of real men and women, and that is about the only kind one finds in THE ARGOSY.

I see one letter in the Log-Book objecting to impossible stories, and would like to say there are not any impossible stories. If I, who have seen the far places of the earth for the love of

going to see what would happen next, could express my knowledge and thoughts of things I have seen and done the world over, why, how some people would rear up and yell "Liar" at me.

But enough of this, for there are men who know there are very few things impossible. You can Log this if you wish. J. R. MORGAN.

DOWN ON THE SEQUEL

Canton, Illinois.

Mr. Editor, you sure are an obliging chap. I asked for another "Beau Rand" story, and you went it as good, or even better, in "Drag Harlan." Seltzer has a taking way with a fellow's spare time, hasn't he? Some way I've failed to find anything uninteresting in any of his stories yet. (More! More! Say I.)

Do you know these authors who write stories with a blooming sequel chasing along after them remind me of a guy who leaves a day's work half finished because there is another day to do it in? It's like wasting one book to introduce the people who will take part in another story to follow. It's a cussed mean way to write a story, and I'd rather a lot read a story that ends in a specified number of books than to wait for an indefinite period to see how it will all end.

This "powder" argument in the Log is some joke. Everybody chewing the rag and nobody putting up a point. I don't blame the ladies. It's clean, cooling, healing and nice to look at if put on even, so why worry? You knockers paint your houses to make 'em look nice against passing observation and to protect 'em from the wear of the weather. Get me? C. H. M.

P. S.—"Which of These Two?" sounded too much like Southworth or Clay. I hope not many like it get mixed up among our real reading. Anyway, that girl was too easy to be true. M.

PREPONDERATING PRAISE

Paterson, New Jersey.

Just a few lines to let you know that I am still a passenger on your good ship. It is a little over two years since I came aboard, and hope to remain as long as she continues her voyage. Wish the fifth serial would return, as "the serial is the thing." I read your excellent short stories and occasionally a novelette, but give me the serial every time.

During the past few months I particularly liked the following: First of all, "Son of the Black Wolf," a sequel to the best ARGOSY serial, "Black Wolf of Picardy." Truly it was too good to be true. No author has appealed to me more than Charles B. Stilson.

Other tales that I enjoyed are: "The Golden Cat," the best story of China I ever read; "The Big Muskeg"—after too long an absence Victor Rousseau returns with a splendid story of the north woods; "Which of These Two?"—I always enjoy this author's stories of England; "Marching Sands"—H. A. Lamb's first ARGOSY serial sure was a thriller.

I wish to say that I agree with Percy E. Moore in the Log of November 29 about Charles Alden Seltzer. Mr. Seltzer's latest story, "Drag Harlan," although good, was the same old thing again. The two-gun man, the credulous heroine, the bad man that controls the town. I am sure if Mr. Seltzer would write a tale of the far north or some other place he would make a great many more friends. Please don't take this as a kick.

I like all of your authors, but especially enjoy those by Stilson, Stevens, Abdullah, Bennet, Ogden, Chalmers, Wertz, Frederick, Smith, Franklin, Sheehan, Lyman, and Dunn.

Wishing success to you, S. K. S.

UNABLE TO FIND ANYTHING TO KICK ABOUT

Caldwell, Ohio.

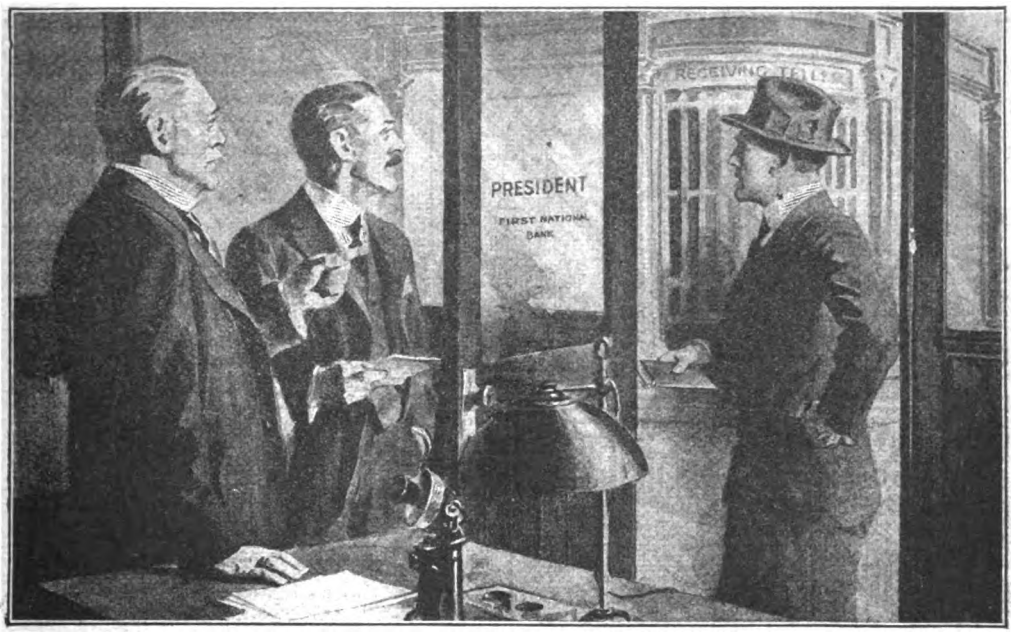
Enclosed please find check for four dollars, for which renew my subscription to THE ARGOSY for one year. I have been a constant reader of the magazine for the last twelve years, and certainly enjoy it. I have not been able to find anything to kick about so far, and don't think I will unless you should happen to take a foolish notion and turn it back to a monthly again. Then I most certainly would kick and kick hard, too, as I can always find time to read it through every week. I noticed one party who wrote that it was all right for some people to have it a weekly, but how was a working man to find time? Well, I am a working man, and I don't only work eight hours, but work from daylight to dark, summer or winter, and after my work is done I still have other business to attend to, as I am a contractor and builder. But I can always find time to read THE ARGOSY through every week, and look ahead for the next one. I'm not writing this to tell any one of my business, but just to prove that a working man can always find time to enjoy a few hours of good reading each week.

As I noticed several letters in the Log in regard to girls powdering and painting, I cannot say that I approve of it. But at the same time I think that is a subject that can be left to the ladies to decide; or, at least, should not be discussed by men, because there are a lot of things we still have to learn about the opposite sex. I know some girls who have a very good reason for powdering. Then, again, why do men use tobacco? I use it myself. Still, I have not read any letters about men using tobacco. So I move we let the girls powder, and we take a good smoke, and all have a good time.

I read several letters about girls writing to unknown soldiers. I will admit all soldiers were not gentlemen, but that had nothing to do with a girl writing to them. I don't care what kind of men they were, when it came to fighting, they were all right. They all had to bear the same hardships. So I think I am safe to say that the man who wrote that the girls should not write to soldiers never saw the other side of the big pond. I received quite a number of letters from girls I had never seen or heard of before I went to France, and I cannot begin to tell how they cheered me. They made a man think of "who" and "what" he was fighting for, and if there ever is another war I hope the girls will do as they did in the last one; and they did write kind, cheery letters.

Well, I'm taking too much of your precious space, so will close, hoping to get more of Zane Grey's and Seltzer's stories. My favorites are Western and railroad stories.

ERNEST H. MILLER.



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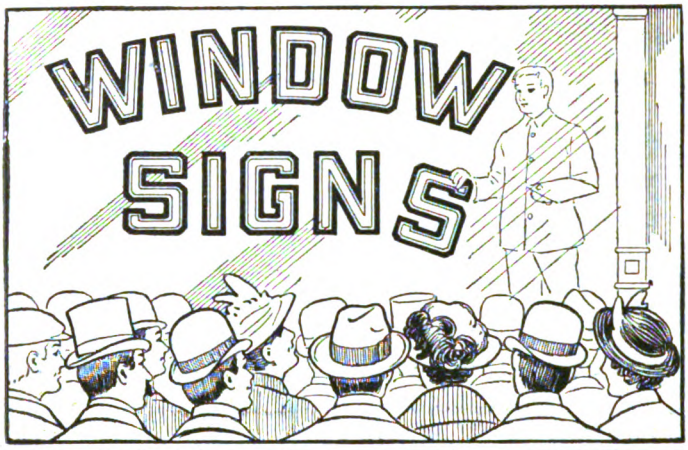

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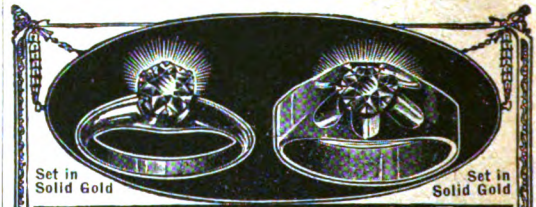

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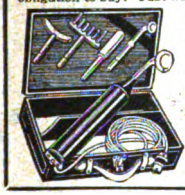

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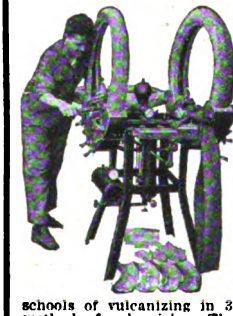

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Statement of the ownership, management, etc., of THE ARGOSY, published weekly at New York, N. Y., for April 1st, 1920. Required by the Act of Congress of August 24th, 1912.

NOTE—This statement is to be made in duplicate, both copies to be delivered by the publisher to the Postmaster, who will send one copy to the Third Assistant Postmaster-General (Division of Classification), Washington, D. C., and retain the other in the files of the Post-Office.

State of NEW YORK } s.s. :
County of NEW YORK }

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared WM. T. DEWART, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publishers of THE ARGOSY, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24th, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations. To wit:

That the names and addresses of the Publisher, Editor, Managing Editor, and Business Manager are:

Publishers—THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Editor—MATTHEW WHITE, JR., 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Managing Editor—ROBERT SIMPSON, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Business Manager—WM. T. DEWART, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

That the Owners are: (If a corporation give its name and the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of the total amount of stock.)

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

FRANK A. MUNSEY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders, owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are:

There are no bonds, mortgages, or other securities against THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY.

That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

WM. T. DEWART, Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 1st day of April, 1920.

A. V. KASS, Notary Public.

(SEAL)

New York County, No. 28.
New York Register No. 2095.
Term expires March 30th, 1922.

Special

3

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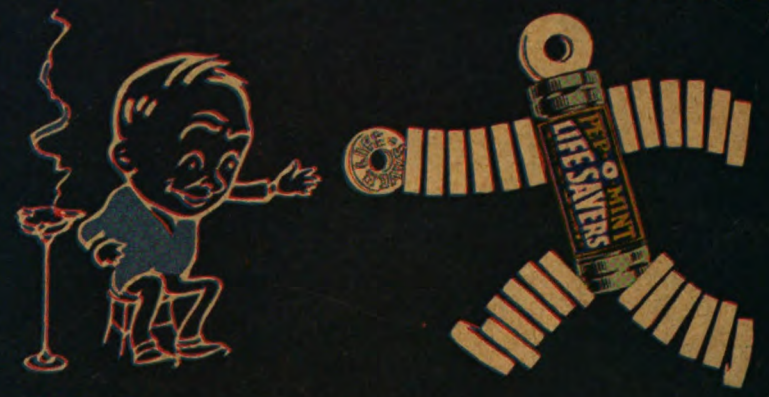

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Life Savers do chase
that tobacco-ey taste
and leave your breath
sweet as a May morn.
Never start to smoke
without a packet in
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PEP-O-MINT WINT-O-GREEN CL-O-VE LIC-O-RICE CIN-O-MON