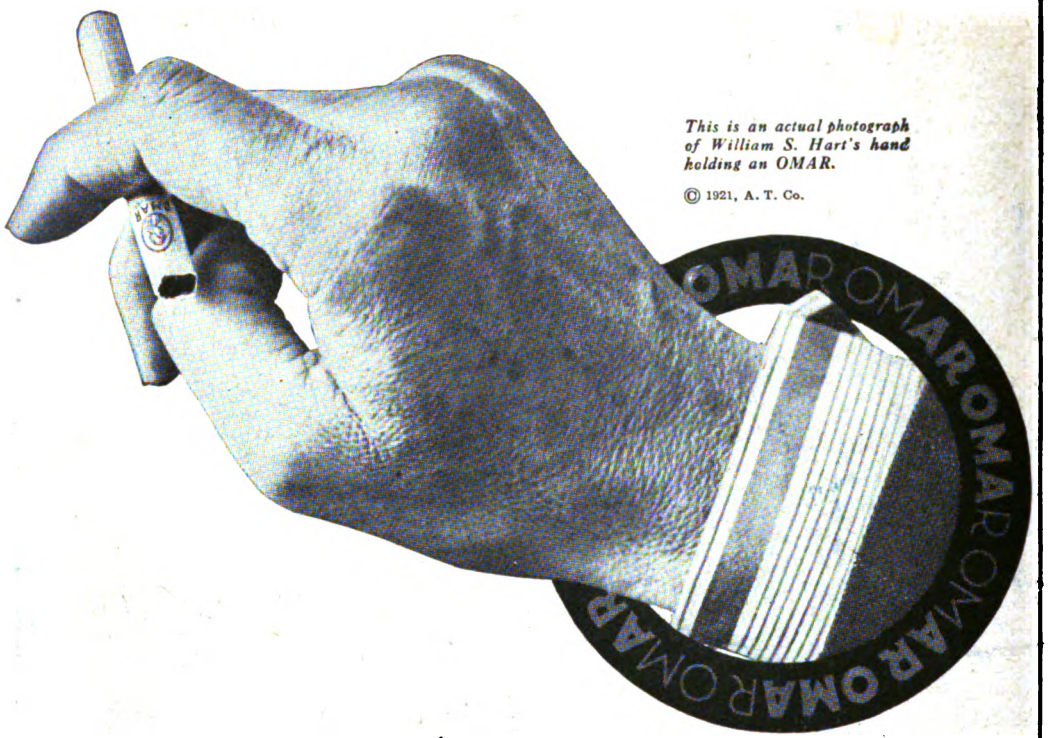
ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

A Drama of Heredity and Hate

Black Jack

by

Max Brand



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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXXXIX CONTENTS FOR DECEMBER 10, 1921 NUMBER 1

FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

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SEVEN SHORT STORIES

WITH the finger of accusation pointed at him, Victor Kent found only one person who believed and trusted him despite his inability to explain the charge of murder and the evidence against him. That one person was the girl he loved, and together they fled for their lives across the great white wastes of snow to the place

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which is the title of a gripping six-part serial by

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Entered as second class matter July 15, 1920, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879

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Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

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- ☐ Gas Engine Operating
- ☐ CIVIL ENGINEER
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ MINE FOREMAN or ENG'R
- ☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER
- ☐ Marine Engineer
- ☐ ARCHITECT
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7-1-21

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City..... State.....

Occupation.....

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Haywood Tire & Equipment Co.
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Burlington Watch Company, Dept. 1459
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The Burlington 21 Jewels

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

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Name .....

Address.....

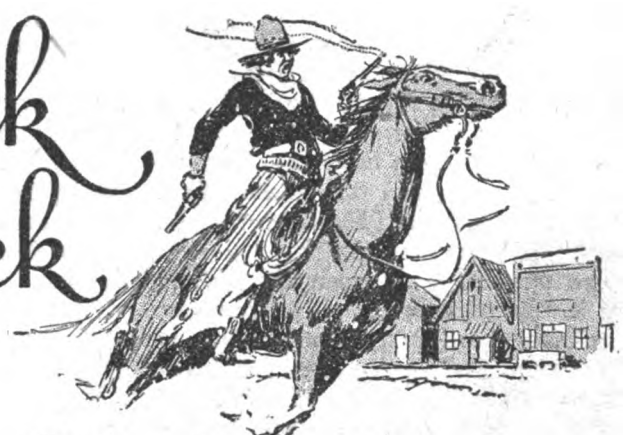
Reference.....

Please fill out all lines.

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

VOL. CXXXIX SATURDAY, DECEMBER 10, 1921 NUMBER 1

Black Jack



Part I

by Max Brand

Author of "Trailin'," "The Untamed," "Tiger," "The Guide to Happiness," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE GUNMAN'S SON.

IT was characteristic of the two that when the uproar broke out Vance Cornish raised his eyes, but went on lighting his pipe. Then his sister Elizabeth ran to the window with a swish of skirts around her long legs. After the first shot there was a lull. The little cattle-town was as peaceful as ever with its storm-shaken houses staggering away down the street.

A boy was stirring up the dust of the street, enjoying its heat with his bare toes, and the same old man was bunched in his chair in front of the store. During the two days Elizabeth had been in town on her cattle-buying trip, she had never seen him alter his position. But she was accustomed to the West, and this advent of sleep in the town did not satisfy her. A drowsy town, like a drowsy-looking cow-puncher, might be capable of unexpected things.

"Vance," she said, "there's trouble starting."

"Somebody shooting at a target," he answered.

As if to mock him, he had no sooner spoken than a dozen voices yelled down the street in a wailing chorus cut short by the rapid chattering of revolvers. Vance ran to the window. Just below the hotel the street made an elbow turn for no particular reason except that the original cattle-trail had made exactly the same turn before Garrison City was built. Toward the corner ran the hubbub at the pace of a running horse. Shouts, shrill, trailing curses, and the muffled beat of hoofs in the dust. A rider plunged into view, now, his horse leaning far in to take the sharp angle, and the dust skidding out and away from his sliding hoofs. The rider gave easily and gracefully to the wrench of his mount.

And he seemed to have a perfect trust in his horse, for he rode with the reins hanging over the horns of his saddle. His hands were occupied by a pair of revolvers, and he was turned in the saddle.

The head of the pursuing crowd lurched around the elbow-turn; fire spat twice from the mouth of each gun. Two men dropped, one rolling over and over in the dust, and the other sitting down and clasping his leg in a ludicrous fashion. But the crowd was checked and feel back.

By this time the racing horse of the fugitive had carried him close to the hotel, and now he faced the front, a handsome fellow with long black hair blowing about his face. He wore a black silk shirt which accentuated the pallor of his face, and the flaring crimson of his bandanna. And he laughed, joyously, and the watchers from the hotel window heard him call: "Go it, Mary. Feed 'em dust, girl!"

The pursuers had apparently realized that it was useless to chase. Another gust of revolver shots barked from the turning of the street and among them a different and more sinister sound like the striking of two great hammers face on face, so that there was a cold ring of metal after the explosion—at least one man had brought a rifle to bear. Now, as the wild rider darted past the hotel, his hat was jerked from his head by an invisible hand. He whirled again in the saddle and his guns raised. As he turned, Elizabeth Cornish saw something glint across the street. It was the gleam of light on the barrel of a rifle that was thrust out through the window of the store.

That long line of light wobbled, steadied, and fire jetted from the mouth of the gun. The black-haired rider spilled sidewise out of the saddle; his feet came clear of the stirrups, and his right leg caught on the cantle. He was flung rolling in the dust, his arms flying weirdly. The rifle disappeared from the window and a boy's set face looked out. But before the limp body of the fugitive had stopped rolling, Elizabeth Cornish dropped into a chair, sick of face. Her brother turned his back on the mob that closed over the dead man and looked at Elizabeth in alarm.

It was not the first time he had seen the result of a gunplay, and for that matter it was not the first time for Elizabeth. Her emotion upset him more than the roar of a hundred guns. He managed to bring her a glass of water, but she brushed it away so that half of the contents spilled on the red carpet of the room.

"He isn't dead, Vance. He isn't dead!" she kept saying.

"Dead before he left the saddle," replied Vance with his usual calm. "And if the bullet hadn't finished him, the fall would have broken his neck. But—what in the world! Did you know the fellow?"

He blinked at her, his amazement growing. The capable hands of Elizabeth were pressed to her breast, and out of the thirty-five years of spinsterhood which had starved her face he became aware of eyes young and dark, and full of spirit; by no means the keen, quiet eyes of Elizabeth Cornish.

"Do something," she cried. "Go down, and—if they've murdered him—"

He literally fled from the room.

She did not follow him with her eyes. Out of the street a jumble of voices beat through the window. She closed the sense of their words out of her mind. In spite of the noise, a great stillness had come on her. She saw the course of a crack up the wall until it sprayed out in a maze of lines on the ceiling. She dwelt with a blank intensity on the picture of the president which hung just opposite. She dropped her eyes to the rug and studied the pattern of roses and distorted Cupids—red roses and blue Cupids!

All the time she was seeing nothing, but she would never forget what she had seen no matter how long she lived. Subconsciously she was fighting to keep the street voices out of her mind. They were saying things she did not wish to hear, things she would not hear. Finally she recovered enough to stand up and shut the window. That brought her a terrible temptation to look down into the mass of men in the street —and women, too!

But she resisted and looked up. The forms on the street remained obscurely in the bottom of her vision, and made her think of something she had seen in the woods—a colony of ants around a dead beetle. Presently the door opened and Vance came back. He still seemed very worried, but she forced herself to smile at

him, and at once his concern disappeared; it was plain that he had been troubled about her and not in the slightest by the fate of the strange rider. She kept on smiling, but for the first time in her life she really looked at Vance without sisterly prejudice in his favor. She saw a good-natured face, handsome, with the cheeks growing a bit blocky, though Vance was only twenty-five. He had a glorious forehead and fine eyes, but one would never look twice at Vance in a crowd. She knew suddenly that her brother was simply a well-mannered mediocrity. She had been in the habit of looking up to him, because he had some of the finer touches which were lacking in her own nature. She knew now, and it had really never occurred to her before, that a man must be something more than well-educated and intelligent. She was surprised by her own judgment. Indeed, Elizabeth was very far from knowing what had happened to her.

"Thank the Lord you're yourself again, Elizabeth," her brother said first of all. "I thought for a moment — I don't know what!"

"Just the shock, Vance," she said. Ordinarily she was well-nigh brutally frank. Now she found it easy to lie and keep on smiling. "It was such a horrible thing to see!"

"I suppose so. Caught you off balance. But I never knew you to lose your grip so easily. Well, do you know what you've seen?"

"He's dead, then?"

He looked sharply at her. It seemed to him that a tremor of unevenness had come into her voice, but now he saw that she was still smiling, and he dismissed the momentary suspicion.

"Oh, dead as a doornail, Elizabeth. Very neat shot. Youngster that dropped him; boy named Joe Minter. Six thousand dollars for Joe. Nice little nest egg to build a fortune on, eh?"

"Six thousand dollars! What do you mean, Vance?"

"The price on the head of Jack Hollis. That was Hollis, sis. The celebrated Black-Jack."

"But—this is only a boy, Vance. He couldn't have been more than twenty-five years old."

"That's all."

"But I've heard of him for ten years, very nearly. And always as a man-killer. It can't be Black-Jack."

"I said the same thing, but it's Black-Jack, well enough. He started out when he was sixteen, they say, and he's been raising the devil ever since. You should have seen them pick him up—as if he were asleep, and not dead. What a body! Lithe as a panther. No larger than I am, but they say he was a giant with his hands."

He was lighting his cigaret as he said this, and consequently he did not see her eyes close tightly. A moment later she was able to make her expression as calm as ever.

"Came into town to see his baby," went on Vance through the smoke. "Little year-old beggar!"

"Think of the mother," murmured Elizabeth Cornish. "I want to do something for her."

"You can't," replied her brother with unnecessary brutality. "Because she's dead. A little after the youngster was born. I believe Black-Jack broke her heart, and a very pleasant sort of girl she was, they tell me."

"What will become of the baby?"

He found her dreaming with her work-worn hands loosely clasped together and her elbows resting on her bony knees. She was not a graceful woman. For ten years, now, she had done a man's work in managing the ranch which their father had left them covered with mortgages. She had lifted those mortgages, but she had given her young womanhood to the labor. This touch of tenderness was an unturned page in her nature, and Vance wondered at it. Mechanically he attributed it to an aftermath of shock.

"It will live and grow up," he said carelessly. "They always do, somehow. Make another like his father, I suppose. A few years of fame in the mountain saloons, and then a knife in the back. One or two rattling murders to give us reading matter, and then the end of him!"

The meager body of Elizabeth stiffened. She was finding it less easy to maintain her nonchalant smile.

"Why?"

"Why? Blood will out, like murder, sis."

"Nonsense! All a matter of environment."

"Have you ever read the story of the Jukes family?"

"An accident. Take a son out of the best family in the world and raise him like a thief—he'll be a thief. And the thief's son can be raised to an honest manhood. I know it!"

She was seeing Black-Jack, as he had raced down the street with the black hair blowing about his face. Of such stuff, she felt, the knights of another age had been made. Vance was raising a forefinger in an authoritative way he had.

"My dear, before that baby is twenty-five—that was his father's age—he'll have shot a man. Bet you on it!"

"I'll take your bet!"

The retort came with such a ring of her voice that he was startled. Before he could recover she went on: "Go out and get that baby for me, Vance. I want it."

He tossed his cigaret out the window.

"Don't drop into one of your headstrong moods, sis. This is nonsense."

"That's why I want to do it. I'm tired of playing the man. I've had enough to fill my mind. I want something to fill my arms and my heart."

She drew up her hands with a peculiar gesture toward her shallow, barren bosom, and then her brother found himself silenced. At the same time he was a little irritated, for there was an imputation in her speech that she had been carrying the burden which his own shoulders should have supported. Which was so true that he could not answer, and therefore he cast about for some way of stinging her. That is always the way when a man is backed against the wall in an argument. He strikes out more or less blindly, and tries to beat his way out of the dilemma through brute force.

"I thought you were going to escape the sentimental period, Elizabeth. But sooner or later I suppose a woman has to pass through it."

A spot of color came in her sallow cheek.

"That's sufficiently disagreeable, Vance."

A sense of his cowardice made him rise to conceal his confusion.

"I'm going to take you at your word, sis. I'm going out to get that baby. I suppose it can be bought—like a calf!"

He went deliberately to the door, and laid his hand on the knob. He had a rather vicious pleasure in calling her bluff, but to his amazement she did not call him back. He opened the door slowly. Still she did not speak. He slammed it behind him and stepped into the hall. Plain stubbornness would make her go through with the thing now, he knew. For a moment he hesitated under an impulse to go back and argue again, but his own stubbornness intervened.

CHAPTER II.

ELIZABETH THE INDOMITABLE.

TWENTY-FOUR years made the face of Vance Cornish a little better fed, a little more blocky of cheek, but he remained astonishingly young. At forty-nine the lumpish promise of his youth was quite gone. He was in a trim and solid middle-age. His hair was thinned above the forehead, but it gave him more dignity. On the whole, he left an impression of a man who has done things and who will do more before he is through. If one looked very close it was seen that his eye was too dull. And in that case one felt that here was a strong man unawakened to a knowledge of his own strength.

He shifted his feet from the top of the porch railing to the cross piece, and shrugged himself deeper into his chair. It was marvelous how comfortable Vance could make himself. He had one great power—the ability to sit still through any given interval. Now he let his eye drift quietly over the Cornish ranch. It lay entirely within one grasp of the vision, spilling across the valley from Sleep Mountain, on the lower bosom of which the house stood, to Mount Discovery, on the north. Not that the

glance of Vance Cornish lurched across this bold distance. His gaze wandered as slowly as a bee buzzes across a clover field, not knowing on which blossom to settle.

Below him, generously looped, Bear Creek, tumbled out of the southeast, and roved between noble borders of silver spruce into the shadows of the Blue Mountains of the north and west. It had the proportions and dignity of a river, but somewhere near its source in the old days a hunter had dropped a grizzly, and the name of his giving remained, extending to the larger stream below.

Here the valley shouldered out on either side into Sleep Mountain on the south and the Blue Mountains on the north, half a dozen miles across and ten long of grazing and farm land. The tillable portion, to be sure, was not a large percentage. It extended hardly beyond the arms of the southward swing of Bear Creek, but this was a rich, loamy bottom-land scattered with aspens.

Beyond, covering the gentle roll of the foothills, was grazing land. Scattering lodge pole pine began in the hills, and thickened into dense yellow-green thickets on the upper mountain slopes. And so north and north the eye of Vance Cornish wandered and climbed until it rested on the bald summit of Mount Discovery. It had its name out of its character, standing boldly to the south out of the jumble of the Blue Mountains.

It was a solid unit, this Cornish ranch, fenced away with mountains, watered by a river, pleasantly forested, and obviously predestined for the ownership of one man. Vance Cornish, on the porch of the house, felt like an enthroned king overlooking his dominions. As a matter of fact his holdings were hardly more than nominal.

In the beginning his father had left the ranch equally to Vance and Elizabeth, thickly plastered with debts. The son would have sold the place for what they could clear. He went East to hunt for education and pleasure; his sister remained and fought the great battle by herself. She consecrated herself to the work, which implied that the work was sacred. And to her, indeed, it was.

She was twenty-two and her brother twelve when their father died. Had she been a tithe younger and her brother a mature man, it would have been different. As it was, she felt herself placed in a maternal position with Vance. She sent him away to school, rolled up her sleeves and started to order chaos. In place of husband, children—love and the fruits of love—she accepted the ranch. The dam between the rapids and the water-fall was the child of her brain; the ploughed fields of the central part of the valley were her reward.

In ten years of constant struggle she cleared away the debts. And then, since Vance gave her nothing but bills to pay, she began to buy out his interest. He chose to learn his business lessons on Wall Street. Elizabeth paid the bills, but she checked the sums against his interest in the ranch. And so it went on. Vance would come out to the ranch at intervals and show a brief, feverish interest, plan a new set of irrigation canals, or a sawmill, or a better road out over the Blue Mountains. But he dropped such work half-done and went away.

Elizabeth said nothing. She kept on paying his bills, and she kept on cutting down his interest in the old Cornish ranch, until at the present time he had only a finger-tip hold. Root and branch, the valley and all that was in it belonged to Elizabeth Cornish. She was proud of her possession, though she seldom talked of her pride. Nevertheless Vance knew, and smiled. It was amusing, because, after all, what she had done, and all her work, would revert to him at her death. Until that time, why should he care in whose name the ranch remained so long as his bills were paid? He had not worked, but in recompense, he had remained young. Elizabeth had labored all her youth away. At forty-nine he was ready to begin the most important part of his career. At sixty his sister was a withered old ghost of a woman. Her strength was in her eye alone.

No wonder that he fell into a pleasant reverie. When Elizabeth died, he would set in some tennis-courts beside the house, buy some blooded horses, cut the road wide and deep to let the world come up

Bear Creek valley, and retire to the life of a country gentleman.

His sister's voice cut into his musing. She had two tones. One might be called her social register. It was smooth, gentle —the low-pitched and controlled voice of a gentlewoman. The other voice was hard and sharp. It could pierce the clamor of the round-up with trenchant orders; it could drive hard and cold across a desk, and bring business men to an understanding that here was a mind, not a woman.

At present she used her latter tone. Vance Cornish came into a shivering consciousness that she was sitting beside him. He turned his head slowly. It was always a shock to come out of one of his pleasant dreams, and see that worn, hollow-eyed, impatient face. He had had his pleasure in life, and his sister had paid for it. He forced himself to smile as he met her eye.

"Are you forty-nine, Vance?"

"I'm not fifty, at least," he countered.

She remained imperturbable, looking him over. He had come to notice that in the past half dozen years, his best smiles often failed to mellow her expression. He felt that something disagreeable was coming, and he ran off easily at a tangent to turn the conversation.

"Why did Cornwall run away this morning? I hoped to take him on a trip."

"He had business to do."

His diversion had been a distinct failure, and had been turned against him. For she went on: "Which leads to what I have to say. You're going back to New York in a few days, I suppose?"

"No, my dear. I haven't been across the water for two years."

"Paris?"

"Brussels. A little less grace; a little more spirit."

"Which means money."

"A few thousand, only. I'll be back by fall."

"Do you know that you'll have to mortgage your future for that money, Vance?"

He blinked at her, but maintained his smile under fire, courageously.

"Come, come! Things are booming. You told me yesterday what you'd clean up on the last bunch of Herefords."

"Well?"

When she folded her hands she was most dangerous, he knew. And now the bony fingers linked and she shrugged the shawl more closely around her shoulders. After a life of wild, hard labor in a rough country with rough men, it was strange to see these prim, old-maidish habits settle on her as the years slipped by.

"We're partners, aren't we?" smiled Vance.

"Partners, yes. You have one share and I have a thousand. But—you don't want to sell out your final claim, I suppose?"

His smile froze.

"Eh?"

"If you want to get those few thousands, Vance, you have nothing to put up for them except your last shreds of property. That's why I say you'll have to mortgage your future for money from now on."

"But—how does it all come about?"

He had not a very manly way of letting business appear a complete mystery to him when he was driven to the wall. It usually made his sister halt under the impression that she was taking an unfair advantage. But to-day she merely flushed a little deeper.

"I've warned you. I've been warning you for twenty-five years, Vance."

Once again he attempted to turn her. He always had the impression that if he became serious, deadly serious for ten consecutive minutes with his sister, he would be ruined. He kept on with his semi-jovial tone.

"There are two arts, Elizabeth. One is making money and the other is spending it. You've mastered one and I've mastered the other. Which balances things, don't you think?"

She did not melt; he waved down to the farm-land.

"Watch that wave of wind, Elizabeth."

A gust struck the scattering of aspens, and turned up the silver of the dark-green leaves. The breeze rolled across the trees in a long, rippling flash of light. But Elizabeth did not look down. Her glance was fixed on the changeless snow of Mount Discovery's summit.

"As long as you have something to spend,

spending is a very important art, Vance. But when the purse is empty it's a bit useless, it seems to me."

"Well, then, I'll have to mortgage my future. As a matter of fact, I suppose I could borrow what I want on my prospects."

A veritable Indian yell, instantly taken up and prolonged by a chorus of similar shouts, cut off the last of his words. Round the corner of the house shot a blood-bay stallion, red as the red of iron under the blacksmith's hammer, with a long, black tail snapping and flaunting behind him, his ears flattened, his beautiful vicious head outstretched in an effort to tug the reins out of the hands of the rider. Failing in that effort he leaped into the air like a steeplechaser and pitched down upon stiffened forelegs.

The shock rippled through the body of the rider and came to his head with a snap that jerked his chin down against his breast. The stallion rocked back on his hindlegs, whirled, and then flung himself deliberately on his back. A sufficiently cunning maneuver—first stunning the enemy with a blow and then crushing him before his senses returned. But he landed on nothing save hard gravel. The rider had whipped out of the saddle and stood poised, his hat jammed hard on his head and the wind curling the brim—a glorious specimen of young manhood, straight as an aspen, strong as the trunk of a silver spruce and now flushed and joyous with the battle.

The fighting horse, a little shaken by the impact of his fall, nevertheless whirled with catlike agility to his feet—a beautiful thing to watch. As he brought his forequarters off the earth he lunged at the rider with open mouth. A sidestep that would have done credit to a puglisit sent the youngster swerving past that danger. He leaped to the saddle at the same time that the blood-bay came to his four feet.

The chorus in full cry was around the house, four or five excited cow-punchers waving their sombreros and yelling for horse or rider according to the gallantry of the fight. And it was, indeed, a battle royal.

The bay was in the air more than he was on the ground, eleven or twelve hundred pounds of might writhing, snapping, bolting, halting, sunfishing with devilish cunning, dropping out of the air on one stiff foreleg with an accompanying sway to one side that gave the rider the effect of a cudgel blow at the back of the head and then a whip-snap to part the vertebræ. Whirling on his hind legs, and again flinging himself desperately on the ground, only to fail, come to his feet wtih the clinging burden once more maddeningly in place, and go again through a maze of fence-rowing and sunfishing until suddenly he straightened out and bolted down the slope like a runaway locomotive on a downgrade. A terrifying spectacle, but the rider sat erect, with one arm raised high above his head in triumph, and his yell trailing off behind him. From a running gait the stallion fell into a smooth pace—a true wild pacer, his hoofs beating the ground with the force and speed of pistons and hurling himself forward with incredible strides. Horse and rider lurched out of sight among the silver spruce.

"By the Lord, wonderful!" cried Vance Cornish.

He heard a stifled cry beside him, a cry of infinite pain.

"Is—is it over?"

And there sat Elizabeth the Indomitable, Elizabeth the Fearless, with her face buried in her hands like a girl of sixteen!

"Of course it's over," said Vance, wondering profoundly.

She seemed to dread to look up.

"And—Terence?"

"He's all right. Ever hear of a horse that could get that young wildcat out of the saddle? He clings as if he had claws. But—where did he get that red devil?"

She straightened, slowly letting her hands fall, and looked down the slope with eyes half frightened, half wistful. For the moment she was young, beautiful. Vance Cornish bit his lip.

"Terence ran him down—in the mountains—somewhere," she answered, speaking as one who had only half heard the question. "Two months of constant trailing to do it, I think. But, oh, you're right! The horse is a devil! And sometimes I think—"

She stopped, shuddering. Vance had re-

turned to the ranch only the day before after a long absence. More and more, after he had been away, he found it difficult to get in touch with things on the ranch. Once he had been a necessary part of the inner life. Now he was on the outside. Terence and Elizabeth were a perfectly completed circle in themselves.

CHAPTER III.

THE LAST OF THE COLBYS.

"IF Terry worries you like this," suggested her brother kindly, "why don't you forbid these pranks?"

She looked at him as if in surprise.

"Forbid Terry?" she echoed, and then smiled. Decidedly this was her first tone, a soft tone that came from deep in her throat. Instinctively Vance contrasted it with the way she had spoken to him. But it was always this way when Terry was mentioned. For the first time he saw it clearly. It was amazing how blind he had been. "Forbid Terence? Vance, that devil of a horse is part of his life. He was on a hunting trip when he saw Le Sangre—"

"Good Lord, did they call the horse that?"

"A French-Canadian was the first to discover him and he gave the name. And he's the color of blood, really. Well, Terence saw Le Sangre on a hilltop against the sky. And he literally went mad. Actually, he struck out on foot with his rifle and lived in the country and never stopped walking until he wore down Le Sangre somehow and brought him back hobbled—just skin and bones, and Terence not much more. Now Le Sangre is himself again and he and Terence have a fight—like that—every day. I dream about it; the most horrible nightmares!"

"And you don't stop it?"

"My dear Vance, how little you know Terence! You couldn't tear that horse out of his life without breaking his heart. I *know!*"

"So you suffer, day by day?"

"I've done very little else all my life," said Elizabeth gravely. "And I've learned to bear pain."

He swallowed. Also, he was beginning to grow irritated. He had never before had a talk with Elizabeth that contained so many reefs that threatened shipwreck. He returned to the gist of their conversation rather too bluntly.

"But to continue, Elizabeth, any banker would lend me money on my prospects."

"You mean the property which will come to you when I die?"

He used all his power, but he could not meet her glance. In spite of himself his eye was forced down to the flashing aspens and to the leisurely silver trail of Bear Creek among the spruces.

"You know that's a nasty way to put it, Elizabeth."

"Dear Vance," she sighed, "a great many people say that I'm a hard woman. I suppose I am. And I like to look facts squarely in the face. Your prospects begin with my death, of course."

He had no answer, but bit his lip nervously and wished the ordeal would come to an end.

"Vance," she went on, "I'm glad to have this talk with you. It's something you have to know. Of course I'll see that during my life or my death you'll be provided for. But as for your main prospects, do you know where they are?"

"Well?"

She was needlessly brutal about it, but as she had told him, her education had been one of pain.

"Your prospects are down there by the river on the back of Le Sangre."

Vance Cornish gasped.

"I'll show you what I mean, Vance. Come along."

The moment she rose some of her age fell from her. Her carriage was erect. Her step was still full of spring and decision, and she carried her head like a queen. In spite of his confusion of mind and his worry Vance admired her. True steel tells in the rapier and true blood in a woman.

She led the way into the house. It was a big, solid, two-story building which the mightiest wind could not shake. Henry Cornish had merely founded the house, just as he had founded the ranch; the main portion of the work had been done by his

daughter. And as they passed through her stern old eye rested peacefully on the deep, shadowy vistas, and her foot fell with just pride on the splendid rising sweep of the staircase. They passed into the roomy vault of the upper hall and went down to the end. She took out a big key from her pocket and fitted it into the lock; then Vance dropped his hand on her arm. His voice lowered.

"You've made a mistake, Elizabeth. This is father's room."

Ever since his death it had been kept unchanged, and practically unentered save for an occasional rare day of work to keep it in order. Now she nodded, and resolutely turned the key and swung the door open. Vance went in with an exclamation of wonder. It was quite changed from the solemn old room and the brown, varnished woodwork which he remembered. Cream-tinted paint now made the walls cool and fresh. The solemn engravings no longer hung above the bookcases. And the bookcases themselves had been replaced with built-in shelves pleasantly filled with rich bindings, black and red and deep yellow-browns. The old-fashioned mantel no longer topped the fireplace. Mounted heads were here and there. A tall cabinet stood open at one side filled with rifles and revolvers and shotguns of every description, and another cabinet was loaded with fishing apparatus. The stiff-backed chairs had given place to comfortable monsters of easy lines, flowing close to the floor. There were two tall floor lamps and a desk lamp, all with shades of light yellow with meager tints of rose showing through the silk lining. Vance Cornish, as one in a dream, peered here and there.

"God bless us!" he kept repeating. "God bless us! But where's there a trace of father?"

"I left it out," said Elizabeth huskily, "because this room is meant for—but let's go back. Do you remember that day twenty-four years ago when we took Jack Hollis's baby?"

"When *you* took it," he corrected. "I disclaim all share in the idea."

"Thank you," she answered proudly. "At any rate, I took the boy and called him Terence Colby."

"Why that name," muttered Vance, "I never could understand."

"Haven't I told you? No, and I hardly know whether to trust even you with the secret, Vance. But you remember we argued about it, and you said that blood would out; that the boy would turn out wrong; that before he was twenty-five he would have shot a man?"

"Dimly. I believe I said some of those things."

"You said them all, Vance. You said more. You reminded me of the Jukes family; you tried to prove that it's the blood that makes the man, and I held out that environment is the thing."

"I believe the talk ran like that."

"Well, Vance, I started out with a theory; but the moment I had that baby in my arms it became a matter of theory, plus, and chiefly plus. I kept remembering what you had said, and I was afraid. That was why I worked up the Colby idea."

"That's easy to see."

"It wasn't so easy to do. But I heard of the last of an old Virginia family who had died of consumption in Arizona. I traced his family. He was the last of it. Then it was easy to arrange a little story: Terence Colby had married a girl in Arizona, died shortly after; the girl died also, and I take the baby. Nobody can disprove what I say. There's not a living soul who knows that Terence is the son of Jack Hollis—except you and me."

"How about the woman I got the baby from?"

"I bought her silence until fifteen years ago. Then she died, and now Terry is convinced that he is the last representative of the Colby family."

She laughed with excitement and beckoned him out of the room and into another—Terry's room, farther down the hall. She pointed to a large photograph of a solemn-faced man on the wall.

"You see that?"

"Who is it?"

"I got it when I took Terry to Virginia last winter—to see the old family estate and go over the ground of the historic Colbys."

She laughed again, happily.

"Terry was wild with enthusiasm. He read everything he could lay his hands on about the Colbys. Discovered the year they landed in Virginia; how they fought in the Revolution; how they fought and died in the Civil War. Oh, he knows every landmark in the history of 'his' family. Of course, I encouraged him."

"I know," chuckled Vance. "Whenever he gets in a pinch I've heard you say: 'Terry, what should a Colby do?' And I've heard you say a dozen times: 'Terry, no matter what else may have been true of them, the Colbys have always been gentlemen.'"

Vance laughed uproariously.

"And," cut in Elizabeth, "you must admit that it has worked. There isn't a prouder, gentler, cleaner-minded boy in the world than Terry. Not blood. It's the blood of Jack Hollis. But it's what he thinks himself to be that counts. And now, Vance, admit that your theory is exploded."

He shook his head.

"Terry will do well enough. But wait till the pinch comes. You don't know how he'll turn out when the rub comes. *Then* blood will tell!"

She shrugged her shoulders angrily.

"You're simply being perverse now, Vance. At any rate, that picture is one of Terry's old 'ancestors,' Colonel Vincent Colby, of prewar days. Terry has discovered family resemblances, of course—same black hair, same black eyes, and a great many other things."

"But suppose he should ever learn the truth?" murmured Vance.

She caught her breath.

"That would be ruinous, of course. But he'll never learn. Only you and I know."

"A very hard blow, eh," said Vance, "if he were robbed of the Colby illusion and had Black-Jack put in its place as a cold fact? But of course we'll never tell him. In the mean time, what's all this mysterious changing of rooms mean, Elizabeth?"

Her color was never high. Now it became gray. Only her eyes remained burning, vivid, young. A woman who has never married and given of her life to make the lives of others, always retains one feature of undying youth—eyes, hair, smile, voice, perhaps. That one feature remains forever young and blazes out at one, now and then, through the mask of age.

"Remember you said his blood would tell before he was twenty-five; that the blood of Black-Jack would come to the surface; that he would have shot a man?"

"Still harping on that, Elizabeth? What if he does?"

"I'd disown him, throw him out penniless on the world, never see him again."

"You're a Spartan," said her brother in awe, as he looked on that thin, stern face. "Terry is your theory. If he disappoints you, he'll be simply a theory gone wrong. You'll cut him out of your life as if he were an algebraic equation and never think of him again."

"But he's *not* going wrong, Vance. Because, in ten days, he'll be twenty-five! And that's what all these changes mean. The moment it grows dark on the night of his twenty-fifth birthday I'm going to take him into my father's room and turn it over to him."

He had listened to her patiently, a little wearied by her unusual flow of words. Now he came out of his apathy with a jerk. He laid his hand on Elizabeth's shoulder and turned her so that the light shone full in her face. Then he studied her.

"What do you mean by that, Elizabeth?"

"Vance," she said steadily, but with a touch of pity in her voice, "I have waited for a score of years, hoping that you'd settle down and try to do a man's work either here or somewhere else. You haven't done it. Yesterday Mr. Cornwall came here to draw up my will. By that will I leave you an annuity, Vance, that will take care of you in comfort; but I leave everything else to Terry Colby. That's why I've changed the room. The moment it grows dark ten days from to-day I'm going to take Terry by the hand and lead him into the room and into the position of my father!"

Who shall say that there was not just a touch of unsisterly triumph, unwomanly hardness, in the gaze which Elizabeth fixed

upon her brother? There was some excuse. She had worked long and struggled bitterly, and all these years he had waited in idle comfort for her death to reap the harvest of her work. But more was revealed to her than she had expected. Under her keen eyes it seemed that the mask of youth which was Vance Cornish crumbled and fell away.

The flight of the years which he had hitherto escaped and outrun suddenly overtook him. A new man looked down at her. The firm flesh of his face became loose. His whole body was flabby. She had the feeling that if she pushed against his chest with the weight of her arm he would topple to the floor. That weakness gradually passed. A peculiar strength of purpose grew in its place.

"Of course, this is a very shrewd game, Elizabeth. You want to wake me up. You're using the spur to make me work. I don't blame you for using the bluff, even if it's a rather cruel one. But of course it's impossible for you to be serious in what you say."

"Why impossible, Vance?"

"Because you know that I'm the last male representative of our family. Because you know my father would turn in his grave if he knew that an interloper, a foundling, the child of a murderer, a vagabond, had been made the heir to his estate. But you aren't serious, Elizabeth; I understand."

He swallowed his pride, for panic grew in him in proportion to the length of time she maintained her silence.

"As a matter of fact, I don't blame you for giving me a scare, my dear sister. I have been a shameless loafer. I'm going to reform and lift the burden of business off your shoulders—let you rest the remainder of your life."

It was the worst thing he could have said. He realized it the moment he had spoken. This forced, cowardly surrender was worse than brazen defiance, and he saw her lip curl. An idler is apt to be like a sullen child, except that in a grown man the child's sulky spite becomes a dark malice, all-embracing. For the very reason that Vance knew he was receiving what he deserved, and that this was the just reward for his thriftless years of idleness, he began to hate Elizabeth with a cold, quiet hatred. There is something stimulating about any great passion. Now Vance felt his nerves soothed and calmed. His self-possession returned with a rush. He was suddenly able to smile into her face.

"After all," he said, "you're absolutely right. I've been a failure, Elizabeth—a rank, disheartening failure. You'd be foolish to trust the result of your life-labors in my hands—entirely foolish. I admit that it's a shrewd blow to see the estate go to—Terry."

He found it oddly difficult to name the boy.

"But why not? Why not Terry? He's a clean youngster, and he may turn out very well—in spite of his blood. I hope so. I really expect that he will. The Lord knows you've given him every chance and the best start in the world. I wish him luck!"

He reached out his hand, and her bloodless fingers closed strongly over it.

"There's the old Vance talking," she said warmly, a mist across her eyes. "I almost thought that part of you had died. But it's just as Terry says—Vance is a good sport!"

He writhed inwardly to have the boy's judgment quoted to his face.

"That's mighty kind of Terry," he said aloud. "By Jove, Elizabeth, think of that boy, coming out of nothing, everything poured into his hands—and now within ten days of his goal! Rather exciting, isn't it? Suppose he should stumble at the very threshold of his success? Eh?"

He pressed the point with singular insistence.

"Doesn't it make your heart beat, Elizabeth, when you think that he might fall—that he might do what I prophesied so long ago—shoot a man before he's twenty-five?"

She shrugged the supposition calmly away.

"My faith in him is based as strongly as the rocks, Vance. But if he fell, after the schooling I've given him, I'd throw him out of my life—forever!"

He paused a moment, studying her face with a peculiar eagerness.

Then he shrugged in turn. "Tush! Of course that's impossible. Let's go down."

CHAPTER IV.

VANCE PLANS.

WHEN they reached the front porch, deep-set, running across the entire face of the building, they saw Terence Colby coming up the terrace from the river road on Le Sangre. And a changed horse he was. One ear was forward as if he did not know what lay in store for him, but would try to be on the alert. One ear flagged warily back. He went slowly, lifting his feet with the care of a very weary horse. Yet, when the wind fluttered a gust of whirling leaves beside him, he leaped aside and stood with high head, staring, transformed in the instant into a creature of fire and wire-strung nerves. The rider gave to the side-spring with supple grace and then sent the stallion on up the hill.

Joyous triumph was in the face of Terry. His black hair, rather in need of the barber, was blowing about his forehead, for his hat was pushed back after the manner of one who has done a hard day's work and is ready to rest. He came close to the veranda, and Le Sangre lifted his fine head and stared fearlessly, curiously, with a sort of contemptuous pride, at Elizabeth and Vance.

"The killer is no longer a killer," laughed Terry. "Look him over, Uncle Vance. A beauty, eh?"

Elizabeth said nothing at all. But she rocked herself back and forth a trifle in her chair as she nodded. She glanced over the terrace, hoping that others might be there to see the triumph of her boy. Then she looked back at Terence. But Vance was regarding the horse.

"He might have a bit more in the legs, Terry."

"Not much more. A leggy horse can't stand mountain work—or any other work, for that matter, except a ride in the park."

"I suppose you're right. He's a picture horse, Terry. And a devilish eye, but I see that you've beaten him."

"Beaten him?" He shook his head. "We reached a gentleman's agreement. As long as I wear spurs he'll fight me till he gets his teeth in me or splashes my skull to bits with his heels. Otherwise he'll keep on fighting till he drops. But as soon as I take off the spurs and stop tormenting him, he'll do what I like. No whips or spurs for Le Sangre. Eh, boy?"

He held out the spurs so that the sun flashed on them. The horse stiffened with a shudder, and that forward look of a horse about to bolt came in his eyes.

"No, no!" cried Elizabeth.

But Terry laughed and dropped the spurs back in his pocket.

"I should say not. Le Sangre has crowded a week's work into twenty minutes, and I feel as if I'd been fighting a tornado. Come, boy!"

The stallion moved off, and Terry waved to them. Just as he turned the mind of Vance Cornish raced back to another picture—a man with long, black hair blowing about his face and a gun in either hand, sweeping through a dusty street with shots barking behind him. It came suddenly as a revelation, and left him downheaded with the thought.

"What is it, Vance?" asked his sister, reaching out to touch his arm.

"Nothing." Then he added abruptly: "I'm going for a jaunt for a few days, Elizabeth."

She grew gloomy.

"Are you going to insist on taking it to heart this way?"

"Not at all. I'm going to be back here in ten days and drink Terry's long life and happiness across the birthday-dinner table."

He marveled at the ease with which he could make himself smile in her face; and he also marveled that she did not see through him. Instead, she was flushing and nodding with pleasure.

"After all," decided Vance, "most women are fools, and Elizabeth is no exception."

"You noticed that," she was saying,

" his gentleman's agreement with Le Sangre? I've made him detest fighting with the idea that only brute beasts fight—men argue and agree."

" I've noticed that he never has trouble with the cow-punchers."

" They've seen him box," chuckled Elizabeth. " Besides, Terry isn't the sort that trouble-makers like to pick on. He has an ugly look when he's angry."

" H-m," murmured Vance. " I've noticed that. But as long as he keeps to his fists he'll do no harm. But what is the reason for surrounding him with guns, Elizabeth?"

" A very good reason. He loves them, you know. Anything from a shotgun to a derringer is a source of joy to Terence. And not a day goes by that he doesn't handle them."

" Certainly the effect of blood, eh?" suggested Vance.

She glanced sharply at him.

" You're determined to be disagreeable to-day, Vance. As a matter of fact, I've convinced him that for the very reason he is so accurate with a gun he must never enter a gun-fight. The advantage would be too much on his side against any ordinary man. That appeals to Terry's sense of fair play. No, he's absolutely safe, no matter how you look at it."

" No doubt."

He looked away from her and over the valley. The day had worn into the late afternoon. Bear Creek ran dull and dark in the shadow, and Mount Discovery was robed in blue to the very edge of its shining crown of snow. In this dimmer, richer light the Cornish ranch had never seemed so desirable to Vance. The wind had fallen away in this holy time of the day, and in the quiet the steady rush of the waterfall that tumbled over the side of Elizabeth's dam drew nearer to them.

Sunset was beginning to color the white spray already, and along the rapids where Bear Creek tumbled down out of Sleep Mountain there was a stain from a red cloud hanging high in the west. It was not a ranch; it was a little kingdom. And Vance was the dispossessed heir.

He knew that he was being watched, however, and all that evening he was at his best. At the dinner-table he guided the talk so that Terence Colby was the lion of the conversation. Afterward, when he was packing his things in his room for his journey of the next day, he was careful to sing at the top of his voice. He reaped a reward for this cautious acting, for the next morning, when he climbed into the buckboard that was to take him down the Blue Mountain Road and over to the railroad, his sister came down the steps and stood beside the wagon.

" You *will* come back for the birthday party, Vance?" she pleaded.

" You want me to?"

" You were with me when I got Terry. In fact, you got him for me. And I want you to be here when he steps into his own."

In this he found enough to keep him thoughtful all the way to the railroad while the buckskins grunted up the grade and then spun away down the long slope beyond. It was one of those little ironies of fate that he should have picked up the very man who was to disinherit him some twenty-four years later.

He turned the matter over in his mind when he was on the train. He decided that he had no grudge against Elizabeth. She had earned the ranch for herself, and she had a right to dispose of it as she saw fit. But she was overstepping. The law might have something to say in his favor if she attempted to let him off with an annuity and give all the rest to the foundling. However, he had no desire to fall back on the law save as a last resort. He had a deep-seated desire to upset Elizabeth with her own weapons.

He carried no grudge against her, but he certainly retained no tenderness. Hereafter he would act his part as well as he could to extract the last possible penny out of her. And in the mean time he must concentrate on tripping up Terence Colby, alias Hollis.

Vance saw nothing particularly vicious in this. He had been idle so long that he rejoiced in a work which was within his mental range. It included scheming, working always behind the scenes, pulling

strings to make others jump. And if he could trip Vance and actually make him shoot a man on or before that birthday, he had no doubt that his sister would actually throw the boy out of her house and out of her life. A woman who could give twenty-four years to a theory would be capable of grim things when the theory went wrong.

It was early evening when he climbed off the train at Garrison City. He had not visited the place since that cattle-buying trip of twenty-four years ago that brought the son of Black-Jack into the affairs of the Cornish family. Garrison City was mightily changed. In fact, it had become a city. There were two solid blocks of brick buildings next to the station, a network of paved streets, and no less than three hotels. It was so new to the eye and so obviously full of the "booster" spirit that he was appalled at the idea of prying through this modern shell and getting back to the heart and the memory of the old days of the town. He found the work even harder than he had thought.

At the restaurant he forced himself upon a grave-looking gentleman across the table. He found that the solemn-faced man was a traveling drummer. The venerable loafer in front of the blacksmith-shop was feeble-minded, and merely gaped at the name of Black-Jack. The proprietor of the hotel shook his head with positive antagonism.

"Of course, Garrison City has its past," he admitted, "but we are living it down, and have succeeded pretty well. I think I've heard of a ruffian of the last generation named Jack Hollis; but I don't know anything, and I don't care to know anything, about him. But if you're interested in Garrison City, I'd like to show you a little plot of ground in a place that is going to be the center of the—"

Vance Cornish made his mind a blank, let the smooth current of words slip off his memory as from an oiled surface, and gave up Garrison City as a hopeless job. Nevertheless it was the hotel proprietor who dropped a valuable hint.

"If you're interested in the early legends, why don't you go to the State Capitol. They have every magazine and every book that so much as mentions any place in the State."

So Vance Cornish went to the capitol and entered the library. It was a sweaty task and a most discouraging one. The name "Black-Jack" revealed nothing; and the name of Hollis was an equal blank, so far as the indices were concerned. Those were not the days when the magazines flung out an army of scouts who skirmished from the north pole to the south, from the pearl-diver to the Matterhorn, on a tireless hunt for adventures and adventurers, facts, or talk about facts. It was before the days when writers learned to give intimate portraits of statesmen at tea or débutantes playing golf.

Ten years later, had he lived so long, Black-Jack Hollis would have been hunted to the ground by fearless photographers and treed by daredevil reporters and immortalized in numberless pages of bad prose. As it was, he was preserved in legend only, and Vance Cornish could make no vital use of legend. He wanted something in cold print.

So he began an exhaustive search. He went through volume after volume of travel—the musty travel books which drenched the market in the late seventies and the early eighties, with photographs of the authors in tight gray trousers and frock coats on the first page and thousands of words of watered Macaulay. He stayed grimly by his task; but though he came upon mention of Black-Jack, he never reached the account of an eye-witness of any of those stirring hold-ups or train-robberies.

And then he began on the old files of magazines—magazines which were so hopelessly antiquated that they still thought they could hold a reader with page-long poems instead of tag-ends of verse for decoration. And still nothing. He was about to give up with four days of patient labor wasted when he struck gold in the desert—the very mine of information which he wanted.

"How I Painted Black-Jack," by Lawrence Montgomery.

There was the photograph of the painter, to begin with—a man who had discovered the beauty of the deserts of the Southwest.

But there was more—much more. It told how, in his wandering across the desert, he had hunted for something more than sand and rocks at dawn and at sunset—raw-colored sands and purple mesas blooming in the distance.

He had searched for a human being to fit into the picture and give the softening touch of life. But he never found the right type. He found white men and Indians in plenty, but never the face for which he had been looking. And then luck came and tapped him on the shoulder. A lone rider came out of the dusk and the desert and loomed beside his camp-fire. The moment the firelight flushed on the face of the man he knew this was the face for which he had been searching. He told how they fried bacon and ate it together; he told of the soft voice and the winning smile of the rider; he told of his eyes, unspeakably soft and unspeakably bold, and the agile, nervous hands, forever shifting and moving in the firelight.

The next morning he had asked his visitor to sit for a picture, and his request had been granted. All day he labored at the canvas, and by night the work was far enough along for him to dismiss his visitor. So the stranger asked for a small brush with black paint on it, and in the corner of the canvas drew in the words, "Yours, Black-Jack." Then he rode into the night.

Black-Jack! Lawrence Montgomery had made up his pack and struck straight back for the nearest town. There he asked for tidings of a certain Black-Jack, and there he got what he wanted in heaps. Every one knew Black-Jack—too well! There followed a brief summary of the history of the desperado and his countless crimes, unspeakable tales of cunning and courage and merciless vengeance taken.

Vance Cornish turned the last page of the article, and there was the reproduction of the painting. He held his breath when he saw it. The outlaw sat on his horse with his head raised and turned, and it was the very replica of Terence Colby as the boy had waved to them from the back of Le Sangre. More than a family, sketchy resemblance—far more.

There was the same large, dark eye; the same smile, half proud and half joyous; the same imperious lift of the head; the same bold carving of the features. There were differences, to be sure. The nose of Black-Jack had been more cruelly arched, for instance, and his cheek-bones were higher and more pronounced. But in spite of the dissimilarities the resemblance was more than striking. It might have stood for an actual portrait of Terence Colby masquerading in long hair. That is, if one did not have the original to look at.

When the full meaning of this photograph had sunk into his mind Vance Cornish closed his eyes and shut his hands. "Eureka!" he whispered to himself.

There was something more to be done. But it was very simple. It merely consisted in taking out a sharp pocket-knife and covertly cutting out the pages of the article in question. Then, carefully, for fear of loss, he jotted down the name and date of the magazine, folded his stolen pages, and fitted them snugly into his breast pocket.

He stood up from the table armed as with a gun, and he walked out of the room with a springy step. His threatened youth was returning to him. That night he ate his first hearty dinner in four days.

CHAPTER V.

AMMUNITION.

VANCE'S work was not by any means accomplished. Rather it might be said that he was in the position of a man with a dangerous charge for a gun and no weapon to shoot it. He started out to find the gun.

In fact, he already had it in mind. Twenty-four hours later he was in Craterville. Five days out of the ten before the twenty-fifth birthday of Terence had elapsed, and Vance was still far from his goal, but he felt that the lion's share of the work had been accomplished.

Craterville was a day's ride across the mountains from the Cornish ranch, and it was the county seat. It consisted of a wretched group of frame buildings stagger-

ing between great masses of black rock for protection. It was one of those towns which spring into existence for no reason that can be discovered, and cling to life generations after they should have died. But Craterville held one thing of which Vance Cornish was in great need, and that was Sheriff Joe Minter, familiarly called Uncle Joe. His reason for wanting the sheriff was perfectly simple. Uncle Joe Minter was the man who killed Black-Jack Hollis.

He had been a boy of eighteen then, shooting with a rifle across a window-sill. That shot had formed his life. He was now forty-two, and he had spent the interval as the professional enemy of criminals in the mountains. For the glory which came from the killing of Black-Jack had been sweet to the youthful palate of Minter, and he had cultivated his taste. Assiduous practise gave him skill with weapons, and a perfect knowledge of the mountains and a fair share of craft completed his equipment.

He became the most dreaded man-hunter in those districts where man-hunting was most common. He had been sheriff at Craterville for a dozen years now, and still his supremacy was not even questioned. And having made the region "bad times" for the lawless element, the sheriff often threatened that he would move elsewhere and try to find better hunting—a threat which always frightened Craterville and its neighbors.

Vance Cornish was lucky to find the sheriff in town presiding at the head of the long table of the hotel at dinner. He was a man of great dignity. He wore his stiff black hair, still untarnished by gray, very long, brushing it with difficulty to keep it behind his ears. It grew far down and over his collar, turning up a little at the ends. This mass of black hair framed a long, stern face, the angles of which had been made by years. But there was no sign of weakness. He had grown dry, not flabby. His cheeks were somewhat sunken; his mouth was a thin, straight line, and his fighting chin jutted out in profile.

He rose from his place to greet Vance Cornish. Indeed, the sheriff acted the part of master of ceremonies at the hotel, having a sort of silent understanding with the widow who owned the place. It was said that the sheriff would marry the woman sooner or later, he so loved to talk at her table. His talk doubled her business. Her table afforded him an audience; so they needed one another.

"You don't remember me," said Vance.

"I got a tolerable poor memory for faces," admitted the sheriff.

"I'm Cornish, of the Cornish ranch.

The sheriff was duly impressed. The Cornish ranch was a show-place. He arranged a chair for Vance at his right, and presently the talk rose above the murmur to which it had been depressed by the arrival of this important stranger. The increasing noise made a background. It left Vance alone with the sheriff.

"And how do you find your work, sheriff?" asked Vance; for he knew that Uncle Joe Minter's great weakness was his love of talk. Every one in the mountains knew it, for that matter.

"Dull," complained Minter; "damn dull. Men ain't what they used to be, or else the law is a heap stronger."

"The men who enforce the law are," said Vance.

The sheriff absorbed this patent compliment with the blank eye of satisfaction and rubbed his chin.

"But they's been some talk of rustling, pretty recent. I'm waiting for it to grow and get ripe. Then I'll bust it."

He made an eloquent gesture which Vance followed. He was distinctly pleased with the sheriff. For Minter was wonderfully preserved. His face seemed five years younger than his age. His body seemed even younger, round, smooth, powerful muscles padding his shoulders and stirring down the length of his big arms. And his hands had that peculiar light restlessness of touch which Vance remembered to have seen—in the hands of Terence Colby, alias Hollis!

"And how's things up your way?" continued the sheriff.

"Booming. By the way, how long is it since you've seen the ranch?"

"Never been there. Bear Creek Valley

has always been a quiet place since the Cornishes moved in; and they ain't been any call for a gent in my line of business up that way."

He grinned with satisfaction, and Vance nodded.

"If times are dull, why not drop over? We're having a celebration there in five days. Come and look us over."

"Maybe I might, and maybe I mightn't," said the sheriff. "All depends."

"And bring some friends with you," insisted Vance.

Then he wisely let the subject drop, and went on to a detailed description of the game in the hills around the ranch. That, he knew, would bring the sheriff if anything would. But he mentioned the invitation no more. There were particular reasons why he must not press it on the sheriff any more than on others in Craterville.

The next morning, before train-time, Vance went to the post-office and left the article on Black-Jack addressed to Terence Colby at the Cornish ranch. The addressing was done on a typewriter, which completely removed any means of identifying the sender. Vance played with Providence in only one way. He was so eager to strike his blow at the last possible moment that he asked the postmaster to hold the letter for three days, which would land it at the ranch on the morning of the birthday. Then he went to the train.

His self-respect was increasing by leaps and bounds. The game was still not won, but, starting with absolutely nothing, he had marshaled forces which had at least an even chance of winning. No wonder he smiled a self-congratulatory smile. In six days he had planted a charge which might send Elizabeth's twenty-four years of labor up in smoke.

He got off the train at Preston, the station nearest the ranch, and took a hired team up the road along Bear Creek Gorge. They debouched out of the Blue Mountains into the valley of the ranch in the early evening, and Vance found himself looking with new eyes on the little kingdom. He felt the happiness, indeed, of one who has lost a great prize, and then put himself in a fair way of winning it back.

They dipped into the valley road. Over the tops of the big silver spruces he traced the outline of Sleep Mountain against the southern sky. It was, in reality, a whole range, but the summits formed one long, smooth, undulating line which dimly suggested the body of a sleeping woman, her hair flowing down a soft slope in a blue mass of lodge-pole pine, and the rest of her figure loosely covered with drapery.

But no imagination was needed to feel the peace and symmetry of that pleasant mountain. And who but Vance, or the dwellers in the valley, would be able to duly appreciate such beauty? If there were any wrong in what he had done, this thought consoled him: the ends justified the means.

Now, as they drew closer, through the branches he made out glimpses of the dim, white front of the big house on the hill. A prospect as peaceful, he felt, as the quiet outlines of Sleep Mountain above it. Here was just such a place as he could have built for himself to spend the gentle end of his life. That big, cool house with the kingdom spilled out at its feet, the farming lands, the pastures of the hills, and the rich forest of the upper mountains. Certainty came to Vance Cornish. He wanted the ranch so profoundly that the thought of losing it became impossible.

CHAPTER VI.

PRIDE.

BUT while he had been working at a distance, things had been going on apace at the ranch, a progress which had now gathered such impetus that he found himself incapable of checking it. The blow fell immediately after dinner that same evening. Terence excused himself early to retire to the mysteries of a new pump-gun. Elizabeth and Vance took their coffee into the library.

The night had turned cool, with a sharp wind driving the chill through every crack; so a few sticks were sending their flames crumbling against the big back log. The lamp glowing in the corner was the only other light, and when they drew their

chairs close to the hearth great tongues of shadows leaped and fell on the wall behind them. Vance looked at his sister with concern. There was a certain complacency about her this evening that told him in advance that she had formed a new plan with which she was well pleased. And he had come to dread her plans.

She always filled him with awe—and never more so than to-night, with her thin, homely face illumined irregularly and by flashes. He kept watching her from the side, with glances.

"I think I know why you've gone away for these few days," she said.

"To get used to the new idea," he admitted with such frankness that she turned to him with unusual sympathy. "It was rather a shock at first."

"I know it was. And I wasn't diplomatic. There's too much man in me, Vance. Altogether too much, while you—"

She closed her lips suddenly. But he knew perfectly the unspoken words. She was about to suggest that there was too *little* man in him. He dropped his chin in his hand, partly for comfort and partly to veil the sneer. If she could have followed what he had done in the past six days!

"And you *are* used to the new idea?"

"You see that I'm back before the time was up and ahead of my promise," he said.

She nodded.

"Which paves the way for another new idea of mine."

He felt that a blow was coming and nerved himself against the shock of it. But the preparation was merely like tensing one's muscles against a fall. When the shock came it stunned him.

"Vance, I've decided to adopt Terence!"

The fire became a confused play of red in a cavern of black. His finger-tips sank into his cheek, bruising the flesh. What would become of his six days of work? What would become of his cunning and his forethought? All destroyed at a blow. For if she adopted the boy the very law would keep her from denying him afterward. For a moment it seemed to him that some devil must have forewarned her of his plans.

"You don't approve?" she said at last, anxiously.

He threw himself back in the chair and laughed. All his despair went into that hollow, ringing sound.

"Approve? It's a queer question to ask me. But let it go. I know I couldn't change you."

"I know that you have a right to advise," she said gently. "You are my father's son and you have a right to advise on the placing of his name."

He had to keep fighting against surging desires to throw his rage in her face. But he mastered himself, except for a tremor of his voice.

"When are you going to do it?"

"To-morrow."

"Elizabeth, why not wait until after the birthday ceremony?"

"Because I've been haunted by peculiar fears, since our last talk, that something might happen before that time. I've actually lain awake at night and thought about it! And I want to forestall all chances. I want to rivet him to me!"

He could see by her eagerness that her mind had been irrevocably made up, and that nothing could change her. She wanted agreement, not advice. And with consummate bitterness of soul he submitted to his fate.

"I suppose you're right. Call him down now and I'll be present when you ask him to join the circle—the family circle of the Cornishes, you know."

He could not school all the bitterness out of his voice, but she seemed too glad of his bare acquiescence to object to such trifles. She sent Wu Chi to call Terence down to them. He had apparently been in his shirt-sleeves working at the gun. He came with his hands still faintly glistening from their hasty washing, and with the coat which he had just bundled into still rather bunched around his big shoulders. He came and stood against the massive, rough-finished stones of the fireplace looking down at Elizabeth. There had always been a sort of silent understanding between him and Vance. They never exchanged more words and looks than were absolutely necessary. Vance realized it more than ever as he looked up to the tall, athletic figure. And he realized also that since he had last

looked closely at Terence the latter had slipped out of boyhood and into manhood. There was that indescribable something about the set of the chin and the straight-looking eyes that spelled the difference.

"Terence," she said, "for twenty-four years you have been my boy."

"Yes, Aunt Elizabeth."

He acknowledged the gravity of this opening statement by straightening a little, his hand falling away from the stone against which he had been leaning. But Vance looked more closely at his sister. He could see the gleam of worship in her eyes. She patently loved every inch of that clean young life.

"And now I want you to be something more. I want you to be my boy in the eyes of the law, so that when anything happens to me your place won't be threatened."

He was straighter than ever.

"I want to adopt you, Terence!"

Somehow, in those few moments they had been gradually building to a climax. It was prodigiously heightened now by the silence of the boy. The throat of Vance tightened with excitement.

"I will be your mother, in the eyes of the law," she was explaining gently, as though it were a mystery which Terry could not understand. "And Vance, here, will be your uncle. You understand, my dear?"

What a world of brooding tenderness went into her voice! Vance wondered at it. But he wondered more at the stiff-standing form of Terence, and his silence; until he saw the tender smile vanish from the face of Elizabeth and alarm come into it. All at once Terence had dropped to one knee before her and taken her hands. And now it was he who was talking slowly, gently, explaining something that might be difficult to understand.

"All my life you've given me things, Aunt Elizabeth. You've given me everything. Home, happiness, love—everything that could be given. So much that you could never be repaid, and all I can do is to love you, you see, and honor you as if you were my mother in fact. But there's just one thing that can't be given. And that's a name!"

He paused. Elizabeth was listening with a stricken face, and the heart of Vance thundered with his excitement. Vaguely he felt that there was something fine and clean and honorable in the heart of this youth which was being laid bare; but about that he cared very little. He was getting at facts and emotions which were valuable to him in the terms of dollars and cents.

"It makes me choke up," said Terence, "to have you offer me this great thing. I tell you, it brings the tears to my eyes to have you offer me your name. It's a fine name, Cornish. But you know that I can't do it. It would be cowardly—a sort of rotten treason for me to change. It would be wrong. I know it would be wrong. I'm a Colby, Aunt Elizabeth. Every time that name is spoken I feel it tingling down to my finger-tips. I want to stand straighter, live cleaner. When I looked at the old Colby place in Virginia last year it brought the tears to my eyes. I felt as if I were a product of that soil. Every fine thing that has ever been done by a Colby is a strength to me. I've studied them. And every now and then when I come to some brave thing they've done I wonder if I could do it. And then I say to myself that I *must* be able to do just such things or else be a shame to my blood.

"Give me a name? Oh, Aunt Elizabeth, I know what a great honor and kindness you're doing to me; but even if I should change my name to Cornish my blood would still be Colby through and through. That would be the name I'd respond to like an anthem. Change my name? Why, I've gone all my life thanking God that I come of a race of gentlemen, clean-handed, and praying God to make me worthy of it. That name is like a whip over me. It drives me on and makes me want to do some fine big thing one of these days. Think of it! I'm the last of a race. I'm the end of it. The last of the Colbys! Why, when you think of it, you see how I can't possibly change, don't you? If I lost that I'd lose the best half of myself and my self-respect! You understand, don't you? Not that I slight the name of Cornish for an instant. But even if names can be changed, blood can't be changed!"

She turned her head. She met the gleaming eyes of Vance, and then let her glance probe the fire and shadow of the hearth.

"It's all right, my dear," she said faintly. "Stand up."

"I've hurt you," he said contritely, leaning over her. "I feel—like a dog. Have I hurt you?"

"Not the least in the world. I only offered it for your happiness, Terry. And if you don't need it there's no more to be said!"

He bent and kissed her forehead.

"Now run back to your greasy guns and forget about this."

The moment he had disappeared through the tall doorway, Vance, past control, exploded.

"Of all the damnable exhibitions of pride in a young upstart, this—"

"Hush, hush!" said Elizabeth faintly. "It's the finest thing I've ever heard Terry say. But it frightens me, Vance. It frightens me to know that I've formed the character and the pride and the self-respect of that boy on—a lie! Pray God that he never learns the truth!"

CHAPTER VII.

VANCE'S LETTER.

THERE was not many guests. Elizabeth had chosen them carefully from families which had known her father, Henry Cornish, when, in his reckless, adventurous way, he had been laying the basis of the Cornish fortune in the Rockies. Indeed, she was a little angry when she heard of the indiscriminate way in which Vance had scattered the invitations, particularly in Craterville.

But, as he said, he had acted so as to show her that he had entered fully into the spirit of the thing, and that his heart was in the right place as far as this birthday party was concerned, and she could not do otherwise than accept his explanation.

Some of the bidden guests, however, came from a great distance, and as a matter of course a few of them arrived the day before the celebration and filled the quiet rooms of the old house with noise. Elizabeth accepted them with resignation, and even pleasure, because they all had pleasant things to say about her father and good wishes to express for the destined heir, Terence Colby. It was carefully explained that this selection of an heir had been made by both Elizabeth and Vance, which removed all cause for remark. Vance himself regarded the guests with distinct amusement. But Terence was disgusted.

"What these true Westerners need," he said to Elizabeth later in the day, "is a touch of blood. No feeling of family or the dignity of family precedents out here."

It touched her shrewdly. More than once she had felt that Terry was on the verge of becoming a complacent prig. So she countered with a sharp thrust.

"You have to remember that you're a Westerner born and bred, my dear. A very Westerner yourself!"

"Birth is an accident — birthplaces, I mean," smiled Terence. "It's the blood that tells."

"Terry, you're a snob!" exclaimed Aunt Elizabeth.

"I hope not," he answered. "But look yonder, now!"

Old George Armstrong's daughter, Nelly, had gone up a tree like a squirrel and was laughing down through the branches at a raw-boned cousin on the ground beneath her.

"And what of it?" said Elizabeth. "That girl is pretty enough to please any man; and she's the type that makes a wife."

Terry rubbed his chin with his knuckles, thoughtfully. It was the one family habit that he had contracted from Vance, much to the irritation of the latter.

"After all," said Terry with complacency, "what are good looks with bad grammar?"

Elizabeth snorted, literally and most unfemininely.

"Terence," she said, lessoning him with her bony, long forefinger, "you're just young enough to be wise about women. When you're a little older you'll get sense. If you want white hands and good grammar, how do you expect to find a wife in the mountains?"

Terry answered with unshaken. lordly

calm. "I haven't thought about the details. They don't matter. But a man must have standards of criticism."

"Standards your foot!" cried Aunt Elizabeth. "You insufferable young prig. That very girl laughing down through the branches—I'll wager she could set your head spinning in ten seconds if she thought it worth her while to try."

"Perhaps," smiled Terence. "In the mean time she has freckles and a vocabulary without growing pains."

Aunt Elizabeth was speechless. She glared at Terence. Her own vocabulary was not impeccable; she had done too much work with and among men.

"What in thunder are you going to try to find in women?" she asked. "Do you think you can cut a slip on Fifth Avenue and ask it to strike root and blossom out here?"

"Why not?" answered Terence serenely. "You did that very thing, you know."

Aunt Elizabeth was silenced. She rubbed her long nose.

"Are you going to hunt for a woman like me—an iron-woman?" she asked with attempted sarcasm.

"It's the mind that counts," asserted Terence.

"All men are fools," declared Aunt Elizabeth; "but boys are idiots, bless 'em! Terence, before you grow up you'll have sore toes from stumbling, take my word for it! Do you know what a wise man would do?"

"Well?"

"Go out and start a terrific flirtation with Nelly."

"For the sake of experience?" sighed Terence.

"Good Heavens," groaned Aunt Elizabeth. "Terry, you're impossible! Where are you going now?"

"Out to see El Sangre."

"To ride him?"

"Of course. Or talk to him."

"Talk to a horse?"

"Lots of ways of doing that. El Sangre has a vocabulary—fully as large as Nelly's, I give you my word. And what he says means more."

He went whistling out the door, and she followed him with confused feelings of anger, pride, joy, and fear. She went to a side window and saw him go fearlessly into the corral where the man-destroying El Sangre was kept. And the big stallion, red fire in the sunshine, went straight to him and nosed at a hip pocket. They had already struck up a perfect understanding. Deeply she wondered at it.

She had never loved the mountains and their people and their ways. It had been a battle to fight. She had fought the battle, won, and gained a hollow victory. And watching Terry caress the great, beautiful horse, she knew vaguely that his heart, at least, was in tune with the wilderness. Indeed, she thought there was something strangely similar in the wild horse and the untamed youth—the same strength unconscious of its power for evil or for good.

"I wish to Heaven, Terry," she murmured, "that you could find a master as El Sangre has done. You need teaching!"

Which was, of course, entirely true. But it was a decided reflection on the upbringing she had given him. Often she had a feeling that he escaped her. That there was too much of him for her to grasp with one effort of eye and mind and heart. And in moments of bitterness she knew that it was because she was not his mother in blood. She had not paid the great price of pain and doubt and hope, and therefore she could not reap the great reward. When she turned from the window she found Vance watching her.

He had a habit of obscurely melting into a background and looking out at her unexpectedly. All at once she knew that he had been there listening during all of her talk with Terence. Not that the talk had been of a peculiarly private nature, but it angered her. There was just a semblance of eavesdropping about the presence of Vance. For she knew that Terence unbosomed himself to her as he would do in the hearing of no other human being. However, she mastered her anger and smiled at her brother. He had taken all these recent changes which were so much to his disadvantage with a good spirit that astonished and touched her.

"Do you know what I'm going to give

Terry for his birthday?" he said, sauntering toward her.

"Well?" A mention of Terence and his welfare always disarmed her completely. It was the one conversational thrust for which she had no parry. She opened her eyes and her heart and smiled at her brother.

"There's no set of Scott in the house. I'm going to give Terry one."

"Do you think he'll ever read the novels? I never could. That antiquated style, Vance, keeps me at arm's length."

"A stiff style because he wrote so rapidly. But there's the greatest body and bone of character. Except for his heroes. Terry reminds me of them, in a way. No thought, not very much feeling, but a great capacity for physical action."

She felt like saying that this was a rather qualified compliment. But she knew the nature of Vance made him mix the good and the bad together. If he lifted a man up one moment he wanted to knock him down the next. She listened while he expanded his theme.

"You see, what Terence needs is some sort of intellectual interest. He's only educated on the surface. Give him a lot of horses, and trails to ride 'em on, and he never thinks about books and the inside of his mind. Give him enough open country and he'll never do anything but see and hear things without listening to what wise heads have to say."

"I think you'd like to be Terry's adviser," she said.

"I wouldn't aspire to the job," yawned Vance, "unless I could ride well and shoot well. If a man can't do that he ceases to be a man in Terry's eyes. And if a woman can't talk pure English she isn't a woman."

"That's because he's young," said Elizabeth.

"It's because he's a prig," sneered Vance. He had been drawn farther into the conversation than he planned; now he retreated carefully. "But another year or so may help him."

He retreated before she could answer, but he left her thoughtful, as he hoped to do. He had a standing theory that the only way to make a woman meditate is to keep her from talking. And he wanted very much to make Elizabeth meditate the evil in the son of Black-Jack. Otherwise all his plans might be useless and his seeds of destruction fall on barren soil. He was intensely afraid of that, anyway. His hope was to draw the boy and the sheriff together on the birthday and guide the two explosives until they met on the subject of the death of Black-Jack. Either Terry would kill the sheriff or the sheriff would kill Terry. Vance hoped for the latter, but rather expected the former to be the outcome, and if it were, he was inclined to think that Elizabeth would sooner or later make excuses for Terry and take him back into the fold of her affections. Accordingly, his work was, in the few days that intervened, to plant all the seeds of suspicion that he could. Then, when the dénouement came, those seeds might blossom overnight into poison-flowers.

In the late afternoon he took up his position in an easy chair on the big veranda. The mail was delivered, as a rule, just before dusk, one of the cow-punchers riding down for it. Grave fears about the loss of that all-important missive to Terry haunted him, for the postmaster was a doddering old fellow who was quite apt to forget his head. Consequently he was vastly relieved when the mail arrived and Elizabeth brought the familiar big envelope out to him, with its typewritten address.

"Looks like a business letter, doesn't it?" she asked Vance.

"More or less," said Vance, covering a yawn of excitement.

"But how on earth could any business—it's post-marked from Craterville."

"Somebody may have heard about his prospects; they're starting early to separate him from his money."

"Vance, how much talking did you do in Craterville?"

It was hard to meet her keen old eyes.

"Too much, I'm afraid," he said frankly. "You see, I've felt rather touchy about the thing. I want people to know that you and I have agreed on making Terry the heir to the ranch. I don't want any one to suspect that we differed. I suppose I talked too much about the birthday plans."

She sighed with vexation and weighed the letter in her hand.

"I've half a mind to open it."

His heart-beat fluttered and paused.

"Go ahead," he urged, with well-assured carelessness.

She shook down the contents of the envelope preparatory to opening it.

"It's nothing but printed stuff, Vance. I can see that, through the envelope."

"But wait a minute, Elizabeth. It might anger Terry to have even his business mail opened. He's touchy, you know."

She hesitated, then shrugged her shoulders.

"I suppose you're right. Let it go." She laughed at her own concern over the matter. "Do you know, Vance, that sometimes I feel as if the whole world were conspiring to get a hand on Terry?"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

In Business for Himself

by John Holden

EVER since he was chin high to a candy counter, Chester P. Boyd had longed to be in business for himself. As a mere boy, he had studied the careers of Rockefeller, Carnegie, Horatio Alger, and the celebrated early bird that caught a worm, and in consequence of the knowledge thereby acquired he had formed a mighty resolution to work for himself rather than pile up pelf for some tyrannical employer.

While still in school, Chester had actually acquired a business of his own, too; built it up from nothing, in fact, and by virtue of its success became something of a financial magnate in his own social set. It was not the sort of business that a national bank or a commercial agency would have looked upon with favor, being only the local agency for a famous advertising periodical that also printed some reading matter, but it was sufficient to provide pleasant metallic tinklings in his trouser-pockets and buy lollypops for half the girls in the block, and for a matter of three or four years that was all that Chester required.

After he had been graduated from high school, however, Chester was forced to the conclusion that pedling a periodical from door to door was no suitable occupation for a man of the world who must array himself in evening clothes, and purchase flowers and theater tickets, and take dancing and ukelele lessons. It was undignified, and the dividends were no longer satisfactory. His parents, too, insisted that he should enter some banking or other recognized business institution.

Chester pleaded that he would rather start a news-stand, or perhaps a hat-cleaning establishment; but his parents were adamant, and also lacking in cash, so the result was that Chester began to serve a life sentence behind the iron bars of a Wall Street bank. His first duty was to act as chauffeur to an adding machine, but he was informed that if he attended strictly to business he might hope to work upward to

a responsible position in fifteen or twenty years.

Although he realized that it was an honor to be able to enter the magnificent portals of a great bank every morning, just as though he were a trust magnate, Chester was nevertheless not entirely contented. The job of being a minute cog in a big wheel was not half so alluring as had been his own personal business of enticing nickels from reluctant pockets. There was no thrill in the task of manipulating a counting machine. The sight of money lying around in the tellers' cages like so many bundles of cigars ceased to hold his interest when he came to a full realization of the fact that it was as non-spendable as Captain Kidd's doubloons. The old hankering to have a business of his own grew upon him. He turned again to the stories of Carnegie, the early bird, Alger, Rockefeller, *et al*, and one day he bought a little book entitled "How to Win Success."

Oddly enough, it was this book that precipitated a crisis in Chester's life. He carried it around in his coat pocket, and during a lull in business one day he took it out and was reading a chapter entitled "The Value of Attending Strictly to Business," when he felt a gentle tap on his shoulder and turned to face the stern countenance of the third assistant secretary to the vice-president.

"Is that all you've got to do?" the 3rd a. s. to the v. p. inquired.

"Yes, sir — for the moment," Chester stammered.

"Let me see that book." Chester had employed his finger as a book-marker, so the admiral of the adding-machine fleet was able to note which chapter he had been reading. "That's good advice; why don't you take it?" he demanded.

"I was—er—going to," replied Chester. His pink and white cheeks were all pink now.

"I see." The boss appraised Chester for a silent moment. "Come over to my desk," he said, and Chester went.

"Has it ever occurred to you, Mr. Boyd, that perhaps you are out of place in this institution?" he queried.

"Yes, sir," said Chester in the straightforward manner of one who never employs words to conceal thought rather than reveal it.

"Oh, it has, eh!" the boss exploded. "Well, sir, the same thing has occurred to me. You are a good man, Boyd, but obviously you are unfitted for a banking career. You are too independent. You place your own interests ahead of the bank's, and that, sir, is something that we cannot tolerate in this institution."

Chester was on the point of remarking that Carnegie, the early bird, and even the famous founder of the bank itself had apparently been more intent upon their personal success than upon the success of others, but he allowed the opportunity to pass.

"In fact, I have reluctantly reached the conclusion, sir, that the quicker you leave this institution the better it will be for all concerned," continued the official. "You will receive two weeks' additional pay in addition to your salary to date, Mr. Boyd, and this evening we will say good-by to you."

"All — all right, sir," stammered Chester, and with a very red face and an all-gone feeling in the region of his backbone, he returned to his adding machine.

He flung his book on how to win success into a wastebasket, finished his day's work, and made his exit from the bank with no more job than a park hobo, and hardly any more capital to start a business of his own than is possessed by the common or prairie variety of jack-rabbit.

Nevertheless it was to a business of his own that Chester's thoughts persisted in turning. On his way home he purchased a copy of the periodical that, back in his schooldays, had provided him with lollypop money and looked through it in haphazard fashion. He found that it had grown so fat and prosperous that it was now a considerable task to find a column of reading matter among the advertisements, so he did not bother to search, but contented himself with the vivid proclamations of the merits of Leather Medal Flour and Roughmobiles and Tar-and-Feather Floor Mops and so on. Then, in a pregnant moment, he hit upon the modest little announcement that

was destined to change the course of his career as a stone diverts the streamlet that later grows into a mighty river:

BE YOUR OWN BOSS

Why work for wages when you can own a business of your own? Our local representatives average from fifty dollars to five hundred dollars a week. You can do the same taking orders for our justly famous Kant-Kreak Boots and Shoes.

Boots and shoes! That sounded like a pretty good line of merchandise to the young man who must needs do something and do it soon. It was dignified; there was good money in each sale that one made; everybody had to have them. Undoubtedly it would be a better business than pedling a five-cent periodical that the average person did not need any more than a cat needs fins. He had been able to make money with five-cent sales of a luxury; why, therefore, should he not be able to make an excellent income with seven-dollar sales of a necessity?

The more Chester thought about becoming a local representative for Kant-Kreak Boots and Shoes, the more did the proposition appeal to him. He read and studied all the details of the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

One did not need to pile up useless expense by opening a store. Goodness, no! The Kant-Kreak plan had that old-fashioned method of merchandising beaten forty ways, as the saying is. One simply made pleasant calls on ladies and gentlemen in their homes, and in a few well-chosen words explained to them the stupendous merits of the celebrated Kant-Kreak shoe. The rest was a mere matter of taking their money and wiring in rush orders for more shoes, which orders, the advertisement stated, could now be filled with neatness and despatch. The best of it was that one could sell to the same customers again and again, and thus build up a business that, after a while, would run on its own momentum, like a flivver going down hill.

Accompanying the announcement there was the picture of one Jaroslav P. Poindexter, standing beside a truck full of Kant-Kreak shoes. Not many months before this gentleman had been a simple farmer's boy, it appeared, with no more knowledge of the boot and shoe business than a centiped possesses, and look at him now! His previous month's sales had totaled one thousand eight hundred and eighty-three dollars, with numerous feet in his territory that might still be enticed inside the best shoe on earth. It was the chance of a lifetime, and one had better apply for territory immediately before it was all taken up like oil land in Oklahoma. No great amount of capital was required. Fifty dollars would provide one with a stock of twelve pairs, and that, considering the fact that they sold like bread in a famine, would be sufficient for a start.

At home that evening Chester totted up his available cash and found that it amounted to seventy-five dollars, just enough to enable him to get under way. He recollected that various captains of finance had been celebrated for their prompt decisions, so, without wasting more than half an hour in thinking the matter over, he sent fifty dollars to the Kant-Kreak people and asked that he be assigned a medium-sized up-State town in which to start his new career. There were altogether too many shoe-stores in New York; also the advertisement had hinted that the smaller cities and towns offered the best shoe-selling opportunities.

With gratifying promptness Chester received twelve pairs of Kant-Kreak shoes, assorted ladies' and gentlemen's sizes, and upon examination they seemed to be perfectly good, sensible shoes. They did not possess the ridiculous high heels that one sometimes sees on Fifth Avenue, also they were gratifyingly free from such silly affectations as holes in the toes and a harness-like arrangement of straps. They looked good to Chester. He was further gratified by receiving the identical territory that he applied for. All in all, it was an enthusiastic young man that set off for the scene of his coming commercial triumph.

It was late in the evening when Chester alighted from a train at his destination and took the first steps toward becoming a merchant prince. These steps led him up the main street, suit-case in one hand and shoe-case in the other.

He noted that the city seemed pretty well provided with shoe-stores, but these did not cause him much uneasiness. No Kant-Kreak shoes were stocked; just gaudy contraptions all fussed up with scrolls and scallops for men, and silly spool heels and crazy color combinations for women. As if men wanted to bedeck their feet in shoes that looked like waffles, or women wanted black and white shoes with red heels! Doubtless people bought them because they could get nothing else. He would show them what a really sensible shoe was.

At the Y. M. C. A., Chester was directed to a rooming-house. He proceeded thither, and after submitting to a cross-examination by a sharp-featured lady who thought he was pedling hooch, he was given a room. He set his alarm-clock for an early hour and went to bed, all buoyed up with hope and eager anticipation for the morrow.

Next morning he rose early and had some business cards, bearing his new address, run off at a quick-print shop. Then he picked out a prosperous-looking residential street that boasted iron deer on several of its big, green lawns, and boldly walked up to the front door of the first house.

His ring was answered by a surprised-looking colored girl.

"Good morning," Chester said. "I am introducing the celebrated Kant-Kreak shoe. If you will let me show it to you—"

"Naw, I don't want no shoes," interrupted the girl, and made a motion to close the door.

"It's the lady of the house that I really want to see," Chester insisted.

"She don't need no shoes neither—she's got shoes—and 'sides she ain't up yet."

Chester was loath to surrender even in the face of such discouragement. His printed instructions had assured him that sales could often be made to persons who at first seemed disinclined to buy.

"Perhaps if I called later—" he suggested, and handed her his business card.

"Naw, 't won't do you no good. Madam she don't never buy from no pedler."

Pedler! The word had a singularly disagreeable sound. Chester's air was not quite so jaunty as he proceeded to the next house.

A sleepy-eyed woman came to the door in a dressing-gown.

"I buy my shoes in regular stores," she said sharply, and closed the door in his face.

A milkman, on his way from the back door to his wagon, overheard the remark.

"Heh, buddy," he said. "You can't sell anything this early in the morning. Folks ain't awake yet. Take a tip from me and wait till 'long about ten o'clock."

"Thanks—er—I believe I will," Chester said, and in rather a crestfallen manner he retraced his steps to his rooming-house.

Again his thoughts reverted to the early bird of song and story whose example he had endeavored to follow; but while it was evident that early hours were desirable in the worm-catching business, it did not seem to follow that they were equally praiseworthy in the shoe-selling trade.

At ten o'clock Chester resumed his interrupted canvass by calling at the third house on his chosen block. To his gratification a polite lady welcomed him inside and listened attentively to his selling talk, then with the same cold politeness she said: "Thank you for explaining your proposition, but I prefer to patronize local tradesmen rather than outsiders."

He called at the fourth house and was gently repulsed; he called at the fifth and was turned down quite rudely. The sixth and seventh were equally barren of results, and at the eighth a dog put teeth marks in his sample case.

In the afternoon his luck was better. A lady who said she was divorced and glad of it examined his shoes with interest and said she would be glad to have a pair only her alimony was overdue, and couldn't Chester let her have a pair on credit? Chester could not, whereupon she remarked that this was a hard world and probably he would starve to death pedling shoes, what with the better styles down-town and all. Not that she cared a snap, all men being brutes anyway who wouldn't pay their alimony if they could wriggle out of it, and probably Chester was as bad as the rest or worse, he having a wicked eye like the male vamp in some film she had seen but couldn't remember the name of.

Chester was so entertained by this chatter that he did not begin to lose heart again until he had been turned down at five other houses. He finished the day with no business done, and with a sneaking suspicion that perhaps a popular five-cent periodical was a better selling proposition than a seven-dollar pair of shoes after all.

His landlady seemed quite interested in his career.

"I've had all kinds of fakirs stopping at my place, from corn doctors to fortune-telling Hindus, but never till you came did I have a shoe salesman," she said. "Did you sell a lot of them?"

"Not as yet," stated Chester with all the nonchalance he could muster up, which was not much.

"No, and I guess you won't. There's lots of good shoe-stores in this town." She added in a kindly manner: "Now if you'd like to accept a nice genteel job in a brickyard, I know where you might possibly get on."

Chester declined with thanks and dignity, and went to his room.

He was no quitter, so in the morning he resumed his canvass with all his erstwhile jauntiness. But as the day wore on his step became a plod, and he lugged his sample-case from house to house in the manner of a convict dragging a ball and chain. Nobody wanted Kant-Kreak shoes except a kindly-featured old lady who called him a bonnie boy and took a motherly interest in him, and he did not happen to have her size.

Folks told him that his shoe could not be any good or the regular stores would stock it; that his styles were forty years behind the times; that the toes were too blunt; that the toes were too pointed; that his heels were too low; that his heels were too high; that everything under the sun was wrong with his proposition; that if he wanted to sell shoes why didn't he get him a respectable job in a shoe-store?

Chester was minded to admit defeat at the end of the second day, but upon reflection he decided to apply to his venture the rules of baseball, which decree that one isn't out until he had missed the ball three times; and upon the third day he resumed his canvassing with small hope and large apprehension.

Ringing a door-bell was now a task that he dreaded as much as a green soldier dreads going over the top. Between one house and another he slowed his steps down to a creep so that the expected and dreaded repulse would be longer delayed.

At noon he had sold nothing and had definitely decided to abandon his task, but fear of being self-convicted as a quitter was upon him, so he resolved to plod through the afternoon regardless of what happened. He did plod, too, until four o'clock, and then the amazing thing that he was destined to remember all his life occurred. He rang the door-bell of a big house set well back from the street in a luxurious vista of green grass and shrubbery that was without any disfiguring iron dogs or deer, and in a moment the door was opened.

But not this time by a sour-featured dame with scorn in her eyes and barbed remarks upon her tongue. On the contrary, it was the most engaging girl that Chester had ever seen since leaving New York who answered his ring. The golden sheen of the sun was in her hair, merriment danced in her alluring brown eyes, and her voice, as she invited him to enter, was like the rich, golden tone of some precious violin. From somewhere in the house behind her came peals of laughter. Evidently something unusual was going on in this palatial home.

"I am introducing the famous Kant-Kreak shoe," Chester started his customary patter. "It possesses style and comfort, distinction and pep, and the price is no higher than for ordinary shoes. It cannot be bought in common stores, but is being introduced to a select—"

"Fine! We'll all have a look." His prospect asked him to come in, and called to the merrymakers: "Oh, girls! Look who's here!"

Half a dozen fair charmers crowded into the room and ranged about Chester and the first girl.

"What's doing, Elaine?" they wanted to know, and in the manner of a circus barker, Elaine told them.

"We have with us to-day," she orated, "a genuine, blown-in-the-bottle salesman.

Often we have heard of the silver-tongued oratory of these gifted gentlemen, who are able, it is said, to charm even the birds off the trees, but never, I'll venture to say, have we had the priceless opportunity of observing one in action at such close range." She looked at Chester's business card which he had handed her. "Ladies, I therefore take pleasure in introducing for your approval Mr. Chester Boyd, shoe salesman extraordinary, who will now demonstrate how he lures unwary dollars from the pockets of the proletariat — or something like that. Go ahead, Mr. Boyd."

"No, sir!" A bobbed-haired little feminine imp spoke up commandingly. "He's got to sing for us first. No fair luring dollars till he sings. Will you sing, Mr. Boyd?"

Mr. Boyd could and would. In fact, Chester rather welcomed the opportunity. The gaiety of this little party, in such sharp contrast to the innumerable rebukes he had suffered, was contagious. He felt so grateful for being recognized as a human being that he was willing to do almost anything that was requested of him. So he sang a popular song, while Elaine accompanied him on the piano, and his little audience applauded loudly.

Even then, however, the girls were not in a buying mood. They asked Chester if he could recite something, and after he had done so the young lady who had commanded the first song insisted upon exhibiting a new dance she had recently learned. Then some one else sang, and in fact the gathering seemed to forget that Chester was a salesman instead of a regular member of the party. Time after time he was about to interrupt the gay proceedings, but he sensed that commercial activity would not be welcome at the moment, and he kept putting off the task of getting down to business. Finally he put pleasure behind him, and with an effort began:

"Ladies, as I told Miss Elaine at the start, I have here the finest shoe—"

That was as far as he got. From the street came the loud honking of automobiles, and the girls flew to the windows.

"There are the boys! Let's go!" some one shouted, and in two seconds Chester's audience had grabbed up hats and wraps and were flying down the pathway to where three men in three big cars awaited them.

Elaine, too, donned her wraps, though she did not immediately rush away.

"I'm sorry," she said to Chester, "but you see how it is. You couldn't get the girls to listen to shoe talk now."

"Couldn't you—" Chester did not complete the sentence. He realized the utter futility of doing so. It was only too painfully apparent that Elaine, too, had no time to waste on shoes.

"Some other day, perhaps," she said; but Chester knew there would be no other day for him. He picked up his grip and preceded her out the door. She walked about ten steps with him and thanked him for entertaining her and her friends, and then, evidently feeling that she had done her full duty toward him, she ran the remaining distance to the impatiently waiting cars, and in five seconds the entire party was honk-honking down the street, leaving behind them the most discouraged salesman in the entire United States.

Discouragement, in fact, does not begin to describe Chester's feeling. Never in all his life had he felt so utterly cast down. The gaiety of the party, the proximity of the exceedingly attractive girl called Elaine who had given him a thrill the moment he looked at her, the prospect of making several sales—all this had lifted him to heights of delightful expectation. Following that, his swift and sudden descent into the black pit of failure left him temporarily dazed. And with his sense of failure came also the humiliating realization that he had been used merely as a temporary means of entertainment, to be cast aside like an outworn toy the instant the girls tired of him.

It was a consistent climax to his three days of failure! In the language of baseball, he had struck out three times. For him the game was finished. He would sell his shoes anywhere for whatever they would bring and return to New York, penniless, jobless, and discouraged, to join the already swollen ranks of the unemployed. He walked into the nearest shoe-store and asked the proprietor to make him an offer on his stock.

The man took them for his bargain counter at two dollars a pair, and after hearing Chester's story, remarked:

"You were licked before you started, young man. In some country sections you might work up that proposition into a good thing, but in a town like this, with a dozen or more up-to-the-minute shoe-stores, you never had a chance. Why, if you had succeeded in selling only one pair a day I'd give you a job right here in my store at fifty per cent more salary than the ordinary shoe clerk gets."

There was no train out of town until midnight, so, after a frugal supper, Chester returned to his room and threw himself down on his bed to endure as best he might the several hours that he must still spend in this detestable town. He found a grain of comfort in the fact that at least he had closed up his shoe business without getting into debt or other trouble.

And yet it seemed that even this small comfort was not to be his for long. After an hour or so of gloomy introspection he was suddenly yanked out of his reverie by the sharp clang of the door-bell and the authoritative voice of a man demanding of the landlady if any one named Chester Boyd was in. Chester heard her reply that he was, and then the man gave her peremptory orders to send him down to the parlor immediately. The woman crept up to Chester's door, and in the manner of an executioner at a condemned man's cell, informed him that he had better collect his wits, for his caller did not look like a man who could be trifled with.

Thinking over any possible crime that he could have unwittingly committed, Chester's knees suddenly grew weak as he reflected that it might be a misdemeanor to peddle shoes in this town without a license. They grew weaker still as he sighted a big motor-car in the dusk outside. He was prepared for the worst as he entered the parlor, and as he sighted the keen eyes of the well-dressed, gray-haired man who confronted him, he did not doubt that the worst was what he would get.

"Mr. Boyd?" the man queried sharply.

"Yes, sir," answered Chester in a thin, weak tone.

"I understand that you have been selling shoes from house to house."

Chester smiled wanly. "Trying to—yes."

"Didn't you succeed?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

Chester repeated what the shoe merchant and others had told him, to the effect that his stock was not sufficiently varied and up-to-date to compete with local shoe-stores, particularly as many persons preferred to patronize the town merchants.

"I see," said the man. "You stuck to a losing game for three days and then you gave it up. Well, what I want to know now is, how did you approach the women and young girls who answered your calls, and what did you say to them?"

A dreadful premonition that perhaps he had unknowingly said something amiss assailed Chester.

"Why—er—I said practically the same thing to all of them," he hedged.

"Say it to me."

"But I haven't got the shoes any more."

"Say it without them."

So Chester braced up and recited his selling talk as convincingly as though he were still in the business. The man, in the rôle of prospective buyer, advanced reasons for refusing to buy, and Chester countered with the best arguments at his command. He did not become excited and he was careful to retain his suavity of manner. He felt, as he proceeded from one clinching argument to another, that he was regaining some measure of his self-respect by reason of the fact that his arguments were good ones. He enjoyed the clash of wits, as indeed he always had. The thought came to him that perhaps, with another and more promising line, he might still make good as a salesman.

The man brought the sales talk to an abrupt conclusion, and then questioned Chester as to his previous business experience. Chester told him how he made good money in his school days, and how he was a square peg in a round hole at the bank. The man wanted to know why Chester had persisted in his losing shoe business for three days when he was practically certain

that it was a failure at the end of the first day; and Chester replied that, having made a start at anything, he was not the sort of person who surrenders while there is still a remote possibility of victory.

The man sat silently appraising young Boyd until the latter grew uncomfortable.

"Has it ever struck you," the stranger queried at last, "that you might be able to make good as a road salesman for—well, say, trunks and bags and other leather goods?"

"It certainly has," Chester replied. "In fact, I think that's just what I'm cut out for. I like to sell things to people; like to argue with them; like to move around from place to place as a road salesman does."

The stranger grew still more serious.

"Mr. Boyd," he said, "I've been studying you while we've been talking, and I also think that you might make a good road salesman. You have an engaging personality, you know how to present an argument, your manner is convincing, and above all you have demonstrated on the streets of our town that you possess that prime requisite of a salesman, which is persistence. At any rate, I am willing to give you a try-out. My name is Moore, I have a leather-goods factory in this town, and I am in need of a salesman. I will pay you a salary and commission, too, so you will virtually be in business for yourself. What do you say?"

Chester could scarcely believe his ears. "What will I say?" he repeated incredulously. "I'll say that I'll be absolutely delighted to take it, and I feel sure that I can make good."

Mr. Moore rose. "Then it's settled," he stated. "Come to my office in the morning and we'll arrange the details." He shook Chester's hand and was going out the door when Chester thought of something.

"By the way, Mr. Moore," he queried, "what caused you to look me up here?"

The manufacturer smiled. "Come outside to my car and you'll see for yourself."

Chester did so, and nearly dropped dead with amazement as he recognized therein the girl who had invited him into her house that afternoon and then had dismissed him without even looking at his wares. Elaine! The thrill that he experienced when he first laid eyes on her was as nothing compared with the wave of emotion that seized him now.

"I understand that you two met this afternoon," Mr. Moore explained. "Elaine, this is my new road salesman. I'm glad now that you insisted on my looking him up, because I believe he's just the sort of energetic, ambitious young man I've been hunting for."

"I want you to accept my humble apology, Mr. Boyd, for treating you as I did this afternoon," Elaine said. "It was very unfair of me, and I felt very badly about it when I had time fully to realize what I had done. So when daddy mentioned, at dinner, that he needed a salesman, I made what amends I could by insisting that he should interview you at the address given on your card. If the two of you can get along together I will be very pleased indeed."

Six months later Chester was still getting along quite nicely with Mr. Moore, and even better with his charming daughter.

ALAS!

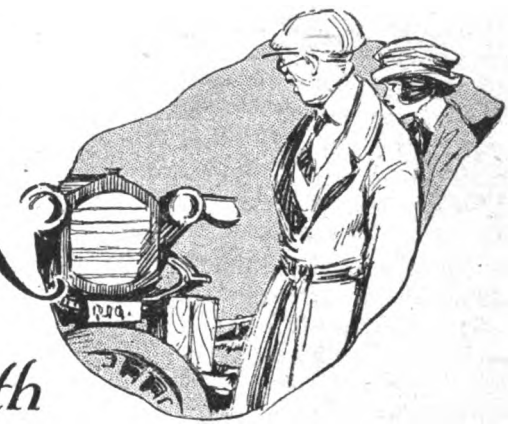
A WOMAN like a white, white flame,
With the heart of a rose—
Lips brimming cups of honeydew,
Eyes dark as sloes,
Passionate locks of sunny gold . . .
With grief my soul is rife.
Of course she *has* to be—
Some other fellow's wife!

Margaret G. Hays.

The Wreck

Part II

by E. J. Rath



Author of "Gas—Drive In," "Good References," "Once Again," "Too Much Efficiency," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

THE Wreck's other name is Henry Williams. He has just driven a flivver from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to Montana in pursuit of health. Convinced that he is a nervous wreck suffering from insomnia, he is recuperating at the Bar M Ranch, and when Sally Morgan, the daughter of the ranch owner, decides to go thirty-five miles to the railroad and then to Chicago, to buy the trousseau for her marriage to Sheriff Bob Wells, the Wreck places himself and his flivver at her disposal. They set out across the prairie, miss the road that is supposed to cross the trail, spend the night out, go hungry and succeed in losing themselves. Then the flivver runs out of gas and comes to a stop. After being stranded for some time, the Wreck sees a large motor-car approaching, and decides to stop it. Knowing the ways of some motorists, he demands Sally's gun, which she reluctantly gives him, protesting against any use of it.

CHAPTER V.

THE NERVOUS GUNMAN.

IT was a big black machine, long and squat and heavy, with luggage on the running-boards, luggage on the rear, three spares, and four occupants, one of them a chauffeur in uniform. The Wreck ignored the chauffeur, although he kept a furtive eye on him. He stepped close to the side of the tonneau and addressed himself to one of the three persons who sat there.

"I'm asking you again for a few gallons of gas," he said. "I've got to have it; that's all. You can spare me some without any trouble."

"And I'm still telling you to go to the devil," answered a heavy voice from the central figure. "We haven't got any gas to spare. And you'd better get busy and roll that flivver out of the road and let me get by. If you need any help, my driver is here."

"I don't want that kind of help," said the Wreck, still controlling his voice. "I want gas."

The heavy voice laughed.

"We're not running a tank wagon. Why don't you carry enough gas with you? That's what other people have to do. You people with flivvers are always running short of something. Move your car."

"We people with flivvers," declared the Wreck, slowly, "are not gas hogs. If I had as much gas as you've got in your tank I could run from here to New York. You're burning about a gallon every three or four miles. That's what I call being a damned hog. It's you birds that keep up the price. All I'm asking is five gallons and I'll pay for it. Do I get it?"

"You do not."

There was an abrupt change in the Wreck's demeanor. He stepped back a pace, pulled his cap close over his eyes and brought to view an object he had been concealing behind his back. Even in the

gloom it was possible to get an idea of what it was.

"Stick 'em up!" he barked. "All hands. Be in a hurry, now."

There was a feminine shriek from the tonneau, and the Wreck then and there first learned that one of them was a woman. But it was no time for courtesies.

"All up—everybody! You there, in the front seat! That's the idea. I want to see eight hands up all the time. And I don't want to see any funny movements, either."

He had to take it for granted that eight hands were up; he could not count them very clearly in the dark, particularly as his eyesight was none too keen. But that, of course, was something they did not know.

"Listen hard, now," he said, briskly. "When I tell you to do something, do it quick and don't give me any back talk. I want everybody out of that car, on this side of the road. And just keep those hands up; I'll open the doors. It'll be awful good for your health if you bear in mind that I'm nervous. I'm apt to get excited. Everybody out, now; one at a time. Line up!"

The driver came first, his arms stiffly aloft. Then three figures in single file from the tonneau, the last one wearing skirts. The person with the heavy voice coughed nervously.

"We'll give you five—"

"Shut up!" commanded the Wreck. "You'll give me anything I want. You three—" He indicated the passengers with a wave of the gun. "You three step out in front of those lights where I can keep a good eye on you. That's business. Stay there. Now, driver, got a can?"

"Ah—ah—yes, sir."

"Get it—and be careful you don't get anything else."

The man in uniform moved cautiously to the side of the car and unstrapped a five-gallon container from the running-board.

"It's full, sir," he said.

"Full, eh? Carrying extra gas and wouldn't give me a drop, eh. All right, you pick up that can and march—straight up the middle of the road."

For a few seconds it puzzled the Wreck what to do with the trio who still stood with their hands up in the glare of lights. He solved it by ordering them to a point midway between the two cars, where he made them sit down and told them not to budge.

"My partner up here in the flivver," he explained, "is looking at you over a pair of sights. He's a pretty good shot. He's nervous, too."

The man with the five-gallon can walked ahead until the Wreck halted him within half a dozen paces of the stalled car. The Wreck stepped ahead to speak to Sally. He found that she had dismounted and was standing by the roadside, beyond the beam of light.

"You crazy—"

He placed a hand roughly across her lips.

"Shut up!" he whispered. "Stay where you are and say nothing. I'm running this."

Sally was boiling, but she obeyed. It seemed the only way to keep him from some other wild folly.

The Wreck called to the man with the can and, as he reached the flivver, told him he would find a funnel on the floor.

"Pour that stuff into the tank, and see to it that you don't spill any of it."

It gave him a small thrill of satisfaction to find himself smartly obeyed. Then he marched the chauffeur ahead of him, back to the big car. As he passed the group in the road he tossed them a cheerful word of caution.

"My partner," he said, "noticed one of you didn't keep his hands in plain sight. He says he wouldn't like to have it happen again."

The Wreck and the driver went directly to the rear of the gas-eating monster.

"How much in that tank?" demanded the Wreck.

"About fifteen, sir."

"Pet-cock in the bottom? You'd better have, if you don't want me to shoot a hole in the tank."

"Y-yes, sir. We got a pet-cock."

"Stick that can under it and let her go."

Presently the driver announced that the can was full, and the Wreck verified the statement.

"All right. Dump it out in the road."

The driver stared through the darkness.

"Dump it out!" And the Wreck executed the order himself by kicking the can over.

"Now fill it again," he commanded.

The second filling was accomplished.

"That'll do. That leaves you five gallons. It's too much for a hog, at that. Come along with the can, now."

They made a second trip to the flivver and emptied a second dose into the tank under the seat.

"Now we go back again," said the Wreck. "And when I tell you to do something, I don't want any questions asked."

"N-no, sir."

Once more at the side of the big car, the Wreck ordered his servant to lay aside the five-gallon can.

"Got a tire pump on that engine?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir."

"Rotten luxury. But it's going to save your back a lot of work. Get busy now and let the air out of those tires. All of it!"

The driver hesitated, from bewilderment rather than insubordination. But he jumped to the task when the Wreck prodded him with the muzzle of Sally's six-shooter. The tires flattened themselves under the wheels, each with a long, shrill sigh.

"Open up those valves on the spares," directed the Wreck.

The spares also sang a swan song.

"There. That'll keep you busy for awhile. Come along."

They joined the group of sitters in the middle of the road. Standing with his back to the headlights and carefully shielding his own face from illumination, the Wreck contemplated his victims for a moment.

"You!" he said, suddenly, with a significant gesture of the gun. "The big one who didn't want to sell any gas. Stand up!"

The owner of the heavy voice rose slowly to his feet, looking slightly anxious. Most of the belligerence had departed from him.

"I've a good mind to give you a trimming," said the Wreck, "but I haven't got time to do it right. I've met all kinds of hogs in my time, but you're in the blue-ribbon class. Maybe you don't know you're getting off light, but take it from me you are. If you think a flivver is funny, I'm going to give you a chance to play with it. Hump yourself!"

He urged the large man in the direction of the flivver, leaving the remainder of the group behind him. Sally had climbed back into the seat, and the Wreck joined her. He switched on his headlights and took the wheel, but he still had the gun in his hand.

"Now, you just lay hold of that crank and get to work, hog."

The gentleman with loud signs of wealth seized the crank and yanked it violently.

"Spin it," ordered the Wreck.

He spun it, but there was no answer from the engine.

"Spin it some more."

Not even a sputter.

"Spin it again—harder."

Still there was no response. The large man panted heavily and wiped his forehead.

"You going to keep me here all night?" demanded the Wreck. "If you don't spin that crank—"

There was another furious spell of whirling. Sally pinched her companion.

"How can he start it when you haven't turned on the ignition?" she said.

"He can't," said the Wreck. "Doggone it, what did you butt in for? I wanted to see him spin it."

He reached over, threw the switch, and the engine was off with a night-splitting clatter. The big man staggered wearily toward the side of the road. His gait was accelerated when a mud-guard nudged him roughly as the flivver sprang into life. They heard him shout something; it sounded like a threat, although they could not catch the words. Then the Wreck took a solid grip on the wheel and began to drive.

Once Sally looked behind her. The headlights of the motionless car had faded to small points. She glanced at the Wreck. It was not possible to see his face clearly, but she could imagine the expression. He would be gritting his teeth and staring truculently at the road, quite in his glory. It was five minutes before she spoke, and then she cut loose.

"You've done it now!" she exclaimed,

"You sure have fixed the pair of us this time. Have you gone stark mad?"

"Don't argue," advised the Wreck.

"Don't you know what you've done? Don't you realize anything? Do you think you can get away with a thing like that? Why, you've committed a crime!"

He shrugged impatiently. How women did talk!

"A crime!" repeated Sally, dwelling on the sinister word. "Do you know that people have been shot for things like that, or strung up, or sent to prison for life? Haven't you any sense at all? And you dragged *me* into it!"

"Didn't. I told you to keep out of it."

"But I was there, wasn't I? And I heard you tell them that I was holding a gun on them. What difference does it make that I wasn't? You've had me just as guilty as you are yourself. And if they catch us—"

She left the sentence unfinished, for it was leading to things too awful for contemplation.

"Who in blazes is going to catch us?" he demanded. "*They* won't. It 'll take them half an hour to blow up those tires, and they'll burn pretty nearly a gallon of gas doing it. That'll leave them about four gallons, and after fifteen miles or so they'll go dead, like we were. Don't you worry about getting caught."

Sally shook her head in despair.

"You seem to think you can stick your head in the sand like an ostrich." she said. "You don't seem to grasp anything at all. I actually believe you don't realize that you've committed a highway robbery,"

"Call that a highway robbery?" sneered the Wreck. "If that's a highway robbery, then everything out here must be getting very much on the pink tea."

"We don't stand for criminals, if that's what you mean. We run them out of the country, or send them to jail—or hang 'em."

He was rather pleased at the information that they might hang him. It jibed with his mood, which was one of deep disgust and resentment. You couldn't please women, no matter what you did. They cried for something, and when you got it for them they did not have gratitude to thank you. Why, they actually reproached you for it! Well, they would wait a long while before he did anything else for them, decided the Wreck. He included the entire sex, too.

"Why, we'll be caught before daylight!" exclaimed Sally.

"Bet you five dollars."

"To-morrow, anyway," she went on, ignoring his challenge. "And they'll have a perfectly good case against us. You held them up with a gun—*my* gun."

"They ought to have been held up. They had it coming to them. They ought to have been shot full of bullets," said the Wreck, fiercely. "Traveling around the country with all the gasoline in the world and wouldn't give a drop to anybody. That's the last time I'll ever start anything by being polite. You only get the laugh. I guess we'll do some of the laughing now."

"If you think I am going to laugh," said Sally, "you're all wrong. I'm not goin to cry, either. But I'm just trying to make you understand that you've done a very, *very* serious thing. And all you do is to go on raving about your rights, as if you were actually proud of what you did."

He decided to have no more argument with her; she was absolutely impossible. But the sense of outrage was too deep and sharp for his resolution. He thrust his spectacles close to her face and glared at her through the gloom.

"Will you stop bawling me out?" he demanded. "First you bawled me and bawled me because I ran out of gasoline, and because I didn't get out and walk a couple of hundred miles looking for it. Then when I produce the gasoline, you bawl me out for getting it. You holler if we stay in one place and you holler if we go on. You're just bound to holler, anyhow. When I put you on that railroad train you'll still be hollering. You needn't think you can maul me around. I'm not the sheriff."

Sally was red with anger, but of course he could not see that. She sat with her fists clenched and her lips set tight. Every time he said anything about the sheriff he sneered. And he had no right to! Be-

sides he talked as if she were a common scold—when she was only trying to bring him to his senses.

"I'm trying," she said, with a show of dignity, "to explain things to you for your own good. But all the thanks I get—"

"For Heaven's sake, cut it out!" His voice rose to a shrill falsetto. "Doggone it, you'll get me so fussed I can't do anything. Just as everything is going along all right, you start in making me nervous."

Sally found herself speechless from amazement. Nervous! He had held up four people at the point of the gun, robbed them of gasoline, subjected one of them to the indignity of cranking his flivver, and then left the whole outfit stranded in the middle of Montana. He had done it with all the aplomb of an old hand. And when she wanted to make him understand the enormity of the thing, he complained that she made him nervous!

The flivver went on steadily through the night. She had not the least idea where they were going, but she was thankful they were going somewhere. She wanted to get very far away from the big black car and its four passengers. Occasionally she stole a glance behind, guiltily apprehensive that vengeance was already on the trail. She did not yet appreciate how thoroughly the Wreck had performed his mad work.

The road rose and fell and meandered, but it was too dark to obtain much information about the country. Sally had a strong impression, however, that they went uphill more than they did down, and that the land was steadily rising and growing rougher. But the road was very good and the flivver was setting the best pace she had yet seen.

"Hungry," demanded the Wreck, suddenly, after an hour of silence.

Sally roused herself and prepared for battle. Of course she was hungry; she was starving. But there was no decency in reminding her of it. She had been doing her best to forget it.

"Eat this," he advised, without waiting for an answer.

He took a somewhat tattered sandwich from his pocket and handed it to her.

"Go on and eat it," he said, sharply. "I had mine a while back. I held out a couple of them at lunch time."

The Wreck was lying. He had held out one sandwich, not two, and with the very idea that he was now putting into execution. Sally had a suspicion that he was lying; she was certain he had not eaten anything for hours and hours. But she recognized a sort of peace offering in the dry and crumbly object, and wrath suddenly melted out of her.

"I'll split it with you," she said, preparing to divide it.

"Eat it all. I don't want it. I wouldn't have it. For Pete's sake, *eat it!* Have I got to jam it down your throat?"

Sally ate, it smiling in the darkness.

CHAPTER VI.

AN ACT OF PROVIDENCE.

IT was after sun-up when he aroused her by a touch on the arm. Sally's eyes blinked rapidly as she straightened in the seat. The flivver was moving along at a slow pace, intended to promote the comfort of a sleeping passenger.

"'Morning," said the Wreck. "Sorry to wake you, but I wanted your expert opinion."

"'Morning," yawned Sally; then shook herself into full wakefulness and inspected him. "Have you been driving all night?"

If he had, she was prepared to acknowledge a tremendous respect for his endurance, for he was not flying any signals of weariness. But he shook his head with a grin.

"I stopped for a while, after you got asleep. I didn't need any sleep; I just can't sleep. But I let the engine cool out. There wasn't any hurry, anyhow."

"Nobody—passed us?" She asked it anxiously.

The Wreck shook his head and laughed. He was in fine spirits for a man with guilt on his soul.

"What I wanted to ask you about was this wire fence," he said. "We've been following it for a couple of miles. What's it mean?"

Sally inspected the fence, which followed the line of the road.

"It's somebody's wire, of course," she answered. "It means there must be a ranch around somewhere."

"Do they have breakfast at ranches?"

"They better had!"

"My idea, too," he said. "Whereabouts would this ranch lie, reckoning without the aid of any mountains or other visible landmarks?"

That brought a smile to her face. Plainly, the Wreck was in excellent fettle this morning. He was disposed to be almost playful.

"I'd say it's on the same side of the road as the fence," replied Sally. "And if we haven't passed any gate yet, we'd better keep on until we hit one. There's sure to be one."

He nodded and continued to drive, while Sally studied the country. It was not mountainous, but decidedly hilly, and she knew at a glance that it must lie at a considerable distance from the Bar-M. There was nothing within a wide radius of the Bar-M that looked like this. In the draws it was well wooded, but there was a lot of open range and twice she had glimpses of water. She decided that they were very much to the eastward of Black Top, although she had no idea in which direction the Wreck had been driving during the night.

Presently her thoughts returned to the big car and its passengers, and she caught herself looking backward over the rolling road, wondering what had become of them.

"Here's a gate," said the Wreck.

There was more than a gate. There was a plain road, running under it and off into the hills beyond. Without waiting for a consultation, he climbed down, opened the gate, then drove the flivver through. He was going straight ahead when Sally stopped him.

"Always close the gates after you out in this country," she said, jumping out. "They're put there for a reason. Cattle."

"I was in a hurry for breakfast," he explained.

The private road was a long one, as Sally judged it would be; she knew something about the size of ranches. If you were a stranger and stuck to the public road, you never saw half of them. It was nearly a quarter of an hour before they came within sight of anything but hills and hollows.

Then the ranch buildings flashed abruptly into view as the road emerged from a patch of young spruce. Sally studied the picture with a professional eye. The ranch house, the stables, the outbuildings, the corrals, all classified themselves swiftly under her survey.

"That's a pretty big house," she commented. "Looks sort of new too. They've got a nice location. See the way those hills rise, off yonder, back of the house. Pretty, isn't it?"

"I can's see anything but bacon and eggs," said the Wreck.

"Here's hoping you see them."

"Well, if I don't—"

Sally checked him.

"See here, Henry Williams," she said, "don't you start anything this morning. You've done enough for a while. You'd better talk very small and be mighty polite. You're still in the State of Montana."

"I'll behave, if you don't rile me," he promised. "But I've certainly got to be fed."

"And when they ask questions, we're a couple of tourists. Don't forget that," said Sally, significantly. "I'm supposed to be a dude, too."

The flivver came to a stop in the dooryard, just as a man emerged from the house. He was a tall, lean man, with a scraggy mustache, and he stood studying them for several seconds, in evident surprise, before he approached.

"Good morning," called Sally, with a wave of her hand.

"'Mornin', ma'am."

As he walked over to the car he was still scrutinizing them with a pair of steady blue eyes.

"Are you the proprietor?" inquired Sally.

She knew better than that, but she was trying to play a part.

"I'm the foreman, ma'am."

"Oh! Well, I'm sure you're the very

person I want to see. Can we get breakfast?"

The foreman rubbed his chin and gave her a further appraisal.

"It sort of depends," he said. "Can you cook?"

"Yes!" It was a chorus from two in the flivver.

For a few seconds the foreman transferred his gaze to the Wreck, who seemed to have acquired sudden interest in his eyes.

"It happens, ma'am, that we ain't furnished with a cook. We had a Chinee, and a Chinee helper. But they blew on us yesterday. But there's plenty of grub, and if you want to cook it, help yourself."

He waved a hand in the direction of the kitchen. There was a scrambling exodus from the flivver. The Wreck beat her to the kitchen door by a couple of yards. The foreman followed.

"I'll show you where everything is," he said. "Tell you the truth, I'm kind of hungry myself. The boys had to rustle their own breakfast this mornin', and they didn't make out none too well. I et some of it and I know what I'm talkin' about. So if you don't mind, ma'am, while you're cookin' up something, make it liberal in quantity. My name's Charley McSween."

He looked expectantly at the Wreck.

"My name's Williams," said the Wreck, taking the hint.

The foreman shook hands and glanced in the direction of Sally, who was already clearing a place on the stove.

"My wife," said the Wreck.

"Pleased to know you, Mis' Williams."

Sally had whirled about, her cheeks suddenly pink. She shot an amazed glance at Henry Williams and received a look of warning in return. Charley McSween laughed.

"I've seen honeymooners before," he said. "I was married once myself. It ain't nothin' against anybody."

Sally opened her lips to say something, broke into a queer laugh and turned to the stove again.

It was the kind of breakfast that comes once in a long, long time, when you are ready for even the meanest and find yourself sitting down to the best. The Wreck ate with a concentration that was appalling. Even the foreman, who was accustomed to all sorts of appetites, watched with an admiring eye. Sally and the Wreck were still eating when Charley McSween pushed back his chair.

"I'm sayin' that was a regular breakfast," he declared, as he wiped his mouth. "The lady sure knows how to fry bacon. I kind of like to have my eggs flopped over; but that's nothin' against her, because I didn't say so. Coffee was A-1. I can't say as I usually eat toast, but I've got no objections to it. Can you make biscuits, ma'am?"

"Of course I can," said Sally. "But I couldn't wait for them this morning."

"I figured you could make 'em," nodded the foreman. "Can you cook meats? I don't mean plain fryin', but all kinds of ways?"

"Quite a number of ways," she smiled.

"I bet you can do tricks with eggs, like makin' omelettes and scrambles and things like that."

"I can do some tricks," she confessed.

"I bet you can," he said admiringly, as he arose from the table. "I sure did enjoy that breakfast. If you folks will excuse me for a little while, I've got some things to do. Just set around and make yourselves comfortable. In case you feel like cleanin' up—"

He glanced at the pile of dishes in the sink.

"Of course we'll wash the dishes," said Sally. "We'll be glad to."

Charley McSween nodded and sauntered out of the kitchen. Sally looked the Wreck in the eye.

"I suppose you thought you had to say that," she remarked.

"Only reason I said it," he answered, returning her look, "couples touring around in flivvers are supposed to be married."

"Reckon you're right," she admitted. "Oh, well, it's not important. You might bring these breakfast dishes over to the sink. I'll wash and you wipe."

He was not very dexterous at wiping, but he got through it without breakage. She

put an apron on him, much to his irritation; but he submitted because she explained that it was a sort of regulation in kitchens.

"I don't suppose you've noticed things around here very much," she said, "but this is a pretty swell kitchen for a ranch. That stove cost a lot of money; look at it. And running water in the sink. There isn't anything around here that isn't high grade. Did you see that other cupboard over there? It's full of china—not crockery, but china. I don't know where he gets his bacon, but I never saw that quality served out to ranch hands before. They must live high."

The Wreck wiped the last dish, escaped from the apron and glanced at his watch.

"Only nine o'clock," he said. "We've got all day to make that train."

"I'd clean forgotten," declared Sally. "But we'll find out all about it from Charley McSween."

Charley reentered the kitchen presently, tilted a chair against the wall and sat down.

"We'll have a little talk," he announced. "Better set down."

Sally drew a chair for herself, but the Wreck propped himself against the table. He wanted to be ready for emergencies. Somebody might have spread an alarm.

"Do you believe in acts of Providence?" asked the foreman, after a moment of thought.

The pair from the flivver exchanged glances.

"No," said the Wreck.

"Yes," said Sally.

"That makes it fifty-fifty," declared Charley McSween, "which is a pretty fair break. As for myself, I believe in 'em. I'll tell you why."

He paused long enough to light a pipe and get it going properly.

"As I said a while back, we had a Chinee cook here and a Chinee dishwasher. Ordinarily we don't run to fancy cookin'. But I got that pair of Chinks for a special reason. I'm expectin' the boss. As near as I can make out from his letter, he's about due to-day. He don't come often, but when he does he has to be fed right.

"But these here Chinks jumped on me yesterday. Some of the boys got to foolin' with 'em and scared 'em 'most to death. So they jumped and left me flat, with the boss comin'. What was I goin' to do? You can't run out and pick up cooks like jack-rabbits. And when you do get 'em they're mostly very plain workers. I said to myself, 'Charley McSween, you're in a hell of a fix. You ain't got a cook and you ain't got time to go and fetch one.' And all the time I was rememberin' how particular the boss is about his meals."

He spent a few seconds in thought and resumed.

"Maybe you can see why I asked you about acts of Providence. Only this mornin' I said to myself, 'Nothin' but an act of Providence will replace them unutterable Chinks.' And right then and there Providence steps up and says, 'Here's a lady that can cook rings around any Chink that ever grew a pigtail, along with her husband who can wash dishes fit for the most particular kind of royalty to eat off of.' I'll leave it to you if it ain't so."

Sally smiled, but the Wreck's face had a suggestion of grimness.

"Are you suggesting," he asked, "that my wife and I go to work in your kitchen and get meals for your boss?"

"You've got the idea," said Charley McSween. "Meals for the boss—and the boys."

"Well, get it out of your head. Nothing doing."

The foreman turned to Sally with a slightly pained expression.

"I don't think your husband grasps it, ma'am. He don't seem to quite lay hold of the situation. Here I am with the boss comin', and no cook. Somebody's got to get those meals. I can't cook 'em. There ain't one of the boys can cook good enough. They can rustle things for themselves, but they don't know any city tricks. I've *got* to have a cook."

Sally smoothed her apron and smiled again.

"It's too bad," she said. "I can see what a fix you're in. You've been very kind to us. We've had a wonderful breakfast and we'd just love to oblige you. But we happen to be catching a train. We're—going East. In fact, we're really behind our time

now. So I don't see how we can, Mr. McSween, although otherwise we'd be glad to help you out. Wouldn't we, Henry?"

The Wreck eyed her critically.

"It doesn't make any difference whether we would or we wouldn't," he said. "The point is, we don't."

The foreman drew at his pipe for half a minute and stared at the floor.

"I'm sure sorry you feel that way about it," he mused. "I sort of figured you were just honeymoonin' around, with nothin' particular to do, and that you'd kind of pitch in. I'll pay you good, understand. I'll pay you regular Chink wages. I ain't makin' any distinctions because you don't happen to be professional to the business."

"Can't be done," said the Wreck, with an impatient gesture and another look at his watch. "We happen to be catching a train just now. Speaking of paying, of course we'll pay for our breakfast."

Charley McSween dismissed the idea with a gesture, and studied the pair with reflective eyes. Then he sighed.

"It ain't for me," he said, "to go flyin' into the face of an act of Providence. I'm a believer in meetin' Providence half way when she turns up a card for you. I'm sorry—I'm plumb sorry—that you, ma'am, and your husband don't feel like you ought to stay. But we'll make it as pleasant for you as we can, and we won't keep you no longer than is necessary."

Sally arose to her feet with a gasp of surprise and sought the eyes of the Wreck. He was boring a glance in the direction of Charley McSween.

"Let me understand you," he said. "Are you talking about keeping us here, whether we want to stay or not?"

"That's the unfortunate idea," said the foreman, regretfully.

The Wreck laughed nervously.

"You'll be quite busy keeping us," he said. "Come on, Sally."

Charley McSween unlimbered himself from his chair and stood up.

"You don't get it all yet," he said. "You don't either of you understand the workin's of Providence. Now, it seems that when Providence fetched you here, and the lady proved that she could cook, and the gentleman proved he could wash dishes and dry 'em, it wasn't for no ordinary human being to set himself up to say, 'No.' So I says to Providence, 'What are we goin' to do to persuade these young married folks to take hold of this here emergency job and see it through?' And Providence says, 'Leave it to me.'

"Now, it seems Providence knows how to operate one of these flivvers. So Providence takes that flivver and runs it down into one of the sheds. Havin' done that much, Providence conceives the idea of takin' off one of the front wheels, which is also done in a workmanlike manner, with no damage to parts. Said wheel, havin' been removed from the shed, is hid elsewhere, nobody but Providence knowin' where it was put."

Charley McSween spread his hands with an eloquent gesture.

"Now you get an idea of the way Providence works," he said.

The Wreck stepped to the door of the kitchen and looked out into the yard. When he came back he was removing his spectacles.

"I can lick you," he said to the foreman.

"No, you don't," said Sally, as she stepped in front of him. "Not yet, at any rate. Mr. McSween, kindly leave the kitchen. We want to have a little talk about things."

Charley McSween moved hastily toward the door.

"The cook's always boss in the kitchen," he said.

CHAPTER VII.

IN LIEU OF CHINKS.

THE Wreck wanted to follow Charley McSween outside, but Sally had a grip on his arm that he could not loosen without being rough. She dragged him to a chair, pushed him into it and stood on guard.

"You listen to me before you do anything else," she said. "You're going off half-cocked all the time, and I won't have it."

He eyed her savagely.

"Are you suffering from the idea that I can't lick him?"

"Maybe you can, Henry Williams. I never said you couldn't. But you're not going to start in now."

"What's the reason I can't start now? I'm not going to take up a lot of time at it. Do you want me to wait until he gets his gang around him?"

Sally regarded him severely; he seemed so much like a bad little boy that sometimes she despaired of getting anything reasonable out of him.

"You're always ready to fight somebody," she said. "And there isn't any sense in it. Besides, what good would it do us right now? Suppose you do whip him; if it makes you feel any better I'll admit that you can whip him from his feet up. But suppose you do—that doesn't help to find the wheel he took off the car, does it? We'd have to stay around here anyhow until he got ready to give it back to us. You can't run a flivver on three wheels."

"I might," he said, stubbornly.

"Well, if you could, I wouldn't ride in it, so that settles that. It might give you a lot of satisfaction to get into a fight with him, but it wouldn't get us anywhere. It would only make a lot more trouble, and we've got enough now."

"It doesn't bother me any."

"That's just it," said Sally. "It doesn't seem to make any difference to you how much trouble you stir up. But we can't afford to have any more right away—and we're not going to have it."

The Wreck regarded her with a look of intense disgust.

"Do I look like a dishwasher?" he demanded. "Do you think anybody can *make* me wash dishes?"

"Suppose I asked you to wash them?"

He shook his head irritably.

"You haven't got any right to ask me."

"Yes, I have. I'm in this thing as much as you are and I have just as many rights as you have. And if it's necessary for you to wash dishes, then you ought to be glad to wash them, for the general good."

Sally puzzled him. She appeared to be abandoning herself to a situation that was preposterous and intolerable. It did not seem like Sally at all.

"What about your train?" he inquired.

"The train's got to wait for the present," she answered, with a shrug.

"You mean to tell me you're going to stick around here and take orders like a trained seal? You're going to cook for this outfit?"

She reached for a chair and seated herself opposite him.

"Do you realize, Henry Williams, that I'm trying to save you? I don't claim any credit for it, because I'm trying to save myself, too. Have you forgotten what you did last night? Do you want to go roaming out on the road again, to be picked up and sent off to jail? Well, if you do, I don't. We've got to hide somewhere until this thing blows over. And if you can think of any better place than this to hide, I can't."

"I only took a little gasoline," he said, impatiently.

"And you only held them up with a gun, too. And scared the life out of them, and made them sit in the road, and humiliated them, and let all the air out of their tires. And you didn't pay for the gasoline, either; so that's stealing. You'd better take it from me, you've done something to hide for. I know Montana, if I don't know much else. You can't do things like that any more."

The Wreck scowled at the floor.

"How about a bird who steals the wheel off your car? Can he do things like that?"

"No; he hasn't any right, of course. But it's done, and I'm not sure but that's also an act of Providence, as Charley McSween says. I have a hunch that what we need right now is a hide-out, and this gives us one without hunting for it. Besides, we can eat here."

"And how long do you think we're going to stay parked here, Sally Morgan?"

"Oh, not long. That depends. I'm sure we'll get the wheel back for the car by the time we ought to start."

He pondered the prospect gloomily. The thing to do, of course, was to lick Charley McSween; no man was expected to endure what Charley had inflicted. If he did not

have Sally Morgan on his hands he would do it in a minute. But the Wreck had a sense of guardianship and responsibility. It was not a conscious sense, perhaps; rather, it was instinctive. He was responsible until he put her aboard that train, or until he carried her back to Dad Morgan's ranch. After that he would be free to settle scores with anybody he pleased, but until then he recognized certain restraints.

He was not so entirely a creature of impulse as Sally believed him. There was a streak of calculation in him; it could not be called caution, but it involved a certain degree of premeditation and reckoning of consequences. He could see Sally's point about the hide-out. It irked him to acknowledge that it had merit; he would not publicly admit it. But he was honest with himself. His fundamental urge was to thrash Charley McSween until he produced the missing wheel and then to rush Sally away to the nearest point on the railroad, where he guaranteed to stop any transcontinental flier that might happen along, even if he had to stall the flivver in the middle of the track. But it might not be the quickest way of getting Sally out of a mess. Perhaps it might be better to think things over a bit; not that he wanted to, but that it might be his unpleasant duty.

"There's a telephone here somewhere," he said, looking up suddenly. "I saw the wire."

"Yes; most of the ranches have phones," nodded Sally.

"You could use it, if you wanted to."

"What for?"

"I thought you might want to talk to your folks."

"I wouldn't for a million dollars," said Sally, emphatically.

It was plain that he did not understand.

"Why, don't you see, they think I took the train day before yesterday. And if they find out I'm still in Montana they'll be worried, and they won't understand. Ma would just sit and fret and say nothing, and Dad would go around telling everybody he met. No, indeed; they'd better keep on thinking I made the train. Besides, I couldn't tell them everything, anyhow."

"Why couldn't you tell them?"

"Well, I couldn't tell them about the hold-up, could I?"

"You didn't have anything to do with it."

She regarded him with astonishment.

"But I was there," she declared. "And I hope you don't think I'm a squealer."

The Wreck studied her with fresh interest. No, of course he hadn't thought she would squeal. But he knew that she did not approve of the hold-up, and he had a fixed notion that she did not approve of him, either.

"You bawled me out for it," he reminded her.

"Of course I did. I think it was a terrible thing for you to do. But that was just between the two of us. You don't suppose I'm going around shouting about it to anybody else? I haven't any doubt I'll be bawling you out some more, about other things; but that doesn't say I'm going to run and tell."

There was a slightly offended look in her eyes. She could not conceive how he got the idea that she might desert him, or give him up to the law, just because he had done something foolish.

"I'm much obliged," he said, awkwardly.

She recognized that as a combination apology and tribute, but it made her smile. He never knew what a ridiculous person he was. She felt that what he needed was a keeper, a guardian, a mother and a stern parent, all rolled into one.

"I'm not worrying about myself one bit," she assured him. "I'm worrying more about you."

The Wreck bristled.

"What in— Why in blazes would you worry about me?"

"Well, you were expecting to go back to the ranch, weren't you?"

"That's nothing. I told them I might not be back the same night."

"I know," said Sally. "But it's the second day after that. And you haven't got me to the train yet. And then you've got to find your way back to the ranch—and I don't believe you ever can."

He flung himself into a two-armed gesture of protest.

"Anywhere I've been once I can go again," he said. "I could drive from here to Pittsburgh with my eyes shut. Don't worry about me."

"But Dad and Ma will think you're lost."

"Then let Dad and Ma do the worrying."

"We'll have to get you a road map, if there is such a thing, before you start back," said Sally, "because you'll have a terrible time if you try to cut across country again."

"Oh, I'll take a bearing from Black Top," observed the Wreck, wickedly.

He grinned and Sally smiled. She was glad that he seemed to be in a better humor. But even at his worst, she had never succeeded in getting really angry at him. Several times she had thought she was, only to discover that her anger was tempered with a half-amused tolerance. And she knew that the Wreck himself, in his most violent moments, showed a strain of chivalry that was not to be mistaken. What he might be like back in Pittsburgh she had no idea, but here in Montana he was a source of incongruous entertainment.

Sally was not concerned very much about her own predicament. It mattered very little that she failed to get the train on a particular day; it was just an annoyance. It would not be an overwhelming catastrophe if she had to go back to the Bar-M. Everything could be explained as soon as the present trouble blew over. What gave her real worry was the Wreck himself. She had assumed an attitude toward him almost identical with his own attitude toward her, although she was more keenly conscious of it than he. She had a sort of guardianship responsibility. It would never do to let him suspect it; he would have a paroxysm at the mere suggestion. But the sense of duty burdened her, none the less. He was a stranger in a strange land, absurdly ignorant of its ways, and he was under the protection of the Bar-M, even if he did not know it. As the sole representative of the Bar-M, Sally Morgan shouldered it all.

The Wreck was headed for the door when she called him to a halt.

"Where are you going?" she asked, suspiciously.

"Just for a look around the place."

"You're not going to hunt up Charley McSween?"

"I'm not going to dodge him."

"Well, you're not going to fight with him," she said, firmly.

"Not if he leaves me alone."

"It doesn't make any difference whether he leaves you alone or not. You're not going to fight; not to-day, anyhow. We can't afford it."

"I'm no door-mat," he grumbled.

"Certainly not. Nobody thinks you are. But— Henry, you are *not* going to fight."

It was not the fact of her quiet emphasis that most impressed him. It was being called "Henry." Back at the ranch they called him "Mr. Williams," and "Wreck," and "Mister," and "Henry Williams" and other things. It had never occurred to anybody to admit him to the comradeship of "Henry." Coming at last, it made a rather favorable impression on him. It was the first time anybody had called him "Henry" since he left Pittsburgh. He did not feel quite so far from home.

"Oh, all right, maw," he drawled, as he went through the door. "I ain't goin' to fight."

Sally sat in a chair and screamed. She had not suspected the Wreck of a teasing sense of humor. Why, he was actually making fun of her!

"There's hope for that dude," she said, as she got control of her laughter. "But he's altogether too wild for this country."

She busied herself for a while in the kitchen, confident that he would keep his promise. There was a lot of tidying up to be done; the boys had evidently left the place without a thought of straightening things out, after they had rustled their own breakfast. Sally was a good housekeeper; even better than Ma, for, while Ma was practical, Sally was both practical and scientific. The kitchen was well arranged, with all sorts of conveniences; in some respects it was better than her home kitchen, which had made a considerable modern advance over most ranch kitchens. She liked housekeeping, when there was not too much

of it, and, best of all, she liked to cook. Charley McSween had imposed less of a hardship than he suspected.

When the kitchen satisfied her, she started on an exploration of the rest of the lower floor. There was a pantry, with more china in it, which caused her eyes to widen.

"This *is* a swell outfit," she murmured. "H'm. Limoges! Well, now, what do I know about *that?*"

There was a dining-room, too, that did not appear to be used for any purpose except serving meals. Of course, the boys did not eat there; they had their grub in the kitchen. A dining-room implied a sort of effete exclusiveness that impressed her deeply.

Beyond the dining-rooom was an enormous living-room; it occupied at least half of the area of the ranch house. She liked it at once, not only for its spacious dimensions, but for the comfort, even luxury, with which it was furnished. There was a great stone fireplace, and curtains at the windows, and Navaho rugs, and furniture with leather cushions, and lots of pictures on the walls—mostly pictures of Indians, and cowboys, and other things that she knew about. But best of all, there were books—books scattered about on the tables and whole shelves of them against the walls.

She roamed about the big rooms as Alice roamed in Wonderland; not amazed at anything she saw, but marveling that it should all be there in the middle of the range country, where most living-rooms run to plainness and simplicity, and too often to drab barrenness. She studied the pictures, she examined the titles of the books, she sat on the leather cushions, she absorbed the atmosphere of the place, gratefully and deliberately.

"This," she told herself, "is what I'm going to have some day, only mine will be exactly my own. I'm not critical, but I can do even better."

Finally she picked up a book that she did not believe would be disappointing, dragged one of the big chairs close to a window and curled herself into a knot of luxurious comfort. She followed the story for a chapter or two, forgetting the Wreck and the flivver and the train going East. But after a while her mind became pleasantly dull and hazy, and a gentle weight on her eyelids closed them. She was aware only of the fact that she was going to take a nap and she found joy in it.

Probably she dreamed. But she was never quite sure of it, because if it began as a dream it ended as something that really happened. There was a rhythmic throbbing in her ears, and as she came slowly and reluctantly to consciousness it grew steadily louder. There was a mechnical regularity about it that reminded her of the windmill at the Bar-M, but she realized an instant later that she was not in her own home. And it wasn't a windmill, either; it was more like an engine. Her eyes were blinking now. Why, it was an automobile!

Sally uncurled herself and straightened up in the big chair. If Henry Williams had resurrected that flivver, if he had found that wheel, if he had been in a fight with Charley McSween—well, then he was going to have some first-class trouble on his hands. Her ears were sharper now; she was completely awake. She listened a second or two longer. No; it was not the flivver. It was a different kind of an engine, more orderly and dignified—wealthier.

She leaned forward and pushed aside a corner of the curtain. The thing that made the noise had just come to a stop outside. Sally stared at it with round eyes.

"Why, I believe— Oh, it is!"

She flipped out of the chair with the sudden speed of a cat and raced in the direction of the kitchen.

"They've trailed us!" she gasped, as she ran.

CHAPTER VIII.

HIDING OUT.

AS Sally charged into the kitchen by way of the pantry, the Wreck was coming in through the door that opened on the yard. He stared at her in plain surprise; he did not know she could run so fast.

"What's the hurry?" he asked, mildly.

"We're trailed!"

"Trailed? What do you mean?"

"Have they seen you?" she panted.

"Who? What are you talking about? I haven't seen anybody but some horses down in a corral."

"Well, we're trailed all right, Henry Williams. "They're out in the front now!"

"Who's out in front?"

"The people you stuck up—the big car!"

The Wreck lifted his eyebrows, looked thoughtful for an instant, then began squaring his shoulders.

"Oh, all right," he said. "We'll stick 'em up again."

Sally groaned.

"We've got to get out of here," she said, sharply. "We've got to make a getaway. We'll get a couple of horses down at the corral before they see us. You'll just *have* to ride."

It was a despairing thing to contemplate the Wreck on horseback, but it seemed the only chance.

"Oh, I can ride," he said. "I can ride anything. Only it's easier to stick 'em up. Here's what we'll do." His eyes glistened. "We'll take their car!"

Sally shook her head angrily.

"No, you idiot!" she cried. "We'll take horses, if we get a chance at them. Hurry!"

She had seized him by the hand and was dragging him in the direction of the door when in walked Charley McSween. Sally stopped and eyed him appraisingly. If the Wreck insisted on whipping him, this seemed to be the chosen time. And if it was necessary, she would help.

"I was just lookin' for you," said Charley, addressing the Wreck. "I want a hand with some baggage outside."

"Huh?" inquired the Wreck.

"Baggage," repeated Charley. "The boss is here."

Sally and the Wreck exchanged a slow glance. Then she pinched his fingers tightly, and he knew it was meant to be some sort of a signal.

"Where are your men? Can't they handle baggage?" she demanded.

"The boys ain't here, ma'am. So I'm askin' him," with a nod toward the Wreck.

"Well, my husband doesn't handle baggage."

Again she pinched the Wreck's fingers.

"What's the reason he don't handle baggage?" inquired Charley. "Ain't it dignified?"

"He's—he's not strong," said Sally.

The Wreck began to squirm and look truculent.

"I admit he ain't exactly powerful lookin', ma'am. But a while back he said he was goin' to lick me, so I thought maybe he could rassle a couple of trunks without sustainin' any personal damage."

"No; you'll have to get somebody else," said Sally.

Charley made no effort to conceal the disgust in his soul. He inspected the Wreck from his horn-rimmed spectacles to his shoes, following the examination with a gesture of contempt.

"Seein' as your wife won't let you," he remarked, "I suppose me and the chauffeur 'll manage."

The Wreck never knew how he managed to maintain any self-control, but he blamed it all on Sally. All he did was to shout:

"If you think I'm a baggage-smasher, you just wait and see what happens to your dishes."

Charley went out with a remark to the effect that he did not have to pay for the dishes. The Wreck and Sallly stared at each other.

"You—you stuck up the owner of the place!" she wailed.

"He was a hog," said the Wreck, with fine simplicity.

He was not worrying about the owner; his mind was occupied with plans to revenge himself for the insults of Charley McSween.

"Of all the awful luck," continued Sally, in an awed whisper. "To think that we walked right into his hands. I knew there was something queer about this place the minute I took a look around the house."

"Well, what do we do now? Swipe the horses?"

Sally considered, then shook her head slowly.

"No; I think we'd better wait now. I don't believe it's quite as bad as I thought. You see, they didn't trail us here, after all. They were coming, anyhow. Probably they

don't know we're here; if they did, we'd have heard from it before this. We've got to figure this thing out now—carefully. The main thing is to keep them from seeing you. That's why I wouldn't let you go out to help with the baggage."

He was not a good hand at playing a waiting game, and said so. He was still in favor of going out and taking the big car, a feat which presented to him no considerations of dismay. But Sally sharply ordered him to put the idea out of his head.

The situation bewildered her, but she did not think it had yet reached a crisis. Nobody in the car had seen her; it was very unlikely that they even knew their hold-up man had a girl with him. So long as she could keep the Wreck out of their sight and so long as the flivver remained locked up in a shed, there was still a chance to figure something out. But how utterly exasperating it was! Just when she was satisfied that they had blundered into a safe hide-out, she discovered that they had really walked into the lion's den.

"What worries me right now," she mused, "is that Charley may say something about the way we came in this morning. That might easily get them asking questions."

"He won't," said the Wreck, sourly. "He isn't going to let his boss know what a close squeak he had in the kitchen. I'll bet money on that."

"Hope you're right. But Henry, if they ever do discover us—"

"Fireworks!"

It comforted her a little to observe that he was still the same confident Wreck, although she might have remembered that he was always thus and that it did not necessarily signify anything. He was confident when he first mounted the sorrel horse, but the horse had at least an even break, if not the better of it.

"The thing to do, of course, is to keep them from seeeing you," she said. "You'll have to stay in the kitchen all the time, I'm afraid. I don't suppose they'll come in here."

"They're not going to coop me up in a kitchen," he growled. "Besides, it was dark last night, anyhow. They didn't get a good look at me. I had my cap pulled down."

"It's the glasses, Henry. They mark you."

"I can't help it if I have to wear them."

"Oh, I don't mean that," she said hastily. "But they identify you. Nobody could miss them."

"Make me look like an owl."

"Nonsense. Don't be so sensitive. They look very well, but—"

"They don't look well," said the Wreck, harshly. "They look like the devil. Don't you start soft-soaping me, Sally Morgan."

"Oh, all right; they look like the devil," she retorted, desperately. "But just the same, they're one of the reasons why you've got to lay low. And you've got to keep out of trouble for awhile; I mean fights, and arguments. You can't go milling around every time somebody says something you don't like."

He showed sulky symptoms, and Sally hoped he would keep on being sulky for awhile; it might keep him quiet. If she was going to pull him out of this mess, thought Sally, she would have to humor him; for she saw the situation as one demanding shrewdness and finesse. As for the Wreck, he was brooding over restraint: If he was going to get her out this hole, it was an affair that called for action. They had the same goal in view, but the methods were hopelessly divergent.

Charley came into the kitchen again.

"We got that baggage in, thanks to nobody that washes dishes," he said. "And now, ma'am, I'll have to ask you to hustle dinner. They're real hungry."

"They'll have dinner just as soon as I can get it," said Sally, promptly.

The Wreck regarded her with a look of amazed disappointment. Was she going to turn to and cook for a hog? It was enough to be drafted as cook for an unknown, but to do chores for your enemy was humiliation. He was about to speak, when she stopped him with a look.

"Seems they didn't get any regular breakfast, except crackers, which they had with 'em," explained Charley. "That leaves 'em kind of hungry. They got hung up on the road. In fact, they got held up."

"You don't mean it!" exclaimed Sally, who was digging into the flour barrel, as a first step in the direction of making biscuits.

"Oh, it don't seem like it was serious, ma'am. That is, there wasn't anybody got shot. Feller just took watches and valuables and left 'em flat without any gas."

Sally ventured a look at the Wreck. He seemed to be curiously elated.

"It's been done before," said Charley, who was slightly bored. "It ain't anything to what they used to do. Only the boss is pretty well stirred up, which maybe is natural enough. He comes from the East, where they don't know anything about such things."

The Wreck was standing near a window, polishing his spectacles. It was Sally's first conscious glimpse of him without the horn rims. He gave her a swift impression of being another person. But there was no time to study him; Charley was too interesting.

"Who is the boss?" she asked, trying to be indifferent.

"His name is Underwood," said Charley. "He's from New York. It's funny the way those New Yorkers buy themselves places that take such a pile of travelin' to get to. And he don't come here oftener than once a year. This time he drove all the way. It don't sound reasonable, but he did. He's got his boy and girl with him. I expect he'll stay a few weeks."

Charley watched her as she began to mix the flour.

"His bein' from New York is why I was so particular about the cookin'. I had Chinks here last year and they did real well. So I went and got another pair this summer; but, as I told you, the boys got kind of juvenile with 'em and they lit out. It seems that a Chink expects you to take him serious. It beats hell."

"The boss must have money," suggested Sally.

"Yes, ma'am; he's lousy with it. He raises fancy cattle, only that ain't the way he made his money. He took it from somebody in Wall Street. But there ain't any finer cattle in Montana. They don't know how he made his money. They don't care, I can't say that I care anything myself. I'm liberal in my views. If I were you, ma'am, I'd sort of give 'em plenty to eat, but I'd make it look as much like New York as I could."

"Oh, I'll give them lots," said Sally. "Don't you worry, old—"

It slipped half way from her lips—"old-timer." It was awfully hard to play tenderfoot when Charley was around. But Charley gave no sign that he noticed anything.

"That's right, ma'am; feed 'em liberal and fancy. I can see you're goin' to make an awful hit with the boys."

He went out again, satisfied that dinner was under way and that Sally would be a credit to his discrimination in cooks. She was flying around the kitchen like a marionette on wires, attending to three or four things at once, but without the least trace of confusion.

"Poke that fire up, Henry; put a lot of wood on it and get it going. I want a hot oven. There's a pile of wood outside the door. Fill the kettle over at the sink pump and put it on. I've got fifty things to do, and you've got to help with some of them. Better put your apron on, too; you'll get all mussed up if you don't."

The Wreck went about his task with a scowl.

"The big lying hog," he said. "I never touched their watches and valuables."

"They're just excited," explained Sally, as she hunted for a rolling pin. "People always exaggerate. Charley doesn't suspect us, anyhow, so there's that much gained. Don't fill the kettle too full; it'll boil over."

"I'm not. I'll be hanged if I'd break my neck cooking for them."

"That's nothing. I've cooked for lots of people. Besides, we're stalling for time. We're going to give them the best meal we know how."

"Chinamen's work!"

"It would be a good thing for us if we were Chinamen," said Sally, blandly. "Then we'd have a complete alibi."

He grumbled his way through the chores, but she could not complain that he was inefficient. Although he seemed constantly at the point of disobedience, the Wreck fol-

lowed his orders. He even kept a faithful eye on the stove, while she went into the dining room to set the table. She took a swift peep into the living-room while engaged in this task, but the Underwood family was evidently up-stairs.

"Underwood?" she mused. "Can't say that I remember hearing the name around here. Fancy cattle, eh? I've heard of somebody around here who raised prize Herefords. I'll bet it's the same one. But if it is, we're a long way from the Bar-M. We haven't any neighbors like that."

She fussed over the table as though she were a hostess; she set out the best china in the pantry, polishing the plates lovingly and carefully.

"Wall Street," she said. "No wonder he's fussy about his meals."

There were footsteps on the staircase that came down into the living rooms, and Sally, with a final look at the table, fled back into the kitchen.

"They're coming down," she informed the Wreck. "We've got to hurry. Thank Heaven, biscuits don't take long. You keep an eye on that coffee, and don't let it boil. Stop it just when it starts. I haven't time to cook any meat; besides, I don't know where they keep it. They're going to have an omelette."

It was a very large omelette that she made, fluffy and thick, a rhapsody in yellows and golden browns. The Wreck eyed it with jealous disapproval, but she did not give him time to express an opinion. She had him opening a can of soup and pouring it into a saucepan for heating. There was time for that much, anyhow.

"I'll cook them a regular meal next time," she promised. "But this will have to do for short notice."

Her enthusiasm for the odious task depressed him.

"Don't work your head off," he advised. "You'll get no thanks for it."

"Oh, I've got lots to do yet," said Sally, cheerfully. "For one thing, I've got to wait on the table."

The Wreck nearly upset the coffee pot in his anger.

"You will *not!*" he exclaimed.

"Of course I will."

"I'll not have you waiting on hogs, Sally Morgan. They can wait on themselves."

"Don't be ridiculous. They don't eat in the kitchen. Somebody's got to carry it to them."

"All right, then. *I'll* carry it to 'em."

She stared, then shook her head vehemently.

"You can't. You've got to dodge them as long as you can. There'll be a blow-up, as sure as a gun, the minute they see you."

"Well, I'm going to wait on them, if anybody does," he said, doggedly. "What's the use of dodging around? We may just as well find out now as any other time."

"See here, Henry Williams! If you—"

She stopped, studied his face with a new interest and remembered something. Reaching out, she lifted off his spectacles, then stepped back a pace for another inspection. Her scrutiny lasted several seconds.

"It makes you look tremendously different," she said. "Can you see anything without them?"

"I can see you," said the Wreck, blinking.

"Wait a minute."

She ran to a closet and came back carrying a starched white jacket.

"It must have belonged to one of the Chinamen," she said, "but I think it will fit you. Put it on."

She managed to get him into it, after fierce protest. Then she viewed him again.

"I really believe," she said, slowly, "that you can get away with it. With that, and the apron, and no spectacles, you don't look the least bit like a nervous wreck. You don't look like a hold-up man, anyhow. And if you're sure you can get around without falling over things, I believe I'll let you try it. But be awfully, awfully careful about your voice. Try to disguise it, if you can. Don't forget yourself and *bark* at them."

"I never bark."

"You did then. But you mustn't. Just keep remembering that we're still hiding out. I think they're at the table now. You can take in the soup, and don't forget to serve things from the left."

He picked up a tray and began navigating cautiously in the direction of the dining

room. Sally watched him anxiously. It was an awful risk, she thought; but if he passed the test she would feel a lot safer.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FOUR-IN-ONE BANDIT.

THERE were two persons in the dining-room when the Wreck entered with the tray. He could make them out with reasonable clearness as he drew nearer to them. One was the girl, Underwood's daughter. If you liked colorful blondes, she was just the right sort; slim, with a delicate prettiness that belonged to the city. Opposite her sat a youth who appeared to be a year or so older. He was well set up and rather good-looking, even if there was a surly set to his features. He was drawing things on the table-cloth with the tine of a fork.

In the living-room there was a table, close to the dining-room door, and on the table was a telephone. Somebody with a heavy voice was using it; the Wreck identified the voice instantly. It belonged to the large man who would not share his gasoline. The girl and the youth were listening, and the Wreck, putting down his tray, listened also, pretending to be busy by wiping the soup plates with a napkin.

"Well, you've got to get him," said the heavy voice, with a note of irascible authority. "I don't care if you have to try every place in the county. He ought to leave word where he goes. This is Underwood talking. What? Yes, certainly. Oh, you understand now, do you? Well, you get him. Leave word every place you try that he's to call me. He knows who it is. And you tell tell him it's important, see? Tell him it's the most important job he ever had. I don't call people up for nothing. Get busy."

There was the snap of a receiver roughly replaced and the creaking of a chair.

"Haven't they located him yet, father?" called the girl.

"No; and I don't believe they're half trying." Underwood was entering the dining-room. "First they thought he was over at Fisher. Now they think he's gone back to the county seat. I don't care where he is. I want him."

The owner of the ranch seated himself at the end of the table. The Wreck observed that he lowered himself into his chair with a slight stiffness of movement. It pleased him to think that he knew the cause. The mudguard of the flivver showed a tell-tale warp, where it had nudged him violently. There was no mistaking Underwood, even without the aid of spectacles. The Wreck had seen him in the white glare of road lights, toiling desperately at a crank, and the heavily jowled face was forever marked in his memory.

"I don't see why you can't have Charley call in the men and start them out on the road," observed the youth.

"They've got work to do here," growled his father, as he spread a napkin. "And it's not their job, anyhow. It's a sheriff's job."

The Wreck, who was ladling soup at the serving table, never spilled a drop. He merely prolonged the task, as he listened.

"It seems to me he ought to have some deputy you could get hold of," suggested Harriet Underwood.

"I don't want his deputy. I don't do business with deputies. I want the man in charge. Lord knows, I pay enough taxes in this county to get a sheriff when I want one. He must be a fine sheriff to let a state of affairs like this go on."

"Well, I guess you could get another one elected, if you wanted to," remarked the young man, with an effort at lightness.

His father glared at him.

"Don't be an ass, Chester. What we want now is a sheriff—on the job. We're not running next year's election."

The Wreck, having ladled soup into three plates, picked one of them up and turned toward the table. This was the crisis, and there was no longer any use in trying to postpone it. He laid the plate in front of Miss Underwood, and then, for the first time since he had entered the room, he seemed to attract family attention.

The girl gave him a casual look and picked up her napkin. Chester's examination was equally brief. Servants were a matter of no great interest, either to himself or his

sister. But the scrutiny of Jerome Underwood was more prolonged. The Wreck blinked painfully and wished that he had his glasses; he wanted to read the big man's expression more accurately.

He had fetched a second plate of soup and laid it before the ranch owner before a word was addressed to him.

"You didn't work here last summer," announced Underwood.

"No, sir."

It was a bitter wrench, but the Wreck kept his voice low and respectful.

"What's your name?"

"Williams."

"Where are you from?"

"Pittsburgh, sir."

"Just working here for the summer?"

"Yes, sir."

Underwood nodded and picked up his spoon. The Wreck moved off toward the serving table and got another plate of soup. He felt as though he were treading on air. He did not believe he was going to mind waiting on the hog, after all; it was so much satisfaction to fool him.

The head of the ranch ate his soup with purposeful speed, pushed back the plate and began drumming on the table with the tips of his thick fingers.

"It's a fine telephone service we get out here," he grumbled. "I suppose that girl hasn't bothered her head about it since."

"But of course it may take time to locate him, father," said Miss Underwood.

"It ought not to. What's a sheriff for? He's supposed to be within call, if I know anything about his business. Here's a bunch of highway robbers running around the country, and I dare say he's never heard about it. And they talk about improving the roads for tourists!"

Jerome Underwood's voice trailed off in a low growl and he continued to drum with his fingers.

"Well, I wanted to take a shot at the one in the road and you wouldn't let me," complained Chester.

"That would have been fine business, wouldn't it?" observed his father. "He'd have shot every last one of us before you could lift your finger. You never had a chance after you got out of the car. If you wanted to take a shot at him, why didn't you do it before you climbed out?"

"But it was just a bit unexpected, father. We didn't think—"

Underwood silenced his son with a gesture.

"Of course we didn't think. We didn't think that the country was running wild, with a lot of desperadoes doing as they damn please. But we found out differently, didn't we? *You* shoot at him! Why, there were three more of them up by his car. I *saw* them."

"Timothy said he didn't see anybody else," said Miss Underwood.

"Timothy's a blind ass. What do you expect of a chauffeur who is scared so stiff that he forgets how to work a tire pump? I say there were three men, lined up at the side of the road—with guns. Why, if it hadn't been for them I'd have had the other one."

The Wreck collected the soup plates and piled them carefully.

"You could have jumped on him while he was trying to get his car started," observed Miss Underwood, with a nod.

Her father mumbled something that did not appear to be a reply. The Wreck was feeling jubilant. He would not have missed waiting on table for the world. Now he knew how deeply he had bitten into the pride of Jerome Underwood; for even in the intimacy of the family circle Underwood had not confessed his humiliation at the crank of the flivver. He had been hidden from the family sight as he toiled, and now he was hiding the story. Too bad, thought the Wreck, that he had not marched the whole family up where they could see.

He carried the soup plates back to the kitchen, where he found Sally standing in the middle of the floor, her hands clasped and an anxious look on her face.

"Is it all right?" she whispered.

"Sure it is," he said.

The grin on his face meant more than his words. Sally breathed deeply and exhaled a long sigh.

"I was getting anxious," she said. "You were gone so terribly long. Didn't they ask you a lot of questions, or anything?"

"They're too busy telling each other how they were held up by four men," he observed.

"Four?"

"Yes—the liars. Four desperadoes, Underwood says. Me—" The Wreck peered down at his white jacket and apron and smiled wryly. "Me—I'm four desperadoes."

Sally did not join in the smile. She was ready to admit that he was one desperado, at the very least.

"Tell me everything they said, Henry."

"I've got to go back. Give me the next tray-full. I'll tell you about it afterward. I'm getting some information now."

Sally hurried with the tray and the Wreck went back to the dining-room. Underwood was still drumming on the table. He glanced at the tray as it passed him, ceased drumming and riveted his eye on the omelette. Even a dyspeptic, which the boss of the ranch was not, would have viewed it with attention. The Wreck was actually proud to carry it, for not only was it an object of beauty in itself, but Sally had found things to garnish it with, so that it was art in a frame.

Two minutes later Underwood looked up from his plate and fixed his glance on the Wreck.

"Say, who made this omelette?" he demanded.

"The cook, sir."

"Biscuits, too?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the coffee?"

"Yes, sir."

The large man helped himself to another mouthful and lingered over it.

"Not the same cook who was here last summer," he announced.

"No, sir."

"Who is he?"

"It's a lady, sir—my wife."

The Underwood family sighed comfortably, in unison.

"At last, father, we've got somebody who can cook," said Harriet. "Remember how awful it was last summer?"

The boss of the ranch nodded and reached for the omelette platter.

"Tell your wife that she's a good cook," he said. "Tell her to keep it up. Tell her to have fried chicken to-night, and browned potatoes, and beans, and corn, if she's got any—and more biscuits. Understand? More biscuits. Coffee, too. And I want her to make some pie. If she hasn't got stuff to make pie out of, we'll send for it. And tell her to cook a lot of everything."

Harriet Underwood frowned and glanced at her brother.

"Remember, father, the doctor said—"

"The doctor's in New York," interrupted Underwood. "What he doesn't know will never get into his bill. Don't forget, Williams—whatever you said your name was—have your wife keep right on cooking."

The Wreck, passing the biscuits again, acknowledged the command with a nod. He was hungry himself and he hoped there would be something left of the omelette, although he could see that the chances were against him. He did not need to be told that Sally Morgan could cook; he knew it before they did, back at the Bar-M, where Sally often shooed her mother out of the kitchen and ran things to suit herself.

"People can eat more out in this country," observed Underwood, apparently talking to himself. "It's the dry air and the altitude. Back in New York—"

There was an uncertain tinkle of the telephone bell in the next room. He lumbered hastily out of his chair in answer to it.

"Yes; this is Underwood. Got him, have you? . . . All right. Put him on. . . . That the sheriff? Great Scott! you're a hard man to get. . . . Never mind. This is Underwood. Get me? What? . . . Yes; that's right. Off in the northeast corner of the county. Now, listen:

"I was held up last night in my car. About thirty miles from the ranch, I should say. West of it, on the main road; there's only one road. We didn't come here direct; drove around by way of Duncan. The road's better. Had my son and daughter with me, and a driver. Are you getting this? . . .

"Four men. . . . Yes; four! Blocked the road with their own car and held us up. We never had a chance. Took watches, valubles, money. What? . . . Took every-

thing we had that was worth carrying off. Stole all the gasoline out of our tank and left us flat on the road. Let the air out of our tires with a knife. How's that? . . .

" How the devil can I give you a description? It was pitch dark. They had handkerchiefs over their faces. I'm not supposed to furnish a set of Bertillon measurements, am I? You didn't expect me to take fingerprints, did you, with a gun stuck under my nose? You're what? . . ."

There was an inarticulate rumble from the living room, then a booming of the heavy voice.

" You're surprised?" roared Underwood. " You didn't think there was anybody working the road over this way? Well, if you're surprised, what do you think I am? Doesn't a property owner get any protection in this county? I'm no tourist. I've got a place here. If you want to know whether I pay any taxes just look up the books. What? . . . Oh; you know about me, do you? Well, I'm damned glad somebody knows about me. Now, the best advice I can give you is to get busy. . . How's that? . . .

" How do I know what direction they went in? They started east when they left us; that's all I know. I want action—understand? I'll pay any reward and any expenses that are necessary, but I want action. I'm going to find out whether a taxpayer in this county has any protection against highwaymen. . . . All right. You're getting on the job at once; is that it? . . . Yes; I'll be here for some time. I'll expect to hear from you without much delay. Your name is Wells, isn't it? . . . All right."

The Wreck, who was pouring coffee for Chester, spilled some into the saucer, but recovered himself. So the sheriff's name was Wells!

Jerome Underwood came back into the dining-room, wearing the expression of a man who has achieved a stroke of business.

" Made it pretty strong, didn't you, father?" sugested his son, with a faint smile.

" Strong? Certainly I did. You don't suppose I wanted to give him the idea that it was a tea party, do you? When I've got a hand I play it to the limit. I don't want him loafing around and taking things easy. I want him on the job. He knows who I am. If he doesn't it won't take him long to find out."

He made another dive at the omelette.

" Says he'll get a posse on the road at once. Well, he'd better. A posse! What they need out here is a few New York policemen."

The Wreck, seeing no immediate need of his services, disappeared through the pantry in the direction of the kitchen. He had a queer look; as much a look of triumph as anything else.

Sally jumped up from a chair by the window and shot a glance of inquiry at him.

" Where are my spectacles?" he demanded. "My eyes hurt."

She found them and the Wreck began to look like himself again.

" Now tell me everything," she ordered.

" He's been at the telephone, raising the country against four desperadoes," said the Wreck. " He's made a regular yarn of it by this time. I guess they'll hang us for sure, Sally."

" They'd better wait till they catch us."

The Wreck contemplated her for a few seconds. He wondered just how she was going to take the news.

" He's a good liar; he piled it on. And he pulled all the old stuff about influence, and how much taxes he pays, and all the New York dope. He made me thank God I came from Pittsburgh."

" Could you get any idea of what's being done about it? asked Sally, with the practical aspects uppermost in her thoughts.

" Oh, there's a posse getting on the job," said the Wreck, wearily.

" A posse," mused Sally, nodding. " Yes; I'd imagine that. Who did he have on the phone?"

" He was talking to the sheriff."

" The sheriff. Uh-huh. Well, that means—"

Sally stopped and stared at the Wreck. Something had startled her.

" What county are we in?" she demanded.

He shrugged. He never tried to keep track of counties and he did not know. But

she read something in his eyes that caused her to clutch at his arm.

"Henry Williams! He wasn't talking to—"

"Yes, he was. That's exactly who he was talking to."

She walked back to the chair by the window and sat down, suddenly limp. For half a minute the Wreck was unable to figure just what sort of reaction she was having. It seemed to him that every possible emotion flashed into her face, one succeeding the other so rapidly that all was a confused blur. And then, with her head tossed back and her eyes wide with merriment, she began to laugh.

"Oh!" she gasped. "Oh, Henry, did you ever hear of such a joke? Bob Wells; Bob—out with a posse—to catch *me!*"

"I'll admit it's a joke," said the Wreck, cheerfully.

"Why, it's a perfect scream! I might have known we were in the same county; it's so terribly big. But I never even thought about it. And now he's got the sheriff—Bob Wells!"

She passed into another spasm of laughter while the Wreck watched. Any time they wanted to laugh about Bob Wells the Wreck was a willing listener.

"I start out for a trousseau, and I get turned into a hold-up man, and I'm chased —by *Bob Wells!*"

"It's great," he affirmed, solemnly.

Then he saw that another change was coming. She was getting control of herself and the laughter was fading. There was a questioning look in her eyes, a chewing of her under lip.

"H-m. It's rather embarrassing at that," she said, slowly. "I don't know that it's so funny, after all. It complicates things. Bob Wells is an awfully good sheriff. When he goes after people he's a perfect bloodhound. He got a murderer last year that nobody ever dreamed he could get. And if he should ever find us—"

She broke off and plunged into another period of reflection. Presently she was frowning, and the Wreck saw that she was clenching her fists.

"Henry Williams," she said, standing up and facing him, "I don't like it. I don't like it one bit. Bob Wells hasn't got any business to be chasing me!"

There were times when even the Wreck could be just to a foe.

"But, Sally, how does he know who he's chasing?"

"Doesn't make any difference. I said I didn't like it, and I don't I won't stand for it. Bob Wells—chasing *me!*" And she again clenched her fists.

The Wreck had never been able to make anything out of women, and now he knew that he never would.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

SONG OF THE SKATER

IN the still, frore night,
When the stars blink white,
And the great trees crack with cold,
And the long black stream
Is red with the gleam
Of the skate fires manifold;

Then swift is the steel
On the skater's heel,
And the skater's call is blithe,
While the deep woods ring
To the songs they sing,
And the swift skates hiss like a scythe.

Harry L. Koopman.

Seas of Misunderstanding

by Ray Cummings

THERE were three of us in the beginning. We drifted together, not because of any sympathy of character or taste, nor even on account of that subtle attraction for which opposites are proverbially noted—though I doubt if three men of more varied characteristics could have been got together—but solely because of the similarity of position in which fate had chosen to place us. For to the best of our knowledge, we none of us had a relative in the world.

Jim O'Mara was Irish, loquaciously enthusiastic on any and every subject, optimistic under every circumstance—a blond young giant both good-natured and quick-tempered. Bogden Walenitsky, on the other hand, was of a Polish near-noble family whose relatives had been systematically hanged, shot and knouted out of existence—a slight, dark youth, silent and morose for the most part, and a nihilist at heart.

For myself I am just an average American, blessed neither by good looks nor great wealth.

Jim christened us the "Islands."

We had been meeting more or less casually at a little cosmopolitan *table d'hôte* where we could quarrel as much as we pleased so long as we stopped short of actual violence, and the question of forming a defensive and offensive alliance had come up.

"'Tis a good idea, boys," said Jim. "And we'll call ourselves the 'Islands.' Emerson or some other literary lad says we are all 'islands shouting to each other across seas of misunderstanding.' It's islands *we* are, all right—bleak and bare desert islands without kith, kin, or pig to bless ourselves—glory be for that—and as to the 'seas of misunderstanding,' sure it's oceans and oceans of it and nothing else we have all the time."

So the Islands we became, and for several months things drifted along pleasantly enough; then—we fell in love. Individually and collectively we fell in love—and of course, with the same girl.

She was the sister of Jack Broughton, an artist acquaintance of ours; and we met her first at the little restaurant where we all dined. Jack's studio became very popular with us after that; though it was several weeks before we would admit, even to each other, that Valarie was its chief charm.

At first Valarie treated us all with equally polite indifference. I soon realized, however, that my commonplace attractions stood no chance against the charms of the handsome, vivacious Irishman, or the dark, romantic beauty of the little Pole; so I was early eliminated from the race and left to heal my broken heart as best I might.

But between Jim and Bogden the rivalry waxed hot and furious.

One day as I sat in my office—I was a struggling young lawyer then—longing for the clients that as yet were so few and far between, the telephone-bell rang, and I heard Jack Broughton's voice hoarse with excitement.

"For God's sake, Will, come up here at once!" he cried. "Something terrible has happened!"

"What?" I answered. "Come where?" I knew he had no telephone in his studio.

"Jim O'Mara's place," he replied. "I'm there now—I can't tell you over the phone." I heard the click as the receiver was hung up.

Jim occupied two rooms in a part office, part studio building on Fourteenth Street—a small bedroom and a huge half-library, half-studio, that he called his workshop.

Broughton met me at the door, and without a word pointed to the room. It had never been a very orderly spot, but now it looked as though the proverbial cyclone had struck it. Practically every bit of furniture was out of place; the glass doors of the bookcases were broken and the books strewn on the floor; chairs were upset; rugs piled in a heap on the couch; the desk was broken open—its shattered lock still clinging to the roll-top; and papers were scattered everywhere. On the laboratory side the wreckage was as bad—broken glass, upset bottles, and scattered instruments.

In the bedroom bureau drawers had been dragged out on the floor and their contents thrown beside them. The bed was in disorder; and a small steamer trunk that had been under it was open and empty.

"Burglars," I said. "Some one has been here and gone through the place—in a hurry, too, I should say."

"Not ordinary burglars at any rate," Broughton replied. "Nothing of value is missing. Besides, look around—look there." He pointed to a stain on the polished floor.

"Blood!" I cried. "And here's more. Notice that test-tube. Some one with bloody hands has handled it!"

"Look in the wash-basin."

I ran into the bedroom; the basin was half filled with water of an unmistakable reddish-brown tinge, and a towel beside it was streaked with red.

For a moment I could do nothing but stare, dumb with horror, at Jack.

"Let's get out of here," I said as soon as I could speak. "We must get the police at once."

But to my surprise Jack demurred, suggesting that we go to Walenitsky's first. At Bogden's studio, which was only a few blocks away, we received no answer to our knocks; but the janitor knew us well and let us in.

Jack threw aside his overcoat and hat and sat down, in spite of my protests that we should waste no time waiting, but should notify the police at once.

"I want to talk to you first," he insisted. "You do not know all I know. Sit down.

"For some time past you have rather avoided Valarie and me," he began directly.

I would have interrupted, but he went on swiftly:

"Don't apologize, Will. Let us talk frankly. I know the reason. What you *don't* know is how Jim and Bogden have been progressing in their quite obvious rivalry over Valarie."

"No, I don't," I agreed briefly.

"They've been growing more and more bitter," he went on earnestly; and the anxiety in his tone was unmistakable. "So bitter that lately I've feared an open breach. Walenitsky is more silent than ever, and, charming as he can be to us when he wants to be, to Jim his manner is little less than insulting. O'Mara's attitude of good-natured, somewhat contemptuous raillery makes him worse. As to Valarie, I confess I don't understand her at all—*her* attitude is quite non-committal."

"There's not much new in all that," I interposed. "I expected it."

"No," replied Jack. "But this is more definite. I was out last evening. When I returned, about eleven, I found Valarie in tears. Jim and Bogden had both been there—quarreling, I think, though I couldn't get much out of Valarie. This morning I went around to see Jim. The door wasn't locked. I went in and found the place the way you have just seen it."

"Great Heavens!" I cried. "You don't think Bogden—"

"Wait," Jack interrupted. "The jani-

tor of Jim's house told me this morning that Jim and the 'foreign gentleman,' as he calls Bogden, went up to Jim's rooms together about eleven last evening—evidently just after they left Valarie. Shortly afterward—when he went up to turn down the hall gas-jet—he heard them talking in loud tones—quarreling evidently. This morning—early—about seven thirty, the janitor says Jim called him up to his rooms to carry down a trunk. Jim took the trunk in a taxi and drove away. When it was Bogden left—if he *did* leave—alive—the janitor doesn't know. He doesn't know—yet—what Jim's rooms look like now. I questioned him very casually."

"Then you think—" I began hoarsely.

"I don't know," he answered. "It looks bad, but I—I can't believe it of Jim. He might have killed him accidentally in a fight. But he wouldn't run away. He wouldn't have—done *that!*"

For an hour we talked the matter over, but with no satisfactory results. Finally we decided that the only thing left was to call in the police.

We were about to start for the door when it was suddenly thrown open, and a policeman, followed by two men in plain clothes and the janitor of Jim's building, burst into the room.

"That's thim," shrieked the janitor as soon as he saw us. "Thim's the bloody murtherers, sir."

I don't know how it happened, but the next thing I realized was that a pair of steel handcuffs had suddenly grown on my wrists; Jack was similarly decorated, but he was the first to recover himself.

"What does this mean?" he demanded excitedly. "What are we arrested for? I—"

"Shut up!" commanded one of the plain-clothes men shortly. "The charge in the warrant says 'burglary,' an' that 'll do for yous. Come on now, or I'll fan yer."

"What hev yer done with Mr. O'Mara, yer bloody murtherers?" yelled the janitor.

"O'Mara!" gasped Jack in amazement, for naturally we had been thinking we were implicated in the murder of Bogden. "You told me O'Mara went away in a taxi at half past seven."

"An' he came back," snapped the janitor. "As yer well know that kilt him, an' tore his rooms all up."

"This is absurd," I cut in. "Of course he didn't come back."

"He surely did," maintained the excited janitor.

"How do you know he did?" I demanded. "Did you see him?"

"No, I didn't see him. But how else did his trunk get back in just the place I took it from at the foot of the bed. An' who smashed up his rooms that was all right at seven thirty? Answer me that, yez—"

"Aw, can the hot air," growled the plain-clothes man who had spoken before. "Come on youse."

And shackled to our captors, we were led away.

I don't know just which of the numerous humiliations the next few hours brought hurt Jack the most; but not the least, to me, were the personal references of the yellow press. I had never before realized that my "eyes were set near together under a slanting, narrow forehead and were those of a typical moral degenerate"; and the fact that Jack had a "typical criminal nose," and "ears that proclaimed unmistakable homicidal tendencies," was but slight balm.

However, the time passed somehow, between being mugged and having the detectives paraded before our cells who looked at us as though we were some new animals at the zoo, and receiving a few degrees at headquarters and elsewhere.

Toward six o'clock the lawyer for whom I had sent made his appearance, and we were taken up-stairs to see him. He was, fortunately, evidently a friend of the chief, for we were soon afterward, for the second time that afternoon, taken into the latter's room.

The chief this time was far more pleasant to us than when he had questioned us before—and my respect for our lawyer leaped skyward.

"Conceding all that you say to be true, gentlemen," said the chief when I had repeated our story, "it looks to me as though your friend O'Mara had made away with Walenitsky for some—"

But at that moment a detective entered with word that a man who insisted he could give important evidence on our case was outside.

As the door reopened a moment later Jack and I leaped to our feet.

"Walenitsky!" we cried simultaneously.

"A lively corpse!" remarked the chief as Bogden threw himself hysterically upon us.

"I've come to confess!" he cried excitedly. "I did it—not kill him—*no*—but I tried to rob him. He had a letter—a paper—I wanted. I went to see him last night, and I met him on the corner by his house. I demanded the—paper, and he laughed. I went up to his room with him, and we quarreled—fought. We broke things, and I cut my hand on the doors of the bookcase—see?" He held up a bandaged hand. "Then he bound it up for me and told me to go home and—and soak my head."

He paused for a moment to let this insult sink in. "But I had to have that—paper—so I watched the house and he went out early in the morning. Then I slipped in and went through everything. That's all. These gentlemen did not have anything to do with it."

"What was that—letter?" asked the chief.

"It was a paper," Bogden answered sullenly. "I cannot tell you what it was. He had threatened to use it in a dishonorable way."

"Look here, Walenitsky," persisted the chief. "I am inclined to believe your story. But even so you are in a grave position. You have confessed to burglary—and if O'Mara does not turn up you may have to answer for murder. Much may depend, for *you*, on that letter."

But Bogden only shook his head.

"Another one with evidence on this case, chief," announced a detective. "It's a lady."

Bogden, Jack, and I sprang again to our feet; there was but *one* lady in the case.

"Show her in," said the chief. "And if the rest of the city comes with evidence, show them in, too. We may as well have this out at once."

Valarie entered, looking more beautiful in her trouble than ever, and flung herself in her brother's arms.

"I've come to tell you it wasn't they," she cried, turning to the chief. "It was—it must have been—" For the first time she saw Walenitsky.

"You here!" she added. "Oh, Bogden, why did you do it?"

"Miss Broughton," said the chief before Bogden could reply, "Mr. Walenitsky has confessed that he searched O'Mara's rooms looking for a certain letter. Its contents may be of great importance to him."

"I came to tell—" began Valarie; but Bogden interrupted excitedly.

"No, no! It is not necessary!"

"Why not?" asked Valarie in surprise. "I came here to tell that *I* had sent you for the letter. I had to clear my—my brother, even at your expense. I'm glad you confessed—I believed you would if you knew that they—he was in trouble through what you did."

She went on with dignity, addressing herself to the chief:

"Mr. O'Mara had done me the honor to ask me by letter to marry him. I answered, also by letter, refusing him. But I went further. I told him I—I loved some one else. And I told him who it was, and that—that he had never proposed." She paused, her face scarlet; but in a moment went bravely on:

"Jim came last night to say good-by—he accepted my refusal without question—he was going away for a while, he said. He told me, more as a joke, I think, that he considered it his duty to let the—the other man know. I should have known he wouldn't. But after he had gone I was afraid perhaps he might. So when Bogden came—"

"Wait a moment," interjected her brother. "Weren't Bogden and Jim with you together last evening?"

"No," she answered. "Jim only stayed a short time. So when Bogden came—"

"I was wrong on that," Jack again interjected to me.

"I asked Bogden to go to Jim," Valarie went on, heedless of this second interruption. "I told him to ask Jim to please return the letter or destroy it, as I was afraid

he might send it to some one I wouldn't have see it for the world. Bogden didn't know what was in the letter."

"No, no, I didn't!" cried Walenitsky, burying his face in his hands. "Oh, I am a fool—quite a fool! I, too, proposed to you and you refused me. I was sure you had refused Jim, too. And I thought that in revenge he had—ah! I am a fool, and you can never forgive me."

"It seems to me," said the chief, "that Mr. O'Mara has yet to be accounted for."

"Mr. O'Mara," announced the detective. "You told me to bring them all in, sir," he added as Jim entered, bag in hand.

"I've come all the way from Philadelphia to surrender myself, sir," began O'Mara gravely to the chief, ignoring our vociferous greetings.

"For what?" asked that official in some surprise.

"For being murdered under false pretences, sir. I'm the *corpus delicti* in this case."

The chief laughed. "Did you bring your trunk?" he asked. "It was the main piece of evidence against these gentlemen."

"The trunk's in Philadelphia," exclaimed Jim in disgust. "Sure I just heard the story from this man here—" He indicated the detective who had shown him in. "The fool janitor couldn't imagine I might have *two* trunks. I suppose Bogden pulled the other one out from under the bed."

"But," I cried, "the janitor said your room wasn't disturbed at seven thirty this morning."

"The *bedroom* wasn't," Jim replied. "We had the scrap in the workshop. I let the janitor into the bedroom from the hall. That's the only room he saw this mornin'."

"Counselor," said the chief, rising and turning to our attorney, "I will take the responsibility of paroling the prisoners in your custody. You can arraign them tomorrow morning and I will see that the complaining witness and the officers who made the arrest are on hand to secure their discharge. As to Mr. Walenitsky, there is no charge against him, unless Mr. O'Mara wishes to make one."

A suggestion Jim declined.

"In that case," continued the chief, "I think the matter is closed. Except," he added dryly to Valarie, "we have not discovered the—other man."

"By Jove, that's so!" cried Jack with brotherly brutality. "Why, Valarie, you only know three men at all well. You've refused Jim and Bogden—there's only—"

"Shut up, you fool!" cautioned Jim; but it was too late.

For a moment my head reeled, and I felt all their eyes upon me. Then I forgot them altogether.

"Valarie!" I said faintly. "Valarie!"

I wanted to say many other things; but that seemed to tell her everything that was in my heart, for she hid her face on my shoulder before them all.

"Seas of misunderstanding," I heard Jim say. "Oceans of it. But we've done shoutin' over it now—we've crossed over for good."

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IN A NEW YORK APARTMENT

A MAN with heavy boots and a dog is trampling overhead;
A woman is trying to sing her soul out—out of tune—below;
The servant rattles the dishes in a tin pan in the near-kitchen.

The bell rings, announcing a guest, or a bill;
The telephone jangles: "Hello!" a wrong call.

Two canaries hop back and forth in a narrow cage;
Some plants are trying to grow in a little shell;
Three goldfish swim round and round in a tiny bowl.
I sit, with hat on—awaiting what, oh, my soul?

Daisy Vail

Tracks

by Hal G. Evarts

A SLENDER tongue of light pierced the thin board partition and fell athwart the peaceful features of Roderick Evans Lee. He aroused sufficiently to feel that his head touched wood and that the bare soles of his feet were flat against the cold foot of the bed. He contracted to the extent of relieving the pressure upon his head and withdrawing his feet once more beneath the sheltering blankets.

"Too short," he reflected, having reference to the blankets.

"Too short." The thought was echoed by a voice from beyond the board partition.

"Now, you would hardly call two hundred short, would you?" said a second voice. "Not for a little play like that. Anyway, that's the last word. You can call it or leave it. Two hundred dollars flat."

Roderick Evans Lee opened one eye and blinked into the tiny shaft of light.

"That stud game is getting tougher every minute," he told himself. "Two hundred flat."

"Do I get it now?" the first voice inquired hopefully.

"Well, practically now," the other returned soothingly. "Thursday is only three days off, so it's almost the same as right now—only you don't get it until Thursday. You leave that little trail all plain and distinct, and you meet me and get the two hundred. Just as simple as that."

"What's the idea?" asked the first.

Lee had an idea that he knew that voice.

"Two hundred dollars is the idea," answered the other. "That's the only idea that concerns you. If ever you gather up any other and newer ideas, just keep on the safe side and don't try to figure them out. Like you said, I'm a stranger to you. I aim to stay one. The only time you'll likely see me again is Thursday. That's the size of it. I'm gone."

Lee applied his eye to the nail-hole through which strayed the fugitive thread of light and attempted a survey of the adjacent poker-room. A two-foot circle of the opposite wall was all that rewarded his efforts. The stranger was as good as his word. He was gone. Lee heard the click as the other went out and softly closed the door behind him. He settled back to resume his interrupted slumbers.

"Some one is going to act up unlawfully," he reflected. "Some one else is to receive a piece of soft money for making a nice plain trail. They'll follow the trail, and at the end of it will be the goat. He'll spill the beans and tell everything he knows. He will make a clean breast of it, and tell all about how a stranger hired him to make some tracks. Of course, they'll believe him and let him go—after anywhere from thirty days to ninety-nine years, according to whether it's chicken stealing or homicide the stranger is about to indulge in." Sleep stopped further speculations.

A few hours later the rattle of pots and pans announced that the kitchen staff of the Élite Hotel was on the job for another day, and that it was time to arise. As he dressed Lee permitted his mind to dwell upon the happenings of the night.

"That voice," he mused. "I've an idea that the goat is well known to me. He's trifling, shiftless, and altogether good-for-nothing. I don't like him hardly any, but some way I don't wish him any harm. It's funny that I feel all that, and yet can't seem to place him. If I hadn't been so dead sleepy I'd have gone out and asked the stranger what he was up to. But a man must have sleep, and anyway it's too late now."

With this philosophical conclusion he repaired to the wash-room, splashed his face and hands energetically, and descended to breakfast.

II.

LATE in the afternoon of the second day thereafter Lee rode into the yard of the Wilson ranch-house on the valley road ten miles below Basin.

The unpainted shack gave evidence that some one struggled against odds to make it neat and attractive. Rock-bordered flower-beds flanked the slab porch, and a few tiny shoots already were peeping through in defiance of the cold of early spring nights. The little square windows were softened by white drapes.

The girl on the porch wore a simple calico dress, freshly ironed and open at the neck, exposing her white throat. Her dress and her drab surroundings seemed only a background, throwing into relief the living grace of face and figure of the girl herself.

Roderick Evans Lee swung from his horse and gathered Betty Wilson close in his arms. Eventually he held her off at arm's length and viewed her reverently, only to sweep her back to him for a still longer period.

"Fifty miles is a long way when a man is busy, Betty," he said at last. "And a month is a long time, no matter how you view it. Are you going back with me this trip, Betty?"

"It's the same old thing, Rod," she replied. "I can't go yet. Eddie is so wild. If I don't stay here and make a home for him, he's liable to do anything. I want to go, Rod, you know I do, but I have to stick by Eddie."

"Damn Eddie!" Rod muttered to himself; but to the girl he said: "We'll take Ed along."

"He wouldn't stay, Rod. He's only a boy, and he's proud of the fact that he runs a ranch of his own. He's not as wild as he was—honestly, Rod. You know how they are, and Eddie's just a boy."

"Some boy!" said Rod. "Yes, I know how they are. Where is Eddie now?"

"He came home early yesterday morning, and left again," she answered. "He had to make a two-day trip to look for strays."

The subject of their thoughts appeared at the gate, riding one horse and leading two others. He greeted them indifferently, but the voice struck a chord in Lee's memory. It was the voice he had heard the night before—the voice of the man who was going to make a clean trail.

"Enter—the goat," Lee remarked.

"I don't understand what you mean, Rod," Betty said curiously.

"I just this minute remembered something I hadn't thought about since night before last," he explained. "It flashed across my mind just now like lamplight through a nail-hole. And to-morrow is Thursday.

"Betty," he continued, once more holding the girl at arm's length, "I'll have to collect some of Eddie's loose ends and see if I can't shape him up into one lump of something or other. I heard rumors in Basin about the sheriff's sort of easing Eddie through a scrape or two. I'm not acquainted with the sheriff, but it struck me as unnatural that he should find much joy in keeping Eddie out of jail through pure humanity.

"Later, after he finds out that he has to ride out here real often to confer with you about how the boy is coming on, it will develop that his interest goes deeper than Eddie. The sheriff has seen you somewhere or other, honey. In order to keep you from feeling under obligation to any one, I'll love to undertake the case myself. Possibly I can pick this brother of yours up by the back of the neck and lift him out of trouble for keeps."

The girl gripped his arms tight and looked up at him.

"If any one on earth can do it, Rod, you're the one," she said.

"I'll work Eddie over," he promised. "Now I've gone and remembered something else. Here I've just seen you for the first time in a thousand years, and I have to leave right now. That little matter I just thought of makes it necessary to start for Basin in something less than one minute. I'll stay over and come out again tomorrow, Betty girl."

He kissed the girl good-by, and she stood and watched him out of sight. In less than two hours he was scanning the register of the Élite Hotel. He noted the room number of one Robert McDonald, and ascended the stairs.

The two greeted each other as old friends.

"I was afraid I'd missed you, Rod," said McDonald. "I was a day late, in addition to the fact that it might take a letter a month to reach that back-country ranch of yours."

"Mail service twice a week, Mac, you old pessimist. At least there have been weeks when I'd go after it that often. Last week was one of that kind—and here I am."

"Sit in this easy chair; I'll use the bed, Rod," said McDonald. "Start in and tell me all you know."

"I'm looking for a job, Mac," Lee informed him. "I haven't had any excitement for a long time, so I thought I'd go to work for the express company."

"Why don't you go back to the rangers if things are dull?" Mac asked. "Why, the express is nothing!"

"Rangering is too sustained, old man, and I can't spare the time. So if you don't mind I'll just hire out to you for a couple of weeks and quit when I get ready."

McDonald looked at him steadily and nodded.

"You're hired, Rod. Name your own price," he said. "Now let's hear it."

"Why, you've guessed already that I know things!" Rod exclaimed admiringly. "When, as a matter of fact, I don't. It's like this: When your letter reached me, saying you would be in Basin, I says to myself: 'They are sending Mac to Basin. Now, just why does the express company send their very best man to a hole like Basin? They have been rapped heavily and consistently in this locality for the last year—that's why,' I answered. 'They know history repeats, and they want Mac here when she starts repeating. That's as plain as voices through a wood partition.'

"While I waited around here yesterday I kept looking over the register to see if I could connect voices with names. I don't believe there was a name there that would fill the bill. That voice wasn't registered. Then it dawned on me. 'Mac's a smart one,' I told myself. 'Wise old Mac! He timed this trip just right. She's starting to repeat right about now. If I only hadn't been so dead sleepy,' I says. 'I can't put a stop to it now. Something will bust within a hundred miles of here. Then they'll find the tracks of three horses, and if they work out the trail they'll pick up the goat. He deserves hanging on general principles, but he'll get it done to him on the wrong count,' I says. 'I'll just have Mac fix me up some papers. I'll help Mac out, and keep the goat from having his neck stretched a foot long. After he's had the fear shoved into him a mile deep, maybe I can steer him into better ways,' I says, 'and help myself most of all.'"

McDonald nodded.

"Two thousand if you land them afterward, Rod, and five if you land them first," he offered.

"All I want is a free hand to act in my own irregular way, Mac," said Lee. "In addition to helping an old friend I have a selfish ax of my own to grind. If I go to tracking the goat I'll only put them wise and gum things up. I'll do it after the job instead. Of course, it's your business to prevent. If you want to throw a guard-line around every express office on the line, go to it, but you'll only scare them off. They'll pull it later when you're off guard. Besides, I may be wrong."

"I'll sit tight and see," McDonald decided. "You've got a free hand to do as you please with the company behind you, Rod. Go to it."

Rod went to it by riding out to the Wilson ranch and spending the following after-

noon and evening building love castles with Betty Wilson. It was nearly midnight when he arrived at the Élite Hotel and turned in.

Half an hour before daylight he was aroused by some one sitting on the edge of the bed.

"History has repeated, Rod," explained McDonald. "Not an office this time, though. Two men blew the safe on No. 16, westbound, at one o'clock. It was only five miles west of here, too. The wires were cut, every one. The hand-car crew they sent out to find the break found it a mile this side of the hold-up—and didn't have sense enough to know there was trouble up ahead and investigate or send a man back to report. No. 16 pulled on into Willard and reported the hold-up about three. They've had deputies on the roads into there, but couldn't wire Basin until nearly five. Wires had been cut at two poles, leaving a clean miss of a hundred feet. The sheriff leaves with a posse in twenty minutes."

"I'll be there," said Rod, kicking off the bedding. "Introduce me as a friend from the sticks, Mac."

Twenty minutes later the posse struck a steady trail trot up the valley road.

"We'll be the first on the spot," Sheriff Jackson announced. "It's forty miles to Willard, and they'll check it up to me. They may send out a car of deputies to look it over, but that will be about all."

In the first faint streaks of dawn the posse passed the spot where the linemen still worked on the hundred-foot gap in a dozen wires.

"No use to look there; they've trampled that place flat," said Jackson; and they jogged on up the road without a pause.

Half a mile beyond the sheriff swung his arm in a half circle, and the men scattered through the brush. Five minutes later a deputy pulled up his horse and waved his hat. The balance of the posse closed in on him.

"Here's where their horses was tied," the deputy stated, pointing.

The sheriff made a businesslike search of the place.

"Three horses," he reported. "They likely tied them here and hoofed it back to Basin on the tracks. They rode the train out and stopped by here. Damn! There's been a bunch of range horses down here visiting around, and they've trampled the ground up until we'll never locate which way they came from. But we're more interested in which way they left. We'll cut their trail going out."

The men scoured the right of way minutely. They were unanimous in declaring that the tracks were made by but two men.

"The third horse is a packhorse to carry the stuff," the sheriff instantly decided. "Circle, boys," and they rode in ever widening loops until one deputy struck the trail.

To the south the valley was flanked by a lofty range from which, at irregular intervals of five miles or more, mountain streams tumbled down through the foothills to the little river in the valley. Over the foothills between two of these streams the trail led them.

"They're going to ride for it," declared the sheriff. "They're not even trying to break their trail."

"The sheriff is reputed to be the best trailer in the State," McDonald said to Lee.

Three miles up in the foothills the trail angled to the right and dipped to the bed of the creek. The point where it struck the stream was in a little upland valley. Here, for half a mile, the creek rested in its tumultuous descent to the river and meandered about through the flat meadows.

Range cattle and horses fought flies in the willows or fed on the rank spring grass. The trail where it entered the stream was already faint from the crossing of stock. It did not come out upon the other bank.

"H-m," said the sheriff, "what's the use to break their trail now? If they went back down they only wasted time in coming here at all. If they went up"—and he pointed to a distant gap in the range—"if they went up, they can't hide their trail. A mile up, this creek narrows to a cañon that a lizard couldn't climb out of. A trout can hardly stay in the water for boulders, let alone a horse. There's just one way out

—a single trail up through the Gunbarrel Gap. Anyway we can soon find out," he went on. "Up above, the range stuff won't be thick enough to blot out the trail. A mile will tell the story. Come on."

Half a mile up-stream they found the trail of the three horses.

"They're going to ride for it and take to the hills," the sheriff prophesied once again. "They'll cross the gap and hide out in the Mogollons, where there's nothing but game trails for a hundred miles. They've a four-hour start of us, and they'll make it over, too, unless—I don't see just why they took to the creek. Maybe they counted on that to fool us and they rested in the cañon until daylight. It's a bad trail at night. We've still a possible chance to head them, boys. Let's go."

McDonald turned to Lee with a faint smile.

"Jackson is the best trailer in the State, Rod," he said.

"I've just remembered something," Lee answered. "I've got to dangle right along back to Basin. If you'll excuse me, Mac, I'll start right now."

The sheriff looked after him and laughed shortly.

"Your tall friend seems to have lost interest in things," he remarked to McDonald. "The prospects of a gun fight in the cañon mebbe didn't appeal to him. It would be a bad hole at that. Well, let's go!" and he led the posse up the Gunbarrel trail.

Late that night they trotted wearily back into Basin and McDonald sought Lee in his room.

"They made it across," he said. "Jackson tracked them every foot of the way. We'll have to send a bunch over with grub for a week's stay and try to hound them out. Jackson is a good trailer, Rod."

"I had a hound once that was the best cold trailer I ever laid an eye on," Lee remarked. "He could follow a trail that was three days old as easy as if it was fresh. But he was unobservant — that dog. It didn't matter a damn to him whether he was tracking a pack rat or a roan colt."

"Or a goat?" McDonald suggested.

"Something like that," Lee admitted. "This job was effected by three folks, Mac, not two," he continued. "One-third home talent and two-thirds away from home talent. The local one-third caught and saddled three range horses and held them there, meanwhile milling a bunch of loose stock around to cover where he'd come from. He never got off his horse or made a track. The imported two-thirds rode Sixteen out, stopped her, and blew the safe. Then all three rode for the hills—up until they took to the creek. They probably stayed in the creek for all of fifty feet or so. Then the local member likely hazed a bunch of range horses down their back tracks to the creek, and with all that stock in the valley it would be impossible for the posse to unravel their trail. That creek crosses the road a few miles from Basin. There's an old wood road runs up it for two hundred yards at the mouth. They rode down there, unsaddled the horses and turned them loose, loaded saddles, blankets, and bridles into a car they had left there and rolled on back to Basin in the moonlight without using any lights. Simple, wasn't it?"

"Very," said McDonald. "And Jackson followed the three-day-old trail of the goat above the meadows where there was no stock to blot it out. Is that it?"

"Jackson can see a trail, but he doesn't notice what he sees," rejoined Lee. "There's only three sizes of saddle horse shoes used much around here. Oughts, ones and twos—and there's almost an inch difference across between each size. Funny that a good tracker such as he is didn't notice that all three of those horses wore twos up to the creek and after that two of them had on oughts. Then that packhorse theory about the third horse. Going through the trees they spread out a time or two with a tree between each horse. A packhorse led with a rope is apt to get all tangled up if he goes on the off side of a tree— and men don't turn a horse loose at night with thirty thousand dollars packed on his back. All three of those horses had some one sitting up in the middle of them. How much did they get, Mac? Was it thirty even."

"Even money," McDonald affirmed. "Six little sacks of gold twenties—five

thousand to the sack. There was no currency shipment and they didn't touch the small stuff. What makes you think two of them are strangers to this country, Rod?"

"You remember Jackson remarking about how they walked and led their horses a good deal as if they were saving them for a long run? I noticed they only walked where steep side hills made them nervous about sitting up in the saddle. And the third man didn't get off once. Then when they got on again they didn't care two straws which side of the horse they used for mounting purposes. A couple of places where the dirt was soft it was plain where they had wandered around and got up from the right side. A six-year-old in this country knows better than to climb the right side of a horse.

"Let the sheriff worry about all the trails in the hills, Mac," he continued. "We'll sit around town and see what happens right here at home."

III.

THE next morning Lee rode out to the Wilson ranch and watched his opportunity to corner Ed Wilson alone in the barn.

"Now you've gone and raised hell, haven't you, Eddie?" he inquired.

"What do you mean, raised hell?" Wilson demanded sullenly.

"Oh, drawing down nice money for making tracks around loose in the hills for one thing. Holding up trains for another. Little boyish pranks like that."

Wilson made a sudden move behind him, but changed it to an upward stretch when Lee instantly shoved a gun into the pit of his stomach.

"Tut, tut, Eddie," Lee admonished, "you'll do that some day at a man who don't realize how slow and awkward you are, and he'll shoot your belt buckle through your backbone before he even stops to think."

"I'll show you how slow I am!" Wilson threatened.

"That's right, Eddie. You're about due to slow up considerably from now on out," said Lee. "You're going to remember that you're twenty past and wish you were three and a half. Turn around.

"Sit down on that box, Eddie, and fold your hands in your lap," he went on after removing Wilson's gun. "Now look at this. That pretty little badge explains that I'm a secret agent for the express company. It's my painful duty to hand you a thousand years at hard labor for sticking up Sixteen. What do you think now about slowing up?"

Ed Wilson paled. "Honest, I didn't have a hand in that, Rod. I'll swear it," he said.

"I'm just here to arrest you—not to judge you," rejoined Lee. "Save your evidence for the jury."

"Give me a chance to explain. Don't jail me, Rod," Wilson begged. "Give me a chance. I'll tell you how it was." He went to pieces under Lee's steady, unblinking stare and poured forth the tale of the stranger who had bought him, the man who had hired him to make tracks.

"The jury will probably fall for every last word of that, Eddie. It sounds likely. You're going strong—and your finish will be stronger," said Lee. "We'll have to think up something better than that. Come now—think again. You tell that pipe dream to the jury and they'll deliberate almost a minute before deciding to hang you four miles in the air."

"This will go hard with Betty—seeing you jail me for something I didn't do," Wilson muttered brokenly. "It's pretty tough on sis."

"Yes," Lee answered, "and sis has had it tough for some time back. Ever since your dad died you've managed all the drunken festivities in Basin while Betty stayed home and did her single-handed best to run the ranch."

"I've told you the living truth," the boy stated. "I'll swear it. Don't you believe me when I say every word is true?"

"Sure. Sure I believe you, Eddie. So will the judge. Eddie, you're right up to the end of the plank. You've got as good a chance to get hung as any mortal I know of. If it wasn't for Betty I'd let you swing. If you'll do just as I say, I can maybe get you off."

"Name it, Rod," Wilson begged. "I'll do anything. I'm in your hands. I'll—"

"Just a minute," Lee cut in. "You're all wrought up and excited. If I don't pick you up now some one else probably will soon. I'll instruct you what to say and do, and the first time you vary from it by as much as a whisper, I'll quit you cold—and you're a dead bird any time I do. Now, Eddie, you listen to me.

"First, you're going to hand out that two hundred. I don't want any one to find it on you and get you mixed up in lying about where you got it. You've earned it, and some day I'll hand it back. Next, we will go up and tell Betty about how you're going to be a much better boy than ever before, and that when she goes home with me in a couple of weeks you'll be going along. We'll mention that we've decided to go in together and for you to have an interest in the business—amount to be determined later. I'll send some one down to drive up your stock—that way they won't increase too fast on the road like they might if you started out to bring them up yourself.

"Then if you get arrested later don't you gabble on about any stranger that tempted you. Dead men tell no tales, Eddie, and you'll be deader than a mackerel as soon as you loosen your trap. If you know enough to hurt him the stranger will find some way to slip you a pill. If he passes you, the jury will elevate you higher than a kite for falling for temptation. Your one hope is to act grouchy and swear you don't know a thing. The first time you make a cheep to the contrary I'll drop you like I would a sand wasp."

As Lee rode back toward Basin he carried the mental vision of a girl whose eyes were happy over the sudden reformation of an erring brother.

"Eddie said he came back across the range by way of the Sunlight Pass," he mused. "There's enough stock in Sunlight Basin to cover his trail until a coyote couldn't track him. If he doesn't converse too much he's riding easy—except in his mind."

Upon his arrival in Basin he hunted up McDonald.

"I happened across the goat, Mac," he said. "He coughed up his little story like I knew he would. But what he knows about the man that hired him won't help us any. He gave me a minute description which will fit half the men in the State."

"The sheriff sent a posse across the pass to beat out the Mogollons for a week," returned McDonald. "Maybe they'll find out something."

"Yes, they'll find the way out or something," Lee answered. "Those fellows didn't cross, Mac. They had been staying here at the house of the local member, and after they held up Sixteen they came back here. They may have slipped out by now—possibly, but the home guard will tip his hand some way before long. Maybe then we can get a line on the other two. I've a life-size hunch they're still visiting him and won't try to leave for a few days."

Three days later the sheriff rode into Basin with Ed Wilson, handcuffed, riding just ahead.

McDonald chanced a remark. "The goat," he guessed softly.

"And I've bet my life no man could track an elephant through Sunlight Basin after this lapse of time," Lee answered. "Jackson is a better trailer than I gave him credit for."

They crossed to the county jail.

"He's one of them," said the sheriff, jerking his thumb toward the sullen prisoner. "I worked out his trail myself."

"I had a hunch," said Lee, "but I wasn't sure. I tried to figure out three horses tracks that come down through the Sunlight Basin myself. I couldn't unravel it at all. You're the eagle-eyed little tracker, Jackson. Did you notice where I'd been messing along on those tracks till I lost 'em?"

The sheriff nodded and laughed good-naturedly.

"It's my business to stick to a trail, once I find it, son," he answered.

Twenty minutes later a girl dropped from her horse in front of the county jail and entered the office where the three of them were interviewing the prisoner.

"Eddie!" she exclaimed reproachfully. "What have you been doing this time?"

"I'm sorry, Miss Betty, but things point that maybe Ed was mixed up with stopping

Sixteen the other night," Jackson explained. "He sticks to it that he don't know a thing about it. I hope it's so."

She gazed at them, her eyes wide with fear.

"He didn't—oh, I know he didn't!" she begged. "Tell them it's not so, Eddie. Oh, I'll give everything I own to prove it!"

The sheriff stepped across and laid his arm protectingly about her shoulders. "Try not to worry, Betty," he soothed, "I'll track down the two men that did it and try to clear Eddie if it's within human possibility. I'll get them," and he gave her an encouraging little squeeze.

Roderick Evans Lee strolled across and picked the sheriff's arm from about her shoulders, placing it gently back at his side and leaving his own arm where the sheriff's had been.

"You mind what the sheriff says, Betty girl, and don't you worry," he reassured her. "He'll catch those hold-ups like he promised." He patted her shoulder and led her from the building.

"You run along home now, honey, and forget it," he said. "Eddie has reformed like I told you, and I can clear him any time I want—but he's safer in jail for the next few days. Take my word for it—and that I'll get him out."

McDonald found him later in his room.

"You seem pretty self-satisfied, Rod," he remarked. "Good news?"

Lee blew a long slender stream of cigaret smoke and nodded contentedly.

"We can just loaf around now and rest on the job," he said. "The sheriff has committed himself to bring in those two hold-ups. That relieves us of further responsibility. He'll get them. He said so himself. Then he'll turn Eddie loose and folks will be grateful. He'll get those strangers dead or alive—mostly dead in all probability because they'll sure put up a fight."

McDonald regarded him with a flicker of amusement in his gray eyes.

"Jackson is the best trailer in the State," he remarked.

"Oh, without a doubt," Lee flung back sarcastically as he left.

He rode to the Wilson ranch and found Betty worried and distressed.

"I just rode along out to talk Eddie over," he said. "I thought you might be nervous about his case. Nothing to it at all. I happen to know enough to show he wasn't mixed up in that. I can prove it, too. Do you feel better now?"

"I know he didn't do it. He's wild and foolish but not really bad. But can you really prove that, Rod?" she asked.

"Cross my heart and promise," he affirmed. "The sheriff will probably let him go of his own accord, and if not I'll get him out myself. Then you and Eddie and I will start for my place for keeps. Is that a bet, honey?"

She leaned against him and nodded. "I'll start the minute Eddie is cleared, Rod," she promised.

"Then you just begin to make plans and be happy, girl. Leave the rest to me."

He rode back into Basin in the first showers that preceded a three-day rain. The first night it drizzled, and for the next two days and nights it fell in torrents, washing the surface of the hills. On the third day the sun shone once more and the sheriff took to the hills to search for any fresh trails that might look suspicious.

In the afternoon he came back and sought McDonald, who sat with Lee in the hotel lobby.

"Well, Mac, we've come to the end of the trail," he said. "I've run them down. That is," he qualified, "I've found them. It's a kind of a funny deal—fight among thieves, I guess. I was up on the divide looking the country over with the glasses and there they lay—right out in the open where you could see them for miles. Dead as a last year's bird's-nest, both of them.

"I went on down. They was both strangers to me, but right there between them was one of those sacks of twenties, and of course it was plain then who they were.

"I looked at their guns and both had two empty shells," he went on. "I finally doped it out like this: They were on that long bare ridge that flanks Gunbarrel Cañon to the left. The ridge is like the cañon itself in one respect—you can't get off of it anywhere from the point to where it butts up against the divide any more than you can get out of the cañon itself. It's

rim-rocked on both sides the whole length. That meant they must have hid out on this side after all and started on foot at night to make it across. They could be seen on that bare ridge for ten miles in daylight. They likely started the night it set in to rain, knowing the storm would cover their trail. They took one sack and cached the rest. Maybe one had a grievance—maybe he wanted it all for himself—we'll never know which. Anyway, he dropped his pal. The one that dropped got his killer from the ground—and there they are. I've turned it over from all angles and that's the only way I can figure it out. What do you think, Mac?"

McDonald nodded an agreement.

"It looks as if you've doped it, Jackson," he said. "Anyway, as long as we've got them any old thing will suit me." He turned to Lee. "Jackson is the best tracker in the State, Rod," he added.

Lee looked at him curiously. "Correct," he admitted shortly. "I'll ride out with you when you go to pack them in." He strode out and crossed to the county jail.

"The stranger that hired you has gone under," he said to Wilson. "There's still another that you don't know about, but he knows about you making a few tracks. If I pick him he can't make a peep on that score without losing his own case. You're riding easy, Eddie, as long as you don't get talkative and you'll be riding easier yet—floating in the air, in fact—if you let any one pump any conversation out of you like you spilled to me. Don't forget that fact."

He joined Jackson, McDonald and two deputies who led pack-horses, and the five of them started up the Gunbarrel ridge. The prints of the sheriff's horse were plain in the fresh dirt where he had ridden down half an hour before. On both sides the ridge fell abruptly away from the crumbling rim rocks, in places dropping sheer to the bottom on the cañon side. With the exception of the trail the sheriff had left as he dropped down from the divide there was no vestige of a track near the two men. The rain, beating on the bare ridge, had obliterated all previous signs.

"Here's the end of the trail and the mystery's all cleared up," said Jackson, looking down at them and shaking his head. "It sure is queer what men will do for gold. I'd give a pretty sum, though, to know where they hid the rest. Slim chance to find the cache. Maybe two hundred years from now some squatter will start a garden and spade up lots of money. Well, let's pack them up, boys, and have it over with."

"That's all that's left of the imported talent," Lee remarked as they rode back down the ridge.

Both McDonald and the sheriff turned in their saddles and regarded him, McDonald with a queer smile and the sheriff with a puzzled frown.

"Imported?" Jackson asked. "Oh, I see. They're strangers in these parts sure enough, if that's what you mean."

"Are they strangers to you, Mac?" Lee inquired.

"In a way, yes," McDonald answered. "But I can tell you who they are if you really care to know. They're yeggs of national reputation. They finished a ten-year stretch apiece about a month or so ago and disappeared."

The next morning the sheriff freed Ed Wilson and started him on his homeward way with a few words of advice.

"You weren't on any picnic over where I picked up your trail," he said, "and I doubt if you were up to any good. I wouldn't get all soused and converse about whatever devilment you were working on just then. I promised Miss Betty I'd cut you loose as soon as I found you didn't have a hand in stopping Sixteen—so you can ride out and tell her I've kept the promise."

"You're a prophet, Rod," McDonald complimented as he watched Ed Wilson ride out of town. "There were two strangers once—and the sheriff brought them in. There was a goat and the sheriff made him free. But some way I've felt all along that he could do it. I've always claimed that Jackson was the best tracker in the State. Possibly I've mentioned it before."

"Why, yes," said Lee, "it does seem to have a familiar ring to it. Come to think of it I'm almost certain I've heard you re-

mark about that little matter before. I'm going to ride out and hunt up some one whose conversation isn't limited to one single phrase."

"There are times," McDonald answered with his quizzical little smile, "there are times, Rod, when I actually feel that your perceptions are not as keen as they once were. You don't recognize a catchy little phrase when you meet it."

"I'm going to arrange my wedding trip," said Lee, "and those arrangements must include the goat."

Late that afternoon he reappeared in McDonald's room, and bowed.

"Mac, you may take my hand and wish me well," he said. "I've made the hill."

"I've seen the lady once myself," said McDonald. "I wonder if you realize what a lucky dog you are."

"Mac," Lee answered humbly, "Mac, you have pronounced a great and solemn truth."

IV.

SOME three days later Lee rode into Basin from the west, untied a heavy sack from behind his saddle and carried it to McDonald's room, depositing it upon the bed.

"There," he said, "in the large sack are five little ones and in each little one you will find five thousand dollars of the company's money. That will help put the express company on its feet."

"I rather thought you'd find it," McDonald rejoined. "I had an idea you'd gone out after it when I missed you to-day. Tell me what you think about it."

"Mac, when we were boys together you occasionally had an idea of your own," Lee objected. "Now suppose you tell me what you think about it?"

McDonald turned on his dry smile before answering.

"Why, I think that Jackson is the best tracker in the State," he reflected.

"The devil!" Lee exclaimed. Then he suddenly slapped his leg and laughed joyously.

"Why, you son-of-a-gun!" he said softly. "Here you've been telling me what you thought all along, but my perceptions are like you said—dull. The best tracker in the State would never follow a false trail—by accident.

"I'm going to go you one better at your own game, Mac," he continued. "If he found my track on Eddie's trail through Sunlight Basin like he said, then Jackson is the best tracker in the whole wide world. I was up in Sunlight once about four years ago."

"You mentioned that they must have turned their horses loose and brought their saddles into Basin in a car, Rod," McDonald contributed. "I started out to have a look at all the two hundred cars in Basin. You'd hardly believe me, Rod, but the very first one I looked at had horsehair smeared all over the floor as if it had maybe been loaded with saddle blankets at some time."

"It doesn't pay to be such an awful good tracker," said Lee, "unless you always live up to your reputation. Come on, Mac, let's go."

They sauntered down the street and into the saloon where the sheriff and two deputies were having their regular afternoon game of solo for the drinks. Lee sat down in the vacant chair across from Jackson and started to talk.

"Listen, I don't like to break into your game, but I've found out something that you ought to know," he said excitedly. "I've a theory that there were three men in that Sixteen job. One planned from the start to double-cross his pals and get it all himself. He never once got off his horse or made a track to show there were more than two. Then when they started across he deliberately shot down the other two and took it all, leaving only one sack to link them up as the men that stopped Sixteen. He pulled off each of their guns a time or two and it looked as if they'd quarreled among themselves. Of course it's only a theory," he apologized, "but how does it sound to you?"

"It's a little late for theories on that case," Jackson said. "Besides, I'm afraid it doesn't fit. Not one of us ever saw a single track to indicate there was a third person concerned. Where did he go—and where's the gold?"

"He didn't go—he came right back to town, and the rain washed out his tracks

like he knew it would," answered Lee. "He tossed the five sacks off the rim rocks where he could ride up the cañon and gather them in when it was safe. I was up there myself to-day and I found where a man had been off his horse and prowled around under the foot of the cliff at a place where it falls straight and sheer from the ridge. That's what first put the idea into my head. Those tracks were made yesterday. I'll bet a good tracker could find where he cached the gold under that big flat rock in a patch of ground pines."

Not by the tightening of a muscle did the sheriff's face change, but there crept into his eyes the stare of the calculating, cold-blooded killer.

"You're good at explaining," he said. "Maybe you'd better start in right now explaining to us where you were that night yourself."

His hand dropped to his side as he spoke, but he suddenly froze rigidly in his chair and slid both hands, palms down, out upon the table.

For Roderick Evans Lee had hooked his heel over a round that was one notch higher on his chair and this slight move elevated his knee some four inches. The gun which lay along his leg peeped over the edge of the table at the sheriff.

"That's a queer coincidence," he said. "You know, Jackson, I was just about to ask that same question of you, because you're sure the third member of that there trio! Stick out your mitts while Mac here adjusts the bracelets."

McDonald handcuffed the best tracker in the State.

"S'-long," said Lee, "I got to get on to my honeymoon. An', Mac, you can tell the company to ship that reward—by express, pronto! Betty 'll be needin' some trappin's."

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TO AN OLD FAMILY PORTRAIT

IF you could think, if you could speak,
I wonder how your voice would sound?
And what opinion you would hold
Of those who idly crowd around?

Why are your eyes, with passive gaze,
Fixed on us as we laugh or weep,
As though you seemed to stand aloof
And mystic self-communion keep?

Can all we say and all we do,
And all we are or might have been,
Be naught to you, as though we were
Unknown, uncared for, and unseen?

'Tis ages since the artist's brush
Upon a snowy canvas drew
Your features; then revered and loved,
Now only known by name to few.

It may be ages since you left
To enter on your endless trance;
But day by day we love to build
Around your face some fresh romance.

Gipsy Heels

Part III

by George Noble

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

JED COURTENAY, known to his shipmates as Frenchy, has run away from home to avoid marrying a girl of his father's choice whom he has never seen. Aboard ship, as a tall-water sailorman, he has made friends with Long Slim, and they have drawn up a "round robin" swearing that they will stick together through everything. Dick Courtenay, Jed's brother, his father having died, leaving his fortune partly to Jed providing he marries Ethel Waterford, Dick's sister-in-law, searches everywhere for Jed. At last he sees him in Buenos Aires, but loses him in the crowd when Frenchy rescues Ethel's dog and is struck with her beauty and charm. Dick follows Long Slim and endeavors, through him, to trace his brother. Long Slim lies valiantly to throw the pursuer off the trail of Frenchy, but Dick later turns up at their ship and compels his brother, despite his objections, to go to his home. Long Slim accompanies him as a bodyguard. Dick is called away and they procced to his palatial home, where they are received by many servants and where, through a misunderstanding, Long Slim is taken for Jed Courtenay, and Frenchy, the real Jed, is supposed to be his servant. Frenchy again meets Ethel, who likes him a great deal better than the supposed Jed whom she is expected to marry. A crisis comes in her dislike of the common sailor when he is accused of having thrown Frenchy down-stairs. Ethel declares she will never marry Jet.

Frenchy falls in love with Ethel, and Long Slim flirts violently with her maid, but as the problems of their mixed identity become more perplexing, first Frenchy and then Long Slim take to their heels. After they have gone, and shipped to Galveston, Texas, Dick Courtenay returns home expecting to find his brother. He finds instead that Ethel hates the supposed Jed and will never marry him. Then Dick is constrained to tell her the terms of the will, which make her the sole heir if Jed does not marry her. Feeling that it would be unfair to Jed to take his money, even though she does not like him, Ethel resolves to give half of it back to him. But to do so they must first find him. They begin the quest at once, at the same time that Frenchy is being stowed away in Galveston on a bark bound for London in accordance with Long Slim's ideas of protecting his friend.

CHAPTER XII.

ARRANGING THE CHESSMAN.

NEXT morning the sun was already well up when a voice gave Frenchy an invitation to uncover his head and eat something.

He obeyed the first part of the command, and the first person his eyes fell upon was the stranger of the night before at the Dutchman's. Before his stiff lips could frame a question Jerry Oakey obligingly introduced the stranger as the man who had been taken on in his—Frenchy's—place; and the verbal rough-house that greeted the announcement explained the tall-water joke.

"Ye reckoned ye was to be Mr. Fifty Dollars, my son," chuckled Long Slim, "but I felt I couldn't nohow spare ye, as the man said.

"We didn't savvy as how Slim 'ad it in

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for November 26.

'im for to plan aht anythink like that 'ere," said Dan Canary, half choking with laughter. "Aye, Slim's a rare clever un, is Slim!".

"Aye, a rare clever one is Slim," said Frenchy as he lowered himself from the bunk where he had been stowed over night. He went to his bag, and emptying it out on the deck, showed that Long Slim's "proper fitout" had been concealed in the bottom beneath his own; and both might have been taken ashore without hindrance, by virtue of the sick discharge.

"Man!" cried Jerry Oakey, rubbing his stubbly chin reflectively. "Ye might of been Mr. Fifty Dollars yourself, Slim."

"Only that 'Slim's a rare clever un, is Slim,'" murmured Frenchy gently.

According to the view of Joel P. Airth, master, Frenchy didn't exist during the passage of the Elizabeth Lazenby from Galveston to London. He had been paid off at the former port as had a squarehead—by name Roops Drebbin; by rating a lamptrimmer and cattle-pusher in steamboats—and only one new hand, a Yank, "a pore sailorman," who called himself Robin Paradise, had been shipped.

The canny Scotsman skipper had an eye on promotion, and it was important to save "siller" for his owners, so he decided to sail short-handed rather than incur Galveston's ruinous prices. Frenchy's appearance aboard the bark gave the skipper a full complement for'ard, and also allowed him to do a magnanimous thing in permitting Frenchy to work his passage to England.

When Frenchy discovered he was logged as a "consul's passenger," at a shilling a month, he ventured to remonstrate, only to be reminded that he was a fugitive from justice, and to be told he ought to be thankful he wasn't "at the hel-lum of a wheelbarrow in the coal-bunkers of a tin tea-kettle, or a Puffin' Billie."*

Long Slim and the others condoled with him, but Frenchy smiled brightly and said it didn't matter greatly, for inasmuch as Long Slim was responsible for the failure of the "jump," he, of course, would hand over his pay to Frenchy on being paid off at Limehouse.

The others in their watch thought this was a good retort, and stoutly maintained that this was the least Long Slim could do, and without a doubt he ought to do it—so much do sailormen approve of financial adjustment, provided it causes some one trouble, and affords them a subject for laughter.

Long Slim was displeased and showed his displeasure as he usually did, by refusing to lend his razor to any shipmate, and declaring he would "keep hisself to hisself."

Frenchy was apparently unimpressed, and a mighty friendship sprung up between him and Dan Canary. In the second dog-watch they were frequently surprised in corners with their heads close together; and when they were not together each had been observed to indulge in a smothered laugh, though nothing funny had happened so far as the onlookers could see.

All this naturally produced a good deal of irritation among the crew, in both watches, and some very biting remarks were made, addressed to nobody in particular, but thoroughly understood by the trouble-makers.

Long Slim was more incensed than the others for, added to the fear which he shared with the other men, that there might be a mirth-provoking joke floating round loose, was the torture of seeing his own special pal so thick with some one else.

"Wot's the game betwixt you an' that 'ere fathead?" he plainted one day when Dan had just been sent aloft to overhaul the buntlines of the fore-to'ga'n's'l and Frenchy was making sennit under the fo'c's'le head, while stifling chuckles at something Dan had just whispered to him.

"Game?" asked Frenchy, looking at Long Slim as if he didn't know he was there. "Fathead? What fathead?"

"That 'ere bloomin', bally cockney, Canary."

"Oh," said Frenchy thoughtfully. "Dan Canary?"

"Well, my son, wot's the game?"

"There's no game that I know of."

"You an' him's allus laughin'," said Long Slim resentfully. "Why don'tee git the joke

* British Isles' lingo for towboat.

offen your mind so's all the lads can jine in sociablelike?"

Frenchy gave his shipmate a disapproving glance. "I'm surprised at you, Slim. But, then, I don't blame you, because you don't know what I know about Dan."

"Wot d'ye know about him? An' why should he tell you, an' not tell to the other lads?"

"It's a thing he can't tell to everybody. I'd have explained to you, but it seemed as if you'd rather not be talked to, so I let you alone."

Frenchy, having contrived to get Long Slim completely in the wrong, was sauntering away to the fo'c's'le to have a draw at his pipe under the guise of seeking a drink of water, when he was implored to come back and sing his sanguinary song.

"Well, you see poor Dan's married," he began.

"Wot o' that? Lots o' pore sailormen is."

"Aye! But his wife's a tartar. She takes all his money, and won't ever let him go out when he's at home."

"I don't see nothink in that 'ere for to laugh at, as the man said."

"There isn't anything for him to laugh at, but I was laughing at him. It's so silly for a grown man to let any woman boss him like that."

"But he's all the time a-laughin' at summat," returned Long Slim, still with suspicion.

"Oh, aye! That's a joke we've been cooking up. If it goes through it 'll be rare fun." And Frenchy laughed frankly and heartily.

"I ain't heard tell of any joke yet," Long Slim reminded him coldly. "Whoever is it on?"

"On his wife."

"Well, stop your chessy cat business, an' git on wi' the song."

"Dan's never been to a music-hall in London since he was married, twenty years ago, and I'm going to take him to one."

"How be ye a goin' to do it?"

"I'm going to take one of the lads with me, and call on Dan at his house, and—"

"One o' the lads!" exclaimed Long Slim jealously. "Which one?"

"Oh, I don't know. I reckon I can find some one to go."

"Wot's the reason I can't go?"

"If you want to, why—" said Frenchy somewhat grudgingly.

"'Course I want to go."

"Well and good." Frenchy seemed to be yielding against his inclination, and then and there Long Slim determined that only death should deter him from being one of the party of two to rescue Dan Canary from an exacting wife, and to give him at least one evening of unalloyed joy.

"No fear, Dan, my son," he reassured Canary, A. B., a little later. "No fear! Me an' Frenchy 'll get ye clear."

"Aye," said Dan, surprised and pleased. "Be *you* a goin' to be in on this?"

Long Slim nodded and winked, more or less like an owl.

"I've been layin' a course wi' Frenchy, an' it 'll be all clear sailin'."

"I *ham* glad!" declared Dan, feelingly. "Hif *you* take a hold they'll be no mistake, sartin. Hit's so long since I've been to the theayter I sha'n't know 'ow to be'ave meself."

"Wotever did ye git married for, my son?"

"Hi ain't sorry I'm marrit. A man wants a 'ome. 'E should 'ave a missus. The honly thing I'm sorry for is Hi didn't wait a few years an' marry Judith."

"Whoever's Judy? That 'ere ain't a name. All women is Judies."

"Judith his my wife's sister," registered Canary, A. B.

In the next hour Long Slim heard more about Miss Judith Lamb than he had ever heard about any woman before. She was beautiful, she was good, she was clever, she was a peerless cook, a perfect housekeeper, and a marvel of economy. Dan Canary, the Dublin-Australian was given to understand, spent most of his time when ashore in defeating the cunning machinations of suitors for his sister-in-law's hand; and how the missus contrived to continue the defense during his absence was a little more than he could figure out. The eulogy was interrupted by eight bells going, and the night watches began.

As Long Slim started to relieve the look-

out he sighed heavily, and said, "I wish I had a Spanish onion, as the man said, Dan."

Before the Elizabeth Lazenby was tied up at "Lim'us" Basin, Dan pointed out to Long Slim and Frenchy a woman standing on the dock, and indicated that she was his "Old Dutch." She was not really old, but neither was she young. She was a fierce and determined-looking person with a grim mouth and large hands.

Canary, A. B., had already taken on a meek and chastened demeanor, and all his shipmates noticed that he hastened preparations for his departure. One or two of the more adventurous of them timed their movements so as to be close to him when he went over the side.

"Hi've been a-waitin' 'ere half an hour for ye, Dan Canary," they heard Mrs. Canary say in a tone which charged her husband with responsibility for the delay.

"Hi—Hi—" he began.

"Don'tee go to makin' hexcuses now. Ye're late as ye allus are, an' talkin' abaht it won't myke up for the time Hi've lost stannin' here. Like as not the tea is sp'iled. Come along 'ome, you!"

"That your mother, Dan?" asked Jerry Oakey kindly. "Why don'tee give us a knockdown to her?"

Dan turned as pale as a "pore sailorman" can. Mrs. Canary seized his arm, and glared at his shipmates with evident hostility.

"If this 'ere's the kind o' rubbidge ye 'ave to mix with, Dan Canary, Hi ain't nowyes surprised at your want o' manners when ye *do* come 'ome," she said.

"Give ye adoo, Dan! See ye to-night at the Cat's Cradle," sung out Jerry Oakey, cheerfully waving his hand.

"Dan Canary, just ye tell that 'ere convick 'e won't see ye at the Cat's Cradle, no, nor nowheres elst."

Dan would probably have done as he was told, but Jerry had considerately taken himself off.

"Is Judith marrit yet, 'Arriette?" the returned seaman asked, adroitly leading her from a temporary grievance to a permanent one.

He received a snarl for an answer, which familiarity enabled him to construe as a negative.

"Ye mykes a mistyke, ole 'oman, not for to let me 'ave some o' my shipmates come alongside. Some on' em might fancy 'er."

"Hi've seen two o' your shipmates today," answered Mrs. Canary haughtily. "An' too much is a plenty."

"They hain't all like that un, 'Arriette," he eagerly assured her, and when she made no reply he felt he had driven home the entering wedge.

Next day came pay-off in the Board of Trade office. Neither Frenchy nor Long Slim was surprised by Dan's absence, nor at the presence of the lady who had referred to Jerry Oakey as "a convick," and who received some money and marched out with it.

Long Slim looked thoughtful as she sailed past him, and muttered: "Pore Dan!"

"He's a goin' to have one night off, sure-*lie*," added the tall mariner firmly.

When the crowd had thinned out Frenchy asked Long Slim for his share of the Argentine money, which, as well as his own, was intact. They tried to get it changed into English notes, but the officer in charge was tired and didn't want to be bothered, so he pretended to suspect the genuineness of the scrip, and declined to accommodate them.

"You'll have to go to the South American bank," he said briskly, waving them aside.

Frenchy was annoyed, but too unsophisticated to assert himself, so he pocketed the two rolls, and, followed by Long Slim, left the place.

"Wot now, Frenchy, lad?"

"I'm going to look for lodgings, and you'd better go and get your tickets for to-night. When you've got them, meet me at the Cat's Cradle."

"Ye're a goin' to look for *wot?*" asked the Dublin-Australian with pardonable amazement.

"Lodgings," answered Frenchy calmly.

"Lodgin's? Wot's the matter with a boardin'-house?"

"I'm sick of boarding-houses. They rob you and drug you with bad whisky, and—and—everything else. No, I'm going into

lodgings, where I can have what I like to eat, and pay no more than the market price."

"But how ever will we get a ship again?"

Frenchy did not explain that he had no intention of getting another ship until Long Slim was married; he merely asked:

"How does Dan Canary get a ship?"

Long Slim had no answer for this, and, feeling vaguely dissatisfied, started for the Paragon Theater of Varieties. When he met Frenchy a couple of hours later, at the Cat's Cradle, lodgings had been found, and there was nothing to do but to eat a meal before setting out for Mr. Canary's home. The tall mariner left the ordering of the repast to Frenchy, stipulating only for a Spanish onion, which he reluctantly consented to forego when it was pointed out to him that he was going to the theater and owed something to the feelings of those who, through no fault of their own, might find themselves in his immediate vicinity.

He was inclined to assert his rights as "a free-born" Englishman—never before had he claimed to be an Englishman—but Frenchy, knowing what he knew, was firm, and the Spanish onion was barred.

CHAPTER XIII.

LONG SLIM'S LITTLE TREAT.

AFTER supper the tall mariner drew Frenchy into a corner. With an air of grandeur and mystery combined he pried from an inner pocket three tickets for the Paragon Theater of Varieties. These he deftly sheltered in his great palms and concealed in such a way that only the tip ends were visible. After an interval, during which Frenchy gazed at them in silence, Long Slim, with much chuckling, restored the precious bits of pasteboard to their hiding-place. Then, for the next fifteen minutes, to refresh his memory, he rehearsed their artful plans.

By dint of much inquiry, roundabout and non-committal, in the neighborhood of the Basin, at last the shipmates reached a dwelling, which they hazarded must be that of Dan Canary. They were right. Dan himself replied to their knock. He examined their feet with anxiety while they were scraping off the mud. Walking on tiptoe, despite the fact that he was wearing worsted slippers, he led the way to an inner room.

"Proper boarding-house, this," observed Frenchy as he sat down, keeping an eye fixed, with a faint suggestion of apprehension, on a long shelf on the wall, where stood proudly row upon row of empty medicine-bottles, arranged with care and precision.

"Puts me in mind of a sailors' Bethel I once seed in Calcutta," came a voice with a tinge of dissatisfaction from the other side of the room, where Long Slim was peering between the bare, empty leaves of a large plush-covered photograph album. One of the speaker's hands rested gingerly on a globular glass case which contained a profusion of artificial flowers.

"Softly, softly!" entreated Dan, shifting his feet as if they had corns, and putting a significant finger on his lips. "The missus is a puttin' up of pickles in the galley there." He waved his hand timorously in the direction of the door.

"The music-hall is to 'turn to' in half an hour, my son," said Long Slim, plunging boldly to the point, with a furtive grimace to Frenchy, who nodded his support. "Get yourself in shape, my son. I'm a goin' for to stand a little treat to-night. Pull on your boots, an' we'll be off. Bear a hand, now, else we'll be late! Remember, my son, it's *my* little treat."

Dan raised a protesting hand, but before he could frame a response the door opened. His jaws closed with a weak show of resistance and he lowered his eyes to the carpet, quickly uncrossing his knees with the air of a schoolboy caught thieving in a cherry-tree. He allowed both slippered feet to rest demurely on the floor.

Frenchy and Long Slim turned to learn the cause of the interruption.

"These 'ere gents is shipmates from the Lazenby, missus," said Dan to a sturdy figure which stood, arms akimbo, in the doorway. "Long Slim, from Melbourne, wot studied for to get heddication to Dublin Univers'y, an' Frenchy, wot—" He paused,

not knowing Frenchy's favorite fo'c's'le origin. "A fine sailorman is Frenchy, ma'am," he concluded.

"Make yourselves comferble," said she, advancing into the room. "Hi like to 'ave Dan, there, 'ave 'is shipmates to call. Hit won't do for 'im to be a knockin' abaht the streets. 'E might be took up or run over wiv those 'ere sea-legs o' his. Shipmates o' Dan's is allus welkim to *my* 'ouse."

The expression of the visitors' faces indicated mild surprise at the last remark, but, with discretion, they forbore from making public their thoughts. Dan continued to study the pattern of his slippers.

Mrs. Canary had a pair of intelligent eyes with an odd gleam of mischief in them, which contrasted strangely with the stern lines of her face and general bearing.

"A fine sailorman is Dan, ma'am!" ventured Long Slim in the tones of one who intended to stand by his principles, whether or not it marred his prospects.

The assertion was not contradicted.

"Aye, my son, a fine sailorman is Dan, ma'am," continued Long Slim, this time raising his voice and boldly driving the argument home by clapping both palms on his knees, and leaning forward as if he were listening to a hail from a boat half a mile away.

The pause which followed this intrepid defiance began to grow uncomfortable. Frenchy caught Long Slim's eye, and nodded vigorously, yet never so slightly. The Dublin-Australian waved his hand above his head to give notice that the signal was understood. Then he shut both eyes and allowed himself to slide gently from his chair to the floor, the while emitting a rasping cough.

As he lay there both hands pounded the floor with considerable force, and at regular intervals he drew up one knee, then permitted his leg to straighten out. Finally he laid his right hand on the left side of his waistcoat, muttered "brandy" and "whisky" a good many times, and lay quite motionless, breathing in strident gasps through his nose.

Frenchy was the first in the room to regain his presence of mind. "It's one of his fists!" he exclaimed, hurrying to the side of the prostrate mariner and leaning down to apply his ear to the heaving chest. "Aye, the signs are plain. It's no great damage," he added reassuringly as he raised his head, "but you and I, Dan, will have to shoulder him and carry him back to his bed in the lodging-house."

Intense alarm was depicted on Dan Canary's face. Removing his slippers, he laid them reverently on the table beside the well-guarded artificial flowers, and started to glide noiselessly from the room in his stockinged feet.

When his hand was on the door-knob Mrs. Canary halted him.

"Dan," she commanded in even tones, with the manner of a sovereign, never shifting her position an inch, "put ahn your slippers this minute. Ye'll be 'avin' a cold next. Would ye like for to 'ave me a nursin' of ye through the hinfluenzar, like the Prince of Wales at Hepsom Downs?"

Her spouse made no response, but the alacrity with which he resumed his slippers went far to remove any suspicion that he was a malingerer.

Mrs. Canary moved with stately tread into the "galley" and returned with a bowl of cold water, which she instantly dashed into Long Slim's face, plentifully bespattering Frenchy, who had no time to draw aside.

"Mop up that there water quick, Dan! Smartly, now, afore it hurts my carpet," she cried over one shoulder as she stooped and yanked Long Slim into a sitting posture by his two wrists. Then she began to thrash one of his arms back and forth like a pump-handle, meanwhile rolling up his sleeve and slapping his forearm till the tan thereon took a deeper shade.

The rapidity with which Long Slim recovered and sprang to his feet was astonishing. Indeed, he was so nimble that he took his self-appointed physician quite by surprise, and had fortified himself behind two chairs in a corner before she had regained her perpendicular.

"Where am I?" he asked plaintively. "Is it Sunday? Is the watch called? Was it all hands?"

Mrs. Canary was not a whit disconcerted by the apparent delirium. In a businesslike way she approached his stronghold, and addressed him in coaxing tones: "So, man! So, man! So, Mr. Long Slim!" she soothed in the manner of a milkmaid, as she laid her hand on his collar; and before the tall mariner realized it he was drawn half-way to the "galley."

The Dublin-Australian looked about him piteously and frantically for relief. Frenchy's interest was focused on the shelf of medicine-bottles, before which he stood in a constrained, awkward attitude. His face was not visible, but from the heaving of his broad shoulders and the smothered sounds coming from his direction it was evident that no little effort was required on his part to make a thorough examination of the medicine labels.

As for Dan Canary, who, as has been attested, was a fine sailorman, he was studying his slippers with more admiration than their appearance warranted. It was obvious that he had not yet completely deciphered the strange legends inscribed thereon with beads.

Two willing hands issued from the kitchen doorway, and with the assistance of Mrs. Canary's maiden sister Long Slim's journey to the "galley" was made smoothly and with despatch.

Miss Judith Lamb was a pocket edition of her sister, with flexible covers, so to speak, in the shape of a less severe cast of countenance and less muscular hands. In decision of character, however, she was not deficient. Without waiting for directions, she drew a steaming cup of senna tea from a kettle which was simmering on the range, and thrust it in the "pore sailorman's" face. In fear lest that, too, was to be capsized upon him, he grasped it quickly with both hands.

"It's a fit," explained Mrs. Canary to her sister. "I've 'andled 'em many's the time wiv Dan, there. A tub of 'ot water for 'is feet an' a mustid plarster on 'is back will make 'im a well man in a sennight. The tea will keep hoff those there chills."

The sight of tiny streams of water running from his jacket diverted her mind from further prescriptions. "We must dry it!" she exclaimed as she snatched the cup of senna tea from his hands, set it on the range, and, unaided, stripped him of his outer garment in a manner which denoted long practise.

Perceiving the two women with their backs turned, deep in consultation in a far corner of the kitchen, Long Slim resolved on a stratagem. Still as a mouse, he regained the cup of tea, and, lifting his chair by the back with a vague idea of using it to divert suspicion in case he were caught, shuffled furtively toward a cupboard, surmounted by a beautiful glazed jug, on which paper cherubims were pasted.

The contents were transferred successfully to the jug, but the triple task of holding the empty cup to his lips, replacing the chair, and keeping one eye on his guardians, all at one time, proved too much for one "pore sailorman." There was a loud crash and a prophetic phrase, muttered somewhat above a whisper, by the tall mariner, expressing certainty as to his future state.

The teacup, obeying the law of gravity, worked not the slightest damage to the overturned chair.

"The chill 'as come!" screamed Mrs. Canary, rushing to Long Slim's side, and putting him into his jacket in a way which caused considerable pain to a large blister he had gained on his wrist from contact with the range. "There is nothink left!" she cried excitedly. "Quick to the dispensary wiv 'im, Judith, my dear! No time is to be lost. Do you run for your bonnet, an' mine, up aloft."

Preparations were made for the trip abroad, before the mirror, by each woman in turn, one of them always guarding the Dublin-Australian. He made no remonstrance by word, look, or behavior. Indeed, he rather welcomed a trip to the dispensary, or any other place where he might come upon allies less passive than his shipmates from the Elizabeth Lazenby.

Like a youngster being started on his travels to his first boarding-school, the valiant defender of Dan Canary's nautical acquirements was swept into the living-room, a female grasping either arm firmly.

"Dan," said Mrs. Canary in final, meas-

ured tones, "Mr. Long Slim is a sicker man than I thought. We must tyke 'im to the dispensary this minute. 'E must be in a medical man's hands. Stay still here, you, an' guard the 'ouse whilst I'm gone! Don'tee stir one step awye from it!"

As the outer door was heard to close it seemed as if some draft of reviving air had been let in and wafted to Dan Canary. He tiptoed to the window stealthily, drew aside one of Mrs. Canary's immaculate curtains, and peered into the street until he was satisfied that none of the departing trio had the slightest intention of returning.

He let go the curtain with a contented sigh, took off the beautiful slippers, and hurled them from him viciously, and remained impenitent when one knocked one of the cherished medicine-bottles from the shelf and broke it. He sped out of the room without a word of explanation, and returned presently with his sea-boots, which he yanked on as if it were "all hands on deck!"

"Now, then, lookee sharp, Frenchy! Come ahn, says I!" he bellowed.

"Where away, Dan?"

"Let's get outer this! We'll go to a music-'all our own selves, or mayhap a pub. Anywye, let's go summers."

"'Vast heavin', Dan! Didn't the missus go to the Board of Trade for you today?"

"Yuss!" acknowledged Dan grumpily. "But ye hain't a goin' to let that 'ere stand in the wye of a night ashore, be ye?"

"I wouldn't if I could help it," said Frenchy in some embarrassment, "but you see Slim's got all the oof except this m-n* paper."

"Wot!" roared Canary, A.B. "Ain't ye got nothink at all?"

"Not a brown,"† confessed Frenchy dejectedly.

"Wotever be we a goin' to do?" the householder asked in dismay. But he received only a nonplused shake of the head by way of answer. His eye fell on the broken medicine-bottle. He went into the "galley" for the brush and dust-pan, and carefully swept up the splinters of glass.

Then he got out a cribbage-board, and the shipmates passed a desolate evening counting "fifteen twos."

No police constable would have grounds for speaking to Long Slim and his two attendants about loitering in the streets or blocking traffic. Swift and straight they sped toward their destination. When five minutes had passed, Mrs. Canary with her disengaged hand began fumbling in the pocket of her dress. Suddenly she paused in her stride, and so abrupt was the stop that Miss Judith Lamb found herself in that delightful position occupied by the small boy at the end of the line when "snap the whip" is played.

The pilot held high her left hand, and in it could be seen three slips of colored pasteboard. If one had peered intently the words "Paragon Theater of Varieties" might have been discerned on them.

"D'you know wot these 'ere is for, Mr. Long Slim?" she asked in a severe voice.

The tall mariner intimated that he was well aware of their purpose, and the march was resumed.

"'Ow luck it is," she went on, altering her tone to one of extreme graciousness, "that Dan, there, 'ad thought to tell ye my little sister was a livin' at my 'ouse, so ye could fetch jest the coe-rect number o' tickets. 'E said as how some time ye'd be comin' up for to hess-cort me an' Judith, an' I 'alf fancied ye might come to the 'ouse to-night."

"Aye, it were all planned, my son," began Long Slim. Then he felt a little guilty, and immediately after, a little apprehensive, as he thought what might have happened if his prearranged fit had been detected, and added hastily: "It were all Frenchy's idee. A fine sailorman is Frenchy, ma'am!"

"Hi could see that," said Mrs. Canary amiably. "A borned leader o' men. A kind shipmate 'e is, too. I fancy 'e knew that Dan, there, 'ad no 'eart for the 'alls. So Mr. Frenchy come along for to stop an' keep 'im comp'ny, an' to myke it pleasant for 'im a talkin' over Cape 'Orn storms, an' all the rough vittles ye have to eat, an' the wet beddin' ye 'ave to sleep in."

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* Moneda nacional—Argentine paper money. † British copper—farthing.

Long Slim looked at the stars and remarked affably: "A fine night, miss an' ma'am. A proper fine night, as the man said."

Mrs. Canary appeared oblivious to the weather, and neither confirmed nor denied this rash conjecture.

"When ye 'ad that there fit, Mr. Long Slim"—she paused and looked so intently at him that it was painful for the Dublin-Australian to meet her gaze—"the tickets fell outer the hinside pocket o' your jacket, an' woulder been crushed only I 'ad to pull 'em outer the wye."

"Thankee kindly, ma'am," said Long Slim humbly. "It were all a blank to me, an' I can't say wot happened."

"Ye mind fair now, though, Mr. Long Slim? Ye mind now, don'tee?" By the way Mrs. Canary turned and peered into his face it was evident that he was meant to say "Yes," so he answered dreamily, "Aye, my son."

"An' ye don't feel hindisposed no more?"

"No fear, ma'am. I feel as proper as any homeward bounder."

"'Ow glad I am to 'ear it," said Mrs. Canary thankfully. "An' 'ere we be at the Paragon. Walk in ahead, Judith, my dear, an' Mr. Long Slim an' I will be ahn your 'eels."

The performance naturally appealed to a mariner just in from half a year's knocking about salt water and Latin America, but as it progressed Long Slim's enjoyment was marred slightly by apparitions which kept thrusting themselves between him and the stage. A considerable part of these apparitions was furnished by brandishing fists, behind which capered Frenchy and Dan Canary. His powers of imagination were not severely taxed in conjuring up a vision of the reproaches his shipmates would heap upon him when they were next encountered, and the steps they might take.

As the three theatergoers filed out of the music-hall a confusion of emotions held Long Slim. He felt sorely in need of somebody to sympathize with him, yet didn't feel as if Frenchy or Dan Canary could fill that rôle, nor that he would be capable of pointing out to them that he was the heaviest sufferer by the evening's work. He had liked parts of the music-hall performance, but he was in no mood for discussing it with his present companions. His imperfectly defined code of etiquette and gallantry left him in doubt as to whether he would be justified in taking to his heels and seeking more congenial amusement in a public-house.

Mrs. Canary's voice disturbed his bewildered meditations. "Such a nice hevening as we've 'ad, Mr. Long Slim," she said sweetly. "It was mortal kind of ye for to hess-cort two lone, lorn ladies. Now ye'll wait houtside 'ere for 'alf a mo? I 'ave a little shoppin' to do."

Before Long Slim could reply the self-reliant housewife had bustled into a shop, leaving Miss Judith Lamb behind—a precaution against further necessity for "first aid to the injured."

The Dublin-Australian, standing on the extreme edge of the pavement, with his back to Miss Judith Lamb, cocked his head aloft and sniffed several times as if to ascertain whether the wind might have hauled a point or two while he was off duty in the music-hall. Apparently satisfied that all was well in the heavens, he cleared his throat and asked: "Have ye a likin' for the theayter, miss?"

Miss Judith Lamb confessed to a partiality in that direction.

"If the night air would be cold for ye, my son, ye might step inside that 'ere shop with your sister." He turned and looked at her.

Miss Judith Lamb giggled, and announced that he must be fond of being a sailor.

The lights in the window of a pub down the street danced in a way that made them look like beckoning fingers. They had such an effect on Long Slim that he began to stamp vigorously, first with one foot, then with the other, the while swinging his arms across his chest and expressing surprise at the coldness of the night air.

"Proper weather for to git a heavy cold, this. I should git on the lee side within if so be I was a young lady," he observed, finishing his efforts to restore circulation.

It was learned that Miss Judith Lamb

was wearing a waist lined with red flannel—a "hand-me-down" from her sister Martha.

Long Slim bravely concealed his interest in this piece of sartorial news, and stole stealthily toward the door of the shop, craning his neck, and allowing reckless thoughts of escape to enter his head.

Out sailed Mrs. Canary, carrying a good-sized package in her arms.

"Mr. Long Slim is fair cold," reported Miss Judith Lamb.

On receiving this intelligence, Sister Martha playfully shook her finger in the tall mariner's face, and started along at a brisk pace, depriving him of any opportunity of commenting on the disclosure.

"Sister Martha!" Mrs. Canary halted at the sound of her charge's voice. "Mr. Long Slim was afeared I might of been takin' 'eavy cold a waitin' on ye."

"Well, to be sure! An' so ye mighter. It's werry genteel of ye to mind that, Mr. Long Slim. We'll go in 'ere an' set that right direckly.

"Come along of us, my lad!" she added as she saw his hesitation. But the invitation was unnecessary, for Miss Judith had hold of his arm.

After prolonged consultations and bargaining, the young woman was put in a new jacket which cost five and twenty shillings, and then a gorgeous hat was put upon her head, and Long Slim was induced to pronounce his approval.

Miss Lamb held up a blue blouse and asked the sailor how he liked it. When he falteringly said he didn't know, she threw it aside in disgust and bade the shopkeeper to mind what he was "abaht and bring summat the gentleman would fancy."

A red one was displayed, and this time, in confusion, Long Slim had to admit it was "as good as if it had o' been bespoke." It was bought at six and nine. Boots and gloves were selected, only after he had nodded his acquiescence, which by this time had become purely mechanical.

There was a whispered colloquy, and he heard Mrs. Canary direct in a loud whisper that "*they*" were to be sent to her house on the morrow, but "the houtside things" she would take with her.

Money changed hands, and by the time Sister Martha had told the Dublin-Australian that the amount she had laid out was five pounds nine shillings and threepence, they had all left the shop and they were all carrying parcels. To the "good sailorman's" intense embarrassment and inconvenience, Miss Judith Lamb was clinging to his arm, while her sister trudged on ahead.

"Hi 'adn't thought to ye, Mr. Long Slim," the leader called out, looking over her starboard shoulder at the convoy in her wake, "that when the tickets fell outer your jacket—when ye 'ad the fit—your pay came halong with 'em. We cyme awye in such a 'urry that I quite disremembered to tell ye abaht it—six pounds eleven."

Long Slim abandoned any lingering thoughts he might have had regarding flight to a public-house, and quickened his steps. When he was close behind, Mrs. Canary wore ship and deposited her parcels in his hands without easing her pace. The tall mariner must needs assume the additional burden and devote all his energies to pursuit, lest he should lose sight of his pilot and never be able alone to find the house where his six pounds eleven lay.

Conversation took the form of a monologue during the remainder of the journey, and before Mrs. Canary had finished telling how she first became enamored of Dan, the front door was reached.

It seemed, according to the lady's story, that she had been fascinated by her future spouse when she spied him on the deck of a "full-rigged ship" skimming swiftly, under full sail, up the Thames to the London docks.

She described how he was "a perched atop o' the cabin, a smokin' an' a dancin, just like a reel sylor on the styge." The back of one hand was on his spine, the palm of the other on his diaphragm. He was flinging out his heels and his bell-mouthed trousers valiantly as he hopped nimbly from one foot to the other, in time with each shifting of his hands—"a reely, truly hornpipe."

Long Slim had in mind many questions concerning the performance, had there been an opportunity to put them.

Frenchy and Dan were surprised, three parts asleep, playing their sixty-sixth game of cribbage mechanically, as the party walked in.

To brighten them up Mrs. Canary made an effusive explanation of her gratitude to Long Slim for his generosity in providing the evening's entertainment.

The tall mariner stood shrinking in a corner, holding fast to the parcels, as praises were showered upon him. He refrained from speech, but blushed like the red, red rose.

Frenchy manifested great annoyance, glaring stolidly in front of him while he crushed the cribbage pegs between his fingers, utterly regardless of Mrs. Canary's frowns of displeasure.

The individual who, according to report, had danced himself into her heart on the smiling waters of "Lim'us Basin," rose to his feet, and as he did so his sea-boots swoshed.

"Dan, there! Where's your slippers? D'ye think H'm a goin' to slave my fingers to the bone a makin' of ye slippers?"

"Never ye mind abaht my slippers!" said Mr. Canary sternly. "Wot I wants for to savvy is wot ye mean by goin' to theayters an' playin'-houses wi' any gentleman as ain't your lorful husband."

To the astonishment of both visitors, Mrs. Canary shrank into a corner trembling.

"Mr. Long Slim—" she began faintly.

"Mr. Long Slim, eh? Ho! Yuss! Hi'll Mr. Long Slim 'im with them 'ere pet nymes!" snarled her "lorful husband," advancing toward the Dublin-Australian.

With a shriek, Miss Judith Lamb threw herself between the two men. "Ye sha'n't 'urt 'im!" she wailed, trying to clasp Long Slim in her arms. The cargo he carried held her off.

"Gimme them things!" cried Mrs. Canary, practical in the moment of impending tragedy. "Ye'll smash 'em." She took the parcels and deposited them on chairs, leaving her sister free to faint on Long Slim's chest.

"Hi sha'n't 'urt 'im, sha'n't I?" asked Dan venomously. "We'll see whether 'e's a goin' to hexplain wot 'e means by traipsin' abaht the streets o' Lunnon along of my Ole Dutch."

The utterly miserable object of the householder's wrath had nothing to say for himself. He leaned against the wall, and Miss Judith Lamb leaned against him.

"Lookee here, Dan," ventured Mrs. Canary. "Wot's the good of your carryin' ahn like that? Can't ye see it wasn't me 'e was arter? It was Judith. Hi couldn't let my own little sister go hout with a young gentleman alone, could I? It wouldn'ter been ree-spectable."

"Eh?" shouted Dan in a voice wherein were beautifully blended profound incredulity and a desire to be convinced.

"Hi ain't never yet let 'er do it," she continued, "hand I never will. My pore, dear mother said, 'Martha,' she says, 'watch hover your sister Judith.' An' I says, 'Mother, Hi will,' an' Hi 'ave."

Miss Judith Lamb moaned.

"Don'tee go for to let 'er fall, Mr. Long Slim," Mrs. Canary admonished. "There, there, Judith, my dear, don'tee let yourself go. Hi'm sure Hi know 'ow ye feel, an' Hi knows how Hi feel to 'ave my lorful husband go for to turn ag'in' me."

"Nah, ole 'oman, I ain't turned ag'in' ye. 'Ow was I to savvy Slim 'ad took a fancy to Judith?"

"Ye'd oughter know, heverybody does," cried his indignant helpmate.

"Frenchy, lad," beseeched the wretched Long Slim, and Miss Judith Lamb leaned her thirteen stone against him, and moaned again. Frenchy refused to be interrupted in his contemplation of the pattern of the carpet.

"There, nah, Judith, dear! Cheero!" Mrs. Canary's voice was comforting in the extreme. "In course Mr. Long Slim ain't the sorter man we 'oped ye'd marry; but ye're so set ahn 'im that me an' Dan, there, ain't a goin' to say nothink ag'in' 'im."

"*Me!*" roared the Dublin-Australian, making a desperate and ineffectual attempt to get out of the corner. "Wot abaht wot were set down on that 'ere paper?"

"Nah, Mrs. Canary," said Dan in mild reproof, "ye 'adn't oughter said that 'ere. Ye've 'urt Slim's feelin's. E'll think as how 'e ain't half good enough for Judith,

an' tyke 'is 'ook. We don't want pore Judith's 'eart broke, says I."

"Lookee here!" bellowed Long Slim with a semiquaver in his voice.

"Keep your 'air ahn, Slim," advised Canary, A. B. "Nobody meant no 'arm. 'E's a good sailorman is Slim, Martha,' says I."

"Hi ain't said nothink to 'im. Hi know 'e'll be a good perwider. Look at all them traps 'e's bought for 'er." Mrs. Canary undid the parcels containing the jacket, hat, blouse, and gloves. "The *hun*-der things is to be sent to my 'ouse to-morrow. Fi' pun nine an' thrippence the lot cost, an' three an' sixpence for the weddin' brekfuss we're to 'ave right nah; to say nothink o' them tickets for the theayter. Nah I'll lay the table an' we'll 'ave a bite for to eat."

The housewife gathered up the supper, which consisted of blood pudding, finnan haddie, eel pie, nubbins and prawns in generous quantities, fruit tarts, and a bag of oranges.

Frenchy looked up from the carpet in dismay, and caught Long Slim's eye fixed upon him. There was absolutely no expression in it. The Dublin-Australian was stunned.

Dan Canary went to his shipmate and shook his helpless hand.

"Well, Slim," he said, "Hi allus knowed ye was o' the right kidney, but Hi never ex-pected as how ye was a goin' to be my brother-in-law. You 'ave be'aved oncommon harnsome, that ye 'ave, says I."

"Aye, uncommonly handsome," put in Frenchy grimly.

"Come ahn, nah!" shrilled Mrs. Canary from the "galley." "Heverythink's 'andy."

At that welcome announcement Miss Judith Lamb opened her eyes, and ceased leaning on the tall mariner. She seized one of his arms, Dan took the other, and so he was led into the "galley," where the feast was spread.

Canary, able seaman, turned his head and winked knowingly at Frenchy, who was so enraged at the loss of the "fi' pun nine an' thrippence, an' three an' sixpence for the weddin' brekfuss we're to 'ave right nah; to say nothink o' them tickets for the theatyter," that he had forgotten this was merely the outcome of his intrigue with Dan Canary to get Long Slim "spliced."

He hadn't expected that the performance was to cost them practically all they had outside of the Argentine "shinplasters"; but, feeling that the result was cheap after all, even at this price, he determined to be cheerful — at least, as cheerful as he could.

He surveyed the festive board, and noting the absence of liquid refreshment, immediately expressed a desire to drink Miss Judith Lamb's health.

Mrs. Canary was a strict blue-ribboner, but, as the occasion was unusual, she suggested that Dan, there, should go out and get "three penn'orth o' porter. An' *that,*" she added, "ud leave Mr. Long Slim"—which she abridged to "Slim" with an arch smile—"just eighteen bob, if ye reely feel ye'd like it back."

Long Slim came out of his trance long enough to reach out his vulturelike claws for the money displayed—and then volunteered "to go out an' git summat o' harf-an'-harf."

Miss Judith Lamb gave a little squeal of protest, and Sister Martha ordered Dan to take the cherubim-decorated jug and "not to be more'n five year an' a half, seein' as they was hall a-waitin' on 'im."

The able seaman was not long. Indeed, Mrs. Canary had just time to fetch from the best parlor five wine-glasses from the display shelf, and set them on the table when he returned.

There was about enough porter to fill the glasses without making them brim over, and Dan was in the midst of a long drawn-out toast to the giver of the little treat and to his sister-in-law, when Frenchy, too thirsty to wait, picked up his glass and drained it.

With a frantic expression he set it down, clapped his hand over his mouth, and sought his hat with feverish haste. As he rushed through the hall to the outer door the word "poison" floated back to the "galley."

Long Slim, as he heard the outer door open and close, sprang to his feet; and, in spite of the clinging hands of Miss Judith

Lamb, and the united remonstrances of Mr. and Mrs. Canary, ran out of the house.

He found Frenchy leaning against a lamp-post, and a police constable eying him suspiciously from across the street.

"It's not poison, my son. No fear!" encouraged the tall mariner, his own sorrows forgotten in his consideration for his friend's physical sufferings. "Them Judies tried for to give me medicine in that 'ere galley, an' I slipped it into that jug unbeknowns. Nobody thought for to heave it out. No fear, my son! It's only *that*."

"*Only* that, eh?" groaned Frenchy.

At that moment Mr. Canary's door opened, and that householder sent a hail into the night, followed by a hoarse, guttural semijodel, such as is used by Norwegian windjammers hauling on a weather main-brace in the middle of the Western Ocean.

The police constable, in no very subdued voice, announced that "honest folk had better be abed," and struck a light for his bull's-eye lantern.

Panic settled like a black pall on Long Slim. He gripped Frenchy by the arm, and, in spite of groaning protests prompted by an outraged stomach, dragged him along the street at a pace which induced the police constable to follow them—until he was out of breath, and they were out of sight.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE STREETS O' LUNNON TOWN.

FOR the first time in his life Long Slim passed a sleepless night in bed, after taking two ladies to the theater, or, if one must be more exact, after two ladies had taken him to the theater. Added to the terror of his own situation was remorse for Frenchy's illness, for which he felt somewhat to blame.

Frenchy was sleeping calmly enough, but there was no saying how he would feel when he waked. How were they to get out of this mess? the tall mariner pondered.

It seemed to him a great mistake their taking lodgings instead of going to a proper boarding-house, where a ship might be got at a moment's notice. But, then, perhaps it was better not to be in a boarding-house, he reasoned, for Dan Canary would be sure to know all the boarding-houses; and there was a chance he didn't know the locality of their lodgings.

Oh, if they were only going to sail that morning, he thought longingly.

Long Slim rose quietly and dressed himself without a sound—all except his boots. He couldn't draw those on because he knew they would creak. So he opened the door quietly and crept down the stairs. When he had closed the street door behind him he drew on the wooden-pegged boots from the slop-chest of the Lazenby, seemingly oblivious of the derisive glances of the passers-by.

He took a few steps toward the shipping, and stopped in dismay. Dan Canary, he realized, was more likely to be in that quarter than any other; and, without exception, Dan Canary was the last person he wanted to see.

The Dublin-Australian took off his cap, and ran his knotted fingers through his hair in search of an idea. The only one that came to him was that he must avoid sailors' haunts, and, turning, he walked in the opposite direction.

The streets were crowded with people going to their work and they annoyed him by jostling him. To be quit of them, he got into a bus and let it take him where it liked. He sat, still and unseeing, searching a way out of his miserable situation. The guard touched him on the shoulder and demanded more money.

"I paid my shot," snarled Long Slim, indignant.

It was explained to him that he had ridden his copper's worth, and must pay again if he wanted to go further on that bus. But no lubber was to be allowed to "come it over" a tall-water sailorman in that fashion, and in a huff the elongated passenger alighted. He found himself in a street more crowded than the one he had left, and feeling suffocated, turned sharply to the port hand and followed what seemed hardly more than an alley at the start, but came to a place where he could breathe.

He never cast a glance at the green of the trees, which was to be seen, but walked

straight across the well-made road and leaned against the bulwarks over the water. It was a mean little body of water, for he could see houses on the other side, and right and left he saw bridges spanning it; but it was water nevertheless.

The boats on the surface looked little better than "tin tea-kettles" and "Puffin' Billies." They were small and grimy, and no more to be compared with a proper windjammer than Miss Judith Lamb was to be compared with a "Spanish onion."

So then and there the tall mariner determined, if he ever got a chance to choose his destination again, he would go to Buenos Aires.

"Señor Jed?" questioned a gentle voice close to him.

He turned around and saw Honoria standing near by.

"Eet eez the *señor!*" she said in amazement.

"Aye, my son, it's me," answered Long Slim, fully persuaded he was dreaming. "But, is it you?"

"Eet eez me—*yo*—Honoria—myself. *Pero,* how do you come here? The *señorita* say maybe you be here een this beeg London—but I do not believe."

"I come in the bark Elizabeth Lazenby o' course. How the—h-how in the name of —of Davy Jones's Locker did you git 'ere?" asked Slim.

"The Señorita Ethel say she must find you. Her brother, the Señor Courtenay, tell her you maybe come to this beeg London. *Pero,* I do not believe. And they are right. You are here."

"That 'ere *loco* Judy said as how she had to find me? Wot do she want o' me?"

"She say she must find the Señor Jed Courtenay—she must—must find heem. And here you are."

"Aye, it's Frenchy she'll be wantin', my son."

"No, eet eez not that one, Señor Henchy. Eet eez the Señor Jed Courtenay she must find."

"Did she tell ye wotever she wants?"

"I don't know all about eet, but I theenk eet eez about some *moneda.*"

"Hell's bells!" groaned Long Slim as he thought of the roll of "shinplaster" Dick had given Frenchy. "But that ain't more'n ten or twelve quid. She ain't come all the way to Lunnon Town for to kick up a shindy abaht that 'ere stuff, sure-*lie!* An', anyways, that 'ere lubber wi' the whisker give it him ahtright. But, no fear! I'll git it an' give it back to her, so it 'll all be clear sailin'."

"Eet eez not that, Señor Jed. The *señorita* has some *moneda,* and she want to geeve eet to you, I theenk. I know leetle—bot some theengs I hear."

"Whoever is she? That 'ere Judy I seed a-walkin' wi' Frenchy the mornin' ye give me the coffee?"

"*Si!* I not see, bot I hear she walk weeth heem that morning."

"Aye, my son! She's *loco.* I savvied that afore."

"*Loco?* The *señorita?* No! *Nada!* No, *señor!*"

"Well, have it your own way, as the man said. I say, d'ye remember the coffee ye give me that 'ere mornin'?"

"Does the *señor?*" The girl, after the fashion of girls, lowered her eyes and smiled.

"Don't I? But, lookee here! Stow that 'ere *señor* business. I'm Long Slim, tall-water sailorman, from the Uninted Kingdom. Mind that, my son!"

"You are Señor Jed Courtenay."

"Blowed if I be," he said petulantly. "I wisht I had some o' that 'ere coffee now."

"When the *señor* comes back to Buenos Aires I make you som' more."

"Are ye goin' back there now?" he asked gloomily. If there were any more trouble looming on the horizon for Frenchy, how could he ever go back to Buenos Aires again, according to his code.

"Not onteel the *señorita* see you and geeve you that *moneda.* After that, *quien sabé?*"

"Your *señorita's* got no blunt for me. Lookee here!" He made up his mind to trust the girl with a secret that weighed heavily on him. "I ain't Jed Cortny. I told ye that afore. D'ye mind that 'ere young chap as was wi' me?"

"The Señor Henchy?"

"No, not Henchy—*Frenchy!* Well, he's

Jed Cortney, or Erasmus Jed, or wotever ye like, as the man said."

"What? What do you tell me, *señor?*"

"Them's the sailin' directions. But that 'ere is a secrut—sealed orders. D'ye mind? Them *locoes* in South America means to do 'im a mischief, an' your missus mustn't never clap eyes onto him."

"Then you weel not get the *moneda?*" she asked wistfully. "The *señor* weel not be reech?"

"Oh, I gets a good pay-off now an' then, if ever we get clear o' this 'ere Western Ocean pond ructions."

"*Pero,* what eez that to me?" she cried, becoming angry. "The *cochero* of Señor Courtenay had as mooch, bot now he eez gone because I geeve you the coffee by the weendow." Her black eyes were swimming with vexation.

"Gone! Where? An' whoever is he, anyhow?"

She explained to him the iniquity of the coachman, and made him see that he was responsible for her failure to get a good husband. Of course he was not sorry to learn that there was not to be an alliance between his "Spanish onion" and a "bally coach-steerer"; but that did not prevent him from abusing in good round terms the absconder, and expressing his opinion of a man who would let slip a "charnst for to tie up alongside a piece o' calico like this 'ere."

She drew a little nearer to him, and he stood his ground. She warned him not to speak so loud as some one might be passing. She held her ear close to his lips, being anxious to catch the words. It is not to be wondered at that he kissed her. And how could she help it? She held no tray this time to drop upon his head, and wasn't in the proper position to do so if she had.

Long Slim was very happy.

"Where shall we leeve when we are married?" asked she with a woman's instinct for the practical.

He had been on the point of putting his arm around her waist, but at the word "married" he straightened up, and sunk his hands in his pockets.

She understood—or thought she did, which is much the same thing—what had caused the change in him; and overwhelmed him with reproaches. He could play with her heart, murmured she; he could kiss her, he could storm against the *cochero;* but what was he doing? He had become a different man at once when she had mentioned the little word "married."

In vain he protested; in vain he attempted to reassure her. She said he was a pig, an animal, a wretch. She would not believe him, she would not even listen to him. She became a little quieter only when he declared he wanted to marry her, and that he would if he could.

"If he could? What did he mean? Was he already married?

No, of course not, but—there was nothing to do but tell her the whole story of the unfortunate round robin.

She laughed at him, but they found a bench to sit on, and he showed her the round robin; and when he told her those words came from the Bible she grew a little awed.

"*Pero,* you can marry weeth me eef he heemself marries," said she after long consideration.

"Aye," replied the Dublin-Australian mournfully, "but he ain't the kind for to marry. 'E's got no use for Judies of any sort.

"Y he eez truly the Señor Jed Courtenay?"

"Aye, but that 'ere's a secrut, mand ye!"

"Where eez he?"

"'E's lodgin' wi' me down Lim'us way. Wherever d'you hang out?"

"*Yo?* Me? Weeth the *señorita* een that 'otel there." She pointed to a huge structure near by, which more or less terrified Long Slim. He knew he would never have the daring to go into such a building as that and ask for her. So he told her he would "stand off an' on, the same evenin', a little arter eight bells," at the spot where they were sitting.

She was very angry, and threatened never to speak to him again, since he could think her capable of such a thing; but she was too curious to see what he was doing with his knife to a sixpence, to leave him. He managed to break the silver piece in two and gave her one-half, while he tied up

the other in the corner of his red handkerchief. He explained that he had thus made the engagement irrevocable, and seizing a moment when nobody was looking, stole another kiss.

With an instinctive knowledge of dramatic values, or psychological moments, or something of the sort, he was about to leave her, when she had something more to say.

"Do not forget to come thees *noche*, for the *señorita* goes away *mañana*, and, of course, I go, too."

"Goin' away?" cried Long Slim blankly. "Where be ye goin'?"

"The *señorita* has *amigoes* een a country called Cardeef, een Wales, and we go to them *mañana por la mañana*."

"Cardiff? Aye, bloomin' well I savvy that 'ere place, an' Tiger Bay, too. Well, my son, see ye about eight bells!"

And this time he really went away without repeating his farewell salute—an omission which caused Honoria to toss her head resentfully.

CHAPTER XV.

WATCH YOUR STEP.

WHEN Frenchy woke up the sun was shining into the round-robiner's lodgings, at least it was doing as much in that line as it is able to do in Limehouse. He was somewhat surprised at finding himself alone. While he wondered at Long Slim's going out without speaking to him, he hoped he had gone to call on Miss Judith Lamb. This hope was but a faint one, however, and he felt sure considerable maneuvering must be done before that lady changed her name.

He got up and dressed himself, and still there was no sign of Long Slim putting in an appearance.

Neither was there any breakfast nor any means of getting any, for Frenchy had no funds apart from the Argentine "shinplasters." He waited half an hour, growing hungrier and more impatient every moment, and then decided he might as well go out and get the junk in his pocket changed into British gold.

The young American went down the narrow stairs into the street, but where to find a place to accomplish his purpose he didn't know. He thought of applying to Dan Canary; then when he recalled the ease with which Long Slim had been separated from close to six pounds on the previous evening, he deemed it more prudent to conceal his financial conditions from a good sailorman blessed with so practical a better two-thirds and sister-in-law.

To a dapper little gentleman approaching him in a long black coat, buttoned down the center of the front, and a standing collar hitched on backward, Frenchy explained his difficulty. He received polite attention and explicit directions for finding a place, which was undoubtedly just what he required, in Ludgate Hill, followed with a pressing invitation to attend services at such and such a meeting-house.

This latter he promised to do, which was wicked, for he had no intention of keeping his promise. The things he said under his breath at having to walk the whole distance for lack of bus fare would have barred him from the services anyway.

However, there was no other way to get a breakfast, so he put as good a face on the matter as he could, and in a reasonably short time found himself at the door of a somewhat celebrated tourists' office.

The able seaman picked up a handful of gold sovereigns, which had been laid before him, and was hurrying away from the window when he felt a light touch on his arm. His first thought was just what any sailor's would have been in the circumstances—that he was in some sort of a sailor boarding-house near the docks, and that somebody he'd not noticed had designs on his money.

He turned around with a scowl on his face.

The scowl disappeared, and its place was taken by an expression of the most absolute surprise, which, in turn, became one of joy, so marked, so sincere, that nobody seeing it could believe that more than one person in all the world was capable of inspiring it.

"*You!*" he whispered.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

The Quitter They Couldn't Stop

by Samuel G. Camp

YOU probably heard about the big fight that was pulled off some little time ago on thirty acres of New Jersey geography now or formerly belonging to a Mr. Boyle. Most everybody heard about it. I refer to the late affair between the heavyweight pugilistic champion of Dry Country 'Tis of Thee and a gentleman representing La Belle France and suburbs.

And while the alleged battle of the century was being built up in the newspapers, you no doubt lamped several statements to the effect that the great French athlete's volatile and highly efficient manager was popularly credited with possessing the so-called hypnotic orb—two of 'em, in fact—and how it was darkly rumored that a number of the renowned French box-fighter's pugilistic victories was largely due to the paralyzing effect of the hypnotic managerial optics on the foreign champion's opponents.

Whereupon, with a laugh, and the remark that it was "good publicity stuff," you no doubt turned to the financial page or the current advice to the lovelorn, according to taste.

But as for me—well, I admit freely that I've got a one-track mind, so to say, and I don't claim to be no authority on taxation, taxidermy, hydraulics, hygiene or hypnotism—particularly hypnotism. I've always stuck pretty close to my own line of business, which I've sometimes heard referred to as graft, and outside of that I don't care what happens.

Howsoever, as for this hypnotic stuff, I don't make no bones about admitting that I ain't so sure—no, sir, not so sure. There may be something in it.

You see, there was once a time when I had a little experience with regard to the science of hypnotism—not to mention, just yet, a highly interesting and singular mental phenomenon which come off as a sort of by-product of said experience—and I'll tell the world that when it comes to the mystical manifestations and supernatural convolutions of the human cerebellum, so to speak, it ain't fitting for no man to be too independent and incredible.

No, sir. All facts with regard to same should be received with an open mind, and without prejudice. You never can tell.

Anyhow, for reasons which will soon be apparent, reading that hypnotic dope in connection with the now historical Battle of Boyle's Thirty Acres, at once brought back to mind the time me and Bernard McQuade returned to the City of New York, after an absence of some years. Be sure that during that absence, me and Bernie McQuade had frequently sighed soulfully for the sights and sounds of Broadway, and the smells of certain subsidiary thoroughfares. But we did not return. While

not exactly invalids, me and Bernie was pretty sure that the atmosphere of the great metropolis wouldn't be good for us. It might even prove fatal. So we stayed away.

The fact is, mine and Bernard McQuade's departure from the city, some years previous, was due to our promoting in a highly successful and comprehensive manner a concern entitled The Consolidated Sea Products Company, Incorporated — without first taking the precaution to buy a hook, line and sinker. That was an act of supreme carelessness.

Naturally, the only sea products produced by the company was what are sometimes vulgarly known as suckers. Eventually me and Bernie heard—just in time —that our marine activities had been called to the attention of the police, and knowing we didn't have a leg to stand on, we used 'em for another and somewhat important purpose. We went away from there.

However, after a period of time passed in South America, Chicago, and other foreign parts, we concluded that we might now once more adorn the streets of Manhattan in comparative safety — which amount of safety, being fully equal to that enjoyed by the other inhabitants, seemed fair enough.

Believe me, we was glad to get back to the old burg. But we found that, during our absence, the world, according to its custom, had moved. Most of our former friends and professional acquaintances was absent from the city, some indefinitely, others more or less according to good behavior.

We was out of touch with things, and days passed without our finding any place to head in—in a business way, you understand. Pretty soon we begun to run out of money.

One morning, having deteriorated thereto from places of greater magniloquence and effeteness, me and Bernie was setting in the lobby of an inconspicuous and ungenteel hotel. I was smoking a germicidal cigar and meditating upon kings—and cabbages. Bernie was reading a newspaper. After a while he looks up from the paper, and says he:

"Cas, delays are dangerous. It looks to me like it's going to take us some time to find an opening in our particular line of business. Meantime, everything's going out and nothing's coming in. I've got a suggestion to make."

"Make it," says I.

"As a sort of *ad interim* occupation, so to speak," says he, "let's you and me take a whirl at legalized assault and battery."

"Granting that there is any such thing," says I, "who do you want to beat up?"

"You don't get me," he says. "I mean the boxing game. I've just been reading in the paper here about the money these fighters and managers are getting nowadays. You know something about it yourself, and you got to admit there's money in it—big money!"

"There is," says I. "I'll go out right now and sign you up for ten rounds against Kayo Bailey, the Brooklyn Bearcat. Considering the shape you're in, you'll last maybe one calendar minute, and you won't never be the same again, but—"

"You will not," says Bernie. "What I propose," he says, "is this: we'll approach the hostilities from the managerial end, as it were. We'll dig up some guy with an elementary brow and a cast-iron jaw, and we'll manage him. Win, lose, draw or get pinched, it won't make no difference to us—except the last. There's three squares per in it till something turns up, and maybe if we can get hold of a scrapper of some ability we may win big."

"Always providing we can get the fights," says I. "Also, first catch your scrapper."

"Are you with me," asks Bernie.

"Till Niagara Falls," says I.

A day or so before, as it happened, we had met up with a former acquaintance of ours, one Edward Lunn by name, who was at one time quite a prominent lightweight. Howsoever, most of Eddie's prominence was now confined to his waistband, and he was no longer actively engaged in the fistic profession—as a principal, that is. But, he informed us, he was getting by, after a fashion, as an attaché of Brown's gymnasium, which place was heavily patronized by professional boxers when preparing for their bouts.

Naturally, in view of the business in hand, it occurred to me and Bernie to look up Mr. Lunn. We did so. We found him in what was technically known as the rubbing room of Brown's gymnasium. He was unoccupied and pleased to see us.

"Eddie," says Bernie, "owing to the higher education of the rube, general business depression and other things, me and Cas are thinking of going into the fighting business, as managers."

"Don't do it," says Mr. Lunn forceful.

"Why not?" asks Bernie.

"It ain't no game for a gentleman," says Edward.

"We are no gentlemen," Bernie informs him.

"Speak for yourself, John," says I.

"Which being the case," Bernie goes on, "do you know of any good, handy and also durable scrapper who stands in need of expert management?"

"You might do business with Texas Turner," says Eddie doubtful.

"Why is he called 'Texas'?" I inquires.

"Because his real name is Clarence," says Mr. Lunn. "He was born and brung up and mostly lived in Vermont. Names don't mean nothing in this business. But I dunno as you'd want to have anything to do with him after all. He's an in-and-outer. That's the reason he hasn't got no manager right now. He's a pretty good scrapper, but—he's an in-and-outer."

"Meaning, I suppose," says Bernie, "that you can't never tell when he's going to come through. One time he'll put up a good scrap and the next time he'll lay down."

"That's it," says Mr. Lunn. "He gets cold feet, or a yellow streak, or something, and it's all off. His last manager bet three thousand on him to win against Sailor Burke. Turner goes into the ring shaking like a chorus girl in a fit of the 'Indigo Blues,' or something, and the Sailor knocks him for a row of binnacles, aye-aye-sirs, or the like, in sixteen seconds. So now he ain't got no manager. At that, when he's going good he's no slouch of a scrapper, and if you don't do no betting—"

"He'll do," says Bernie. Despite the fact that I had my doubts, I let him win it. "Where does Clarence hang out?" asked Bernie.

"Come with me," says Mr. Lunn.

On the main floor of Brown's gymnasium Mr. Lunn pointed out to us a large individual who, in a perfunctory and absent-minded manner, was going through the motions of what is known to the trade as punching the bag.

"That's him," said Mr. Lunn.

We looked him over carefully. Clarence, alias "Texas" Turner, was a heavyweight—physically speaking. He was a big, raw-boned individual, with massive shoulders and ears, one of which last was of the vegetable variety. Generally speaking, he seemed as green as his native State's hills. If me and Bernie had met him on the street, we'd have been doing business with him in less'n two minutes.

"Seems to have plenty of altitude and longitude," says I, "but seems to lack *esprit de corps*, or something."

On closer examination, while being introduced to Mr. Turner, we was able to make a shrewd guess as to what that something was. There was a weak look about the mouth of Texas Turner, and a dull, shallow look in his eyes. I estimated his hat-size at exactly five and no eights. And, thinks I, all this bird lacks to become a first-rate pick-and-shovel stiff is the will-power and the brains.

However, we had Eddie's word for it that Clarence swung a wicked fist when so minded, so we went ahead with the obsequies. We had no trouble doing business with Clarence. He seemed to realize that the strategic tactics and ubiquitous diplomacies of business was beyond his mental depth, and, of course, me and Bernie impressed him as being thoroughly conversational with same—which we was.

We visited a law-shark and had a contract drawn up. That contract didn't give me and Bernie none the worst of it.

"And that's that," says Bernie as we was leaving the law office and twenty-five bucks which we had been set back for the legal document.

"All except one thing," says Mr. Lunn, who had come along to give us the benefit of his experience in matters of the sort.

"What's that?" says I.

"The license," says he.

"What license?" says I. "Say, we ain't going to *marry* Clarence! What d'you mean, license?"

"Before you can operate as managers," explains Mr. Lunn, "you got to get a license from the Boxing Commission."

"I see," says I. "There's a supervisory board consisting of members of the ruling party, with revolutionary powers, mahogany furniture, a blond stenographer, office boy, perquisites, and everything. Who do we see and where?"

"J. Reeves Reynolds," says Mr. Lunn. "He's the secretary of the Commish. His office is just off Broadway on—" He completed the address which just now I seem to disremember.

"J. Reeves Reynolds, Secretary," says I. "We'll see him at once."

And, despite the fact that me and Bernard McQuade was constitutionally opposed to personal encounters with authorities of every kind and description, we forthwith saw Mr. J. Reeves Reynolds, Secretary. We didn't have no trouble about the license. Mr. Secretary Reynolds took the matter under advisement, and at the next meeting of the board me and Bernie was duly authorized to act as boxing managers, in witness whereof and under the statute made and provided.

We give Mr. Lunn a job as official trainer, at a moderate stipend, with a promise of future raises in case of success. Then we went looking for a fight, and found one. Texas Turner won that scrap by a knockout in the second chukker. He wasn't even extended.

To make a long story short, Clarence won six more battles hand-running, and in the hollowest of manners. He fought like a champion. Me and Bernie regretted the time we'd wasted in the confidence business. Mr. Lunn got a raise in salary. The only person who remained uninoculated with the virus of success was Clarence. Clarence remained the same. No change.

A picture of Clarence appeared prominently in one of the leading dailies. There was also quite a write-up. The writer said that apparently Clarence had everything. He said that Clarence was coming fast. We agreed with him.

On the strength of this publicity we were enabled to sign Clarence up with one Battling Berkowitz. Now, Battling Berkowitz had frequently been mentioned in the public prints as a championship possibility. From which you can understand that the coming battle was of no little importance. Anyhow, it was.

One day, shortly after the arrangements for the Turner-Berkowitz affair was concluded, Bernie and me watched Clarence go through his daily work-out. In a word, Clarence showed up like a million dollars. Yes, sir; as that boxing expert had remarked in his paper, Mr. Turner apparently had everything.

"Bernie," I says to him as we was leaving Brown's gymnasium, "that bird is sure going great."

"He sure is," agrees Bernie.

"He'll knock Mr. Battling Berkowitz into a cocked hat, whatever that means," says I.

"I'll say he will," says Bernie, "whatever it is."

"That in-and-outer idea of Eddie's must've been all wrong," says I.

"Forget it," says he.

We did. We bet all the money we owned, and as much more as we could beg, borrow or steal, on Clarence, alias "Texas" Turner, to beat Battling Berkowitz. Yes, sir, as the saying is, we shot the works.

On being informed as to our activities in the betting ring, Mr. Lunn remarked as follows: "All right," says he, "and here's hoping you win. But if you lose, don't never say you wasn't warned. I told you this guy was an in-and-outer, and you hadn't ought to've done no betting."

Whereupon we laughed. Howsoever, a trained ear might have detected that there was a certain amount of nervousness mingled with said merriment. If so, it was justified.

For the day before the battle, dropping into Brown's gymnasium for the purpose of viewing Clarence's final workout, we at once discovered that a great and sudden change had come over Mr. Turner. He

was sitting on a large medicine ball in an attitude which laid him open to a suit for disfranchisement of copyright by the celebrated sculptor, M. Rodin, whose masterpiece, entitled "The Thinker," is well-known to every high-school pupil and several others. Furthermore and in addition to Clarence's deeply pensive and dejected attitude, we noted with alarm that the hue of health had departed from his face, leaving same a sort of deceased pea-green shade, except around the mouth where the coloration more resembled that of the abdominal regions of a fish. In other words, he was extremely pale around the gills. There was large dark circles under his eyes. From time to time a slight tremor passed over his frame. He looked bad.

A short distance from Clarence stood Mr. Lunn. He was in the act of uttering language. None of that language was fit for human consumption.

"Say, what's the idea here?" asks Bernie, anxious.

"Look at him!" ejaculates Mr. Lunn, disgusted, pointing a contemptible finger at the cowering Clarence. "Didn't I tell you?" he demands. "Scared stiff!" he diagnoses Clarence, scornful. "The quitter!"

"Clarence," says I, "can this be true?"

Whereupon Texas Turner disassumes himself somewhat from his despondent posture and delivers himself thus: "I ain't no quitter," says he. "Leastwise, I—well, I guess if anybody felt like I do, they wouldn't do no different. I ain't right. I feel sick. I—it's a kind of hunch. Sometimes I get 'em. And I feel just like I done before I fought Sailor Burke. I got a hunch then that that guy was goin' to murder me, and, believe me, he did! And now I got a sort of feelin' that this Battlin' Berkowitz is goin' to beat me up something fierce—and he will. You can't tell me nothing different. And, believe me, folks, it ain't no joke. I was in the hospital three days—"

"Nonsense!" says I. "Why, Tex, this man Berkowitz is made for you. You'll beat him in a round."

"I won't do no such thing," states Clarence with finality. "I got a hunch he's goin' to murder me, and he will. That settles it."

"Now, see here, Clarence—" I starts, but Bernie interrupts.

"Leave him to me," he says with an air of excitement, like as if he'd suddenly made a great scientific discovery. "Leave him to me! It's a clear case, and he's an ideal subject!"

"If you mean," says I, "that it's a clear case of cold feet, and he's an ideal subject for a little genteel oral manhandling, with a view to verbalizing some of the ocher out of him in what might be called a cursory manner—if that's what you mean, I'm with you. And if that ain't what you mean, what do you mean?"

"I'll tell you," he says, "later. Clarence," says he, "garb yourself. We're going on a little visit to the home of a famous hypothetical specialist. He'll do wonders for you."

"He'll need to," says I.

On the evening of the following day Mr. Lunn, Bernie, and me and Clarence, and one other, duly arrived at the boxing emporium conducted by one Abe Feldblum, alias "the Shamrock Sporting Club." The fifth member of the party was a short, fat person with a shade-grown and entirely bald complexion, and who wore spectacles with lenses of such thickness that they seemed to impart to his eyes a peculiarly luminous and arresting look, so to say. His name was Adolph Steinhelber, M.D.

The Texas Turner-Battling Berkowitz affair being the main event on the evening's table of contents, we was shown to one of the star dressing-rooms. Clarence's morale had improved in nowise since the collapse of yesterday—which was complete. He showed every symptom of a gastronomic due to be shot at sunrise.

We was a trifle late in arriving at the scene of the hostilities. Howsoever, we thought there was plenty of time for all purposes. As it turned out, there was not. We was hardly inside the dressing-room when one of the club employees informs us that one of the preliminary bouts had lasted but one round, and one of the other curtain-raisers had been scratched, and we was next—and to get a move on.

Clarence had no more than got into his fighting togs when another messenger bursts in. "Hey," he yells, "ain't you guys ready yet? That bunch out there is getting hard to hold!"

Sounds of rising impatience was wafted to our ears from the arena.

"Out!" says Bernie to the alarmist. "We'll be there in just a minute."

"Shoot it into him, doc," says Bernie to Adolph Steinhelber, M.D., when the messenger had gone. "Turn on the juice. And make it strong—and snappy! We got no time to lose!"

"Sit down, Turner," says the doc to Clarence, and set down facing him. "Look me in the eye!" says he to Clarence in a domineering manner.

And Clarence looked.

As I may not have said, Bernard McQuade was a man of moods and tenses—and fads. While me and Bernie was partners he run the entire gamut from Belgian hares to Buddhism—including photography and the saxophone. Just then Bernie was dabbling in the occult—mesmerism, hypnotism, and allied topics.

When Clarence's health failed at the critical moment, Bernie at once seen where our one and only hope lay in what he called, if I ain't mistaken, hypnotic suggestion. Science has proved, said Bernie, that hypnotic subjects, when normal, will often carry out suggestions, or the like, made to 'em when under the influence. Anyhow, that's the gist of it.

So Bernie drags Clarence off to this Doc Steinhelber, who was a regular pill-pedler that was messing round with this hypnotic stuff on the side, and had picked up quite a reputation at it. And the doc agrees with Bernie that Clarence is an ideal subject, and it's a grand chance for an experiment, and he'll make that experiment and won't charge nothing for his services—which last was sure appreciated by me and Bernie.

For that matter, believe me, if that experiment hadn't been free, I'd have been heard from; for I didn't take no stock in it whatsoever.

Anyway, Clarence looks the doc in the eye. The doc makes a couple of passes in front of Clarence's face, and Clarence immediately becomes rigid and his eyes glassy. He was easy. The doc had tried him out the day before. And I admit that the doc's eyes, intensified, so to say, with them heavy eye-glass lenses, would have stopped a harder man than Clarence.

"Turner," says the doc, "you are invincible!"

"Excuse me, doc," says I, "but hadn't you better adopt a shorter and uglier terminology? Invincible don't mean nothing to that bird! Tell him he's going to knock the other guy's head off. He'll understand that."

Bernie burns me up with a look, and hisses for silence, and the doc goes right on, paying no attention to my hypnotic suggestion.

"Unconquerable!" says he to Clarence. "You cannot be defeated! You are a superman," says he. "You have the courage of lions, the strength of a dozen men! You can prevail against numbers! A single opponent—he is nothing! His blows cannot harm you, for you can feel no pain! Victory is yours! You cannot—"

The door of the dressing-room crashed open, and there come a yell:

"Hey, what's the matter with you guys? Say, there's goin' to be a riot if—"

"Saw off, doc," says Bernie.

The doc makes a couple of passes, and a sort of shudder passes over Clarence's frame. We yanked him to his feet and rushed him to the ring. Battling Berkowitz was waiting. The preliminaries was hustled through. The gong clanged. That fight was but the affair of a moment. For Clarence, after taking two on the chin, and one on the beak while wading into his man, forthwith unhooked a haymaker which which dropped the Battler for what was plain to all was the long count! Clarence was invincible! The dope had worked.

But even while me and Bernie was celebrating, Clarence strode to where the referee was counting out the Battler, and with one blow knocked that referee unconscious, through the ropes and into the lap of a fat sport-page reporter—thus rendering his previous victory null and void. Clarence was unconquerable. The place was in an uproar. So was Bernie and me. Two of

the Battler's handlers sprang into the ring and made for Clarence. That was the last they knew. Clarence prevailed against numbers!

Then a large, prosperous and political-looking person appeared in the ring and approached Clarence, making protesting gestures and noises. Clarence clipped that party on the chin just once. He went down—and out.

Things were bad enough already, and that last struck me as an entirely unnecessary complication—for that large, prosperous, political-looking person was none other than J. Reeves Reynolds, secretary of the Boxing Commission!

Our goose was cooked. There was no doubt about that. The ring filled with struggling humanity. By good luck me and Bernie was able to grab Clarence and smuggle him out of the building and into a taxi. On the ride, Bernie explained that the happenings was no doubt due to the fact that, owing to haste, Clarence was still in a sort of semihypnotic condition when he entered the ring. Beyond that he would not venture to state, says he. It was no case for a mere layman.

"No," says I, "it's a case for the police."

We'd lost Mr. Lunn in the shuffle. But we was scarcely back in our room at the hotel when Mr. Lunn charged in. "I figured I'd find you here," says he. "Now, listen—quick. Of course you guys realize you've lost your license. Nobody knows just what happened. They figure Clarence was doped or something. Anyhow, leave it to this guy Reynolds.

"And now get this," he goes on. "I was standing right next to Reynolds when he come to. And I heard him tell a friend that ever since you two birds come to him about your license he'd been wondering where and when it was he'd seen you before. Well, while he was 'out,' from the effects of that K. O. which Clarence handed him, says Reynolds to this pal of his, it must 've all come back to him. Anyhow, when his brain clears, the first thing he realizes is that you was the fellows who some years ago sold him a bunch of stock in a fake concern called the Consolidated Sea Products Company, or something. He says you was using different names then, and your appearance has changed considerable, but he'll take his oath you was the people that sold him that bunk stock. And there's no telling when he'll be here with a cop. You guys better go—and keep going!"

As I said in the beginning, me and Bernie sold stock in that marine project to a very large number of people. Otherwise, we'd have no doubt remembered Mr. J. Reeves Reynolds. Furthermore, as time went on, no doubt Mr. J. Reeves Reynolds's appearance had also changed to a considerable extent. No, we wasn't to blame for not recollecting Mr. Reynolds—but that had no particular bearing on the situation at hand.

"Very interesting," says I. "Psychological papers please copy. We'll go!"

We did.

THE WILLOW ROAD

THE willows 'round the river bend
Turn silvery and gray,
While shadows creep—an azure mist
Shading from mauve to amethyst—
Across the grassy way.

In lovely symmetry, the trees
Wave graceful boughs and long,
Outlined against the west—and, hark!
High on the topmost twig, a lark
Pours out its vesper song.

Mazie V. Caruthers.

The Flaw

by

Eugene P. Lyle, Jr.

MURDER may be a fine art, as De Quincey was charmingly pleased to maintain, but Hugo Weems was not an artist. He was only an artizan, stolidly executing the conception of another. Jack Chenault was the artist. Chenault furnished the inspiration and incentive, the plan and the method. He even contributed the material—that is the victim. It was a wry little irony that would have appealed to Jack Chenault.

Weems was a night watchman at the time. This was when the concrete piles were being put in as a foundation for the new Jean Bart Hotel. As yet Weems had not much to watch, not much more than the contractor's office, which was a shed built astride the curb, and the red lanterns which he hung out at sunset to warn aside traffic. The shed was snug and warm, with a stove and electric light, on the dark narrow street at the rear of the hotel site. Here Jack Chenault, roaming the cheerless misty night of the seaport town like an unquiet spirit, wandered in on Weems for a turn, or for as long as he found entertainment, at bear-baiting. He and Weems were cousins, but no love had ever been lost between them.

Their very occupations connoted antithesis, and antipathy. His job as watchman suited Weems. He was an inert mass of a man. But he could serve. Like the stone over the tomb, he could serve. He was scarcely past thirty, yet seemed fixed unchangeably in an indeterminate middle age. He was a large man and impassive, like a craggy headland beaten upon by the waves. His features were gaunt and hard and untouched by fires within, usually, but now came a dull smoldering into the tawny clouded eyes as the door burst open and Jack Chenault's slim figure was limned against the night.

Jack Chenault's garb bespoke him the opposite man—a rover. He had been a newspaper reporter, with a quick eye for a story, and a curling flash of a smile for the human frailty that produced it; yet himself bitten with restlessness, wanting something else. War was something else, and he had wanted in. Not in the trenches, though. Too much slime. Personally Jack Chenault was as clean as laundered cambric. Then again, trenches meant holding fast. But a destroyer meant moving about. And if the German fleet came out! But the German fleet did not come out until whistled out like kenneled hounds, and now Jack Chenault wanted out. War being over, he wanted once again to shake his loose foot according to his private whim. There is one other item: the young man had a wife.

Closing the door behind him, Jack Chenault instantly sensed the quality of his welcome, and was cheered. The bear promised sport. The old moth-eaten blond bear

—*faugh!* How Nance stood for him was beyond him.

Lithe, quick, tense with seething life, Jack Chenault came into the glare. His very cleanness was a taunt, a clean-toothed sneer. As he dug into his coat for his cigaret case, a folded sheet of newspaper dropped from his pocket. He picked it up, laughing.

"Something here, old Bruin. Not bad."

His voice raced and leaped as if ridden by an imp of mockery. His tone was that of deigning to instruct a clod. But big blond Weems sat in his chair, his feet on a desk in the middle of the room, huge, inert, giving no sign except that the tawny coals smoldered deep in their thick-boned sockets. Chenault vaulted over the desk beside him, and smoothed out the sheet of newspaper. It was a page of Sunday supplement, luridly arresting, vivid with colored illustrations mid scrolls and arabesques and descriptive lettering.

"Oh, see, Hugo, they are going to build the Kremlin! Now isn't that nice? Yes, very nice, for now the Kremlin will arise on this spot to the glory of the Czars imperishable. Yes, but wait! What shall there be to sanctify the noble pile? Ah, here! See the beautiful peasant girl. Is she not a peachy love? But lo, behold these fierce Cossacks! They are dragging her down into this hole dug for the corner stone. What, are they going to bury her alive? Yes, the cruel Cossacks are going to bury her alive. They will lower the great stone, inch by inch— Ah, a neat thing! It happened, Hugo, hundreds of years ago. Yet listen! Listen and mayhap at this very moment you can hear the stones shriek to the glory of the Czars. Or is it madmen, Bolshevik wild men, tearing stone from stone—"

The fantasy set Jack Chenault pacing about the office; it explained why he had kept the page of newspaper. But he came back to the lumpish and unmoved Weems.

"Y-a-s, a neat thing, Hugo, but—ah, gaudy, don't you think? Barbaric, you know."

"Barb'rous? *Hunh!*" growled Weems.

"Barbaric," Jack corrected him gently. "Like the girl's kirtle. Like Tartar music. Like Cossack saber play. Too holy much swagger. But we must not be severe. Quaint children, those Russians. And they really did very well. Only one fault, as I see."

"Fault? What fault?"

"Simple lines are always best. Cut the flourishes. Remember, Hugo, if you should ever go in for this sort of thing."

"I'd like to know what fault?"

"Oh, would you, Hugo?" Mockery now danced in Jack's reckless black eyes. He was devilishly handsome. Byron, Poe, wild mischief! "No, think it out for yourself. Alack, if you but had the creative instinct, old cousin! You would climb high. Always room at the top of the scaffold. You have the temperament. Ideal! Heart, granite. Arteries, veins in marble. And nerves? *Poof!* They are threads of petrifaction. Murder will out? Laugh, Hugo; laugh at the silly fable! No drip-drip can ever wear you down. Why not have a try? Test your talents. Sure, keep the paper. Oh, only as a study of course! Building a little old Kremlin here, aren't you? Chuck a votive offering down one of those pile holes, some dark night like this—"

Weems pawed the paper off the desk into the waste basket.

"You jumping jack! You take me for a thug—"

"A thug?" protested Jack Chenault. "No, an artist. I thought we were discussing art, not morality. But as to morality—well, they say there's good in the worst of us. Nothing to it, Hugo. If I could believe there was good in you, I'd—I'd even believe there was in myself! Yes, and I'd nurse it along, too. I'd get it to sprout under glass, till it was hardy enough to stand up under a nip of frost in a cold world."

Abruptly he stopped short. The devilry had ebbed from his face, leaving it bleak and cheerless and rather puzzled—awed, almost. Inadvertently he had gotten under his own hide with his reckless goad of mockery. Besides he had tired of the poor sport. Turning up his collar to his ears, he slammed wide the door to depart.

In the flood of light from the open door-

way he was recognized by two shipmates passing on the opposite side of the street, and one of them hailed him:

"Yo-ho, sailor, got your discharge papers yet?"

Evidently it was a standardized greeting. Evidently Jack Chenault's fretting to be out of the service was notorious.

"Go on, you drunken pirates," he jeered them amiably. "And why wait for the papers? What's to prevent my turning up missing?"

In the office, Hugo Weems looked up as though a buzzer had been set going. It had, somewhere within him. He lifted his head, listening. Jack Chenault was not crossing over to join his mates; no, because Weems heard him as he jumped down into the muddy vacant lot which had been cleared and excavated for the building of the hotel. The sailor would be going his restless way alone, cutting through to Commercial Street in the dark gap between high buildings. Then Weems saw something that glittered in the waste basket. It was Jack Chenault's cigaret case—a thin, flat case of blistered gold. Jack had laid it on the desk, and Weems, in crumpling up the sheet of newspaper, had thrown both paper and case into the waste basket.

Weems stooped and recovered the pretty trifle with some vague, sullen notion of returning it. He could have called from the doorway, but that would have brought his tormentor back, and he chose to overtake him instead. Down in the lot, punctured like a cribbage board with pile-driver holes not yet filled with concrete, even Jack Chenault would be going slowly, cautiously. But the night watchman knew a safer way. A sand heap and then the concrete mixer almost blocked the lonely street, and from the concrete mixer there was a wheelbarrow runway descending into the lot. Down this Weems hastened noiselessly. It came to an end under heavy timbers which supported the pile driver's raised tracks. Here he stopped.

The darkness was velvet black; thickened, besides, by a drizzling mist. But the man who waited could hear low, whimsical blasphemy, as the other man out there pulled one foot after the other out of the mud. With a sense of mounting hate, Hugo Weems pictured the insouciant young devil stepping into one of the gaping round holes. He delectably savored Jack Chenault's emotions while falling, falling. And the waiting, afterwards! Hugo Weems was certain that that would be terror, even for Jack Chenault.

"Pull for the shore, sailor, pull—"

Chenault was almost at the runway, and Weems could have touched him. Weems put out a hand with the cigaret case, and started to speak. But he did not speak. What he did was as if he had planned it through the years. The thing was as familiar to him as that. He did it mechanically. His sudden insane rage was only a mere mechanical driving force. He struck. The next instant he was upon the floundering man, fingers at his throat. There came a moment of pause when Weems believed that Chenault was dead, until he felt the heart fluttering. He was relieved at that. He was relieved that his own hand had not done murder. Others should do the murder, unwittingly. In some queer distorted way this took from him the guilt of the deed. The sophistry of Cain was at work even before Cain's act had been consummated.

He used Jack Chenault's handkerchief for a gag, and his own belt for binding the arms of his sides. There was a faint writhing of the body as he lowered it feet first into the nearest of the black round holes, held it by the shoulders for a moment to center it, and let go. He heard the expected swish through space, although some projecting impediment had for the briefest second broken the fall. This he attributed to a ragged edge, bent inward, of the metal sheathing left in the hole after the long conical core of the pile driver had been drawn out. But the body had not lodged. It had gone on to the bottom.

In the bright warm office, Hugo Weems sat and pictured to himself Jack Chenault's emotions. He made a night of it thus, and as the night wore on, rain pattered on the roof and guttered off into puddles under the eaves. But nothing of this chilled his heart. He sat with lowered head, a round head with thickly tufted hair like a yellow-

ish clay ball. His broad cleft chin on his chest moved with a silent grinding motion of his jaws, and the clouded yellow eyes were focused on a point in vacancy. Jack Chenault was right. Weems had the temperament. Mass and inertia! A craggy headland!

Once his scalp contracted suddenly into horizontal furrows across his brow and abruptly he flung back his head.

"A neat thing!" he laughed. "A neat thing!"

As yet he had not once thought of his motive for the deed. Hatred, because of his satisfaction in having gorged it to repletion at last, might seemingly have been the only motive. But this would have been to flatter Jack Chenault unduly. No, Jack Chenault, for all his devilish ingenuity in taunt and insult, could not have overcome the sodden inertia, and goaded the man's soul to such psychic enterprise had there not been something working in the mass—working unseen and long, like borers in the heart of the oak, until one day a spiteful gust brings on the crash. A woman, and ease for his sluggish carcass, dull festering desire of these was his motive, and hatred of the man who stood between the gust of passion. Yet even so he might not have moved except that he had been shown the way; a more industrious mentality had done the work. With contemplation the long night through, he was stirred to admiration.

"A neat thing!" he laughed. "A neat thing!"

With the first drab streak of dawn he arose and set forth to bring in his lanterns. The rain had partly flooded the sunken lot, obliterating foot tracks, which was well. Everything was well. There was no one to see, and he went down the runway into the lot, peering into unfilled holes, using his flashlight; and though the battery was weak, he at last vaguely distinguished at the bottom of one of the tapering holes a huddled formless hulk of blue.

But he lingered until the men came to work, and afterward, until the negroes with wheelbarrows laden from the concrete mixer had filled all the holes at the end of the runway with the slush of broken rock. It was nearly noon when he turned away and asked the boss for a week's lay-off.

II.

LATER, in the room where he had his slovenly lodging, he changed to his plain best clothes, and came forth a decent-looking, and even, in his huge purposeful way, a substantial, respectable figure. He presently arrived in a residential quarter of the city where many mansions had broken out with a black-sanded, gilt-lettered eruption that diagnosed itself as "Rooms and Board" or simply "Rooms." At one of the latter, bearing a number not unfamiliar to him, he stopped and rang the bell.

"Want to see Mrs. Chenault," he said, and brushed past the maid into the parlor of the house.

He was not left waiting long, but rather was it apparent that the flushed young woman who came down to him wished the interruption speedily over with. Tears only partly dried showed wet on her lashes; and though her eyes were misty, they snapped very ominously for somebody. She closed the doors; then stood softly tapping the toe of one compact little shoe upon the rug. She was a girl with red hair, if that helps to explain—a dark, lustrous red, the ends in coppery warm rebellion about her temples. She had been at work, up above in her two light-housekeeping rooms on the third floor front, and she looked very competent and earnest. She wore her collar open, her sleeves short, a man's old kid gloves, and a checkered apron; and by contrast, there were high heels and silken ankles.

Hugo Weems scowled steadily upon her. This was the woman.

"Nance, Jack's left you. Skipped."

Her reply was astounding.

"Don't I know?" She flung out her loosely gloved little hands as if they were discussing the usual didoes of a stormy tempered child. "It's funny, though, his going without a fuss to start him. No crockery thrown, nothing!" She was sizzling mad, yet pathetically forlorn. "Something seems so horribly incomplete about it all," she sighed.

"Then you knew—that he was going?"

"Oh, he was good enough to write!"

"He wrote you—when?"

"It was dated yesterday, and—"

"Yesterday? Yes, yes, of course!"

"He left it here last night. Nobody saw him. The letter was there on the stand in the hall this morning, and two that had come for him were gone."

"Of course," Weems repeated. "Then he was here last night before he saw me. Couldn't he have stopped long enough to tell you good-by?"

"I think he might have," said Nance, batting her eyes. "But that's Jack! He's been so queer lately, ever since I came here to be with him between his trips with the convoy. I could, you know, having my own little income, but he acted as if—as if he wasn't terrifically glad to see me."

Weems grunted. "Humph, another woman!"

"No," she blazed back; "another man!"

Weems's tight scalp twitched. "What's that you say?" He took a heavy step toward her. "What's that you say—another man?"

She seemed to be appraising him, and then she said:

"You are the other man, Hugo Weems."

His tawny clouded eyes burned like dull coals suddenly blown upon. She saw and shrugged her shoulders.

"I am telling you," she said, "so that you will not come here again. I did not mind so much before, you being Jack's cousin, and Jack did not either, until he began putting two and two together and calling them five. Your coming here, to this city, after I did, that was one. And I—well, I reckon I furnished several myself. Jack was *so* difficult, and you being convenient, I held you up to him. I called you granite, and called him quicksilver. And when I saw it fretted him, I kept on, till he got it into his wild head that—that—Well, he says in his letter—the magnanimous idiot!—that he has cleared out so I'll be happier. But," she added with withering candor, opening the door, "you are going to do some clearing out too, dear Cousin Hugo."

He, the rock of her metaphor, did not move.

"Jack won't come back," he stated bluntly. "Not this time, Nance."

She smiled from a superior knowledge of Jack. "I shall be waiting for him right here," she said.

"But he can't come back. He is a deserter from the navy. Now, here's what you do. You get yourself a divorce, and I will do the waiting. I'm going to wait for you, and you know it."

She dropped him a curtsy for his condescension. Then, "You poor squash!" she said wearily, and left him there.

III.

Two hours later Hugo Weems boarded a westbound train. In his pocket he carried a letter from a Lexington, Kentucky, attorney, which he had received the morning before. Jack Chenault would have received a similar letter if he, Hugo Weems, had not reversed the cogs in the mills of the gods. And now Hugo Weems was going to Lexington, and not Jack Chenault.

"A neat thing!" he quoted out of the dead man's mouth.

The dead man? For a moment, as he was leaving the train at Lexington the next morning, Weems thought he saw the dead man. A lean young fellow in lime-stained overall's and mechanic's cap had just climbed nimbly into the smoking-car, up near the head of the train.

Weems had had but a glimpse, but the impulse to race after the man and look him in the face was like a nagging gamin at his side. With almost a snarl he brushed away the impulse. Nevertheless, going his way up Lexington's principal street, he caught himself staring fixedly whenever a slender boyish figure appeared in the passing crowd.

The attorney whose letter had brought Weems to Lexington was a dry and shabby little old man in a dingy old-fashioned law office amid imposing firms of lawyers; and he was alone, thoughtfully whittling a pine stick into the waste-basket, when Weems entered.

"Remember me, Mr. Kilburn?" asked

Weems, putting down his copper-riveted suit-case of glazed imitation leather.

The little old lawyer looked up, and a shade of startled repugnance crossed his face; but he was instantly as dry as parchment again.

"H-m. I reckon I do, Hugo, seeing you was raised here," he said. "Sit down, won't you?"

Weems settled heavily upon a chair beside the desk. "I got your letter about Uncle Cæsar's will, Mr. Killburn," he began at once, purposefully, without preliminary. "So he's dead, eh? No children; nobody. Had to finally remember his nephews, did he—Jack Chenault and me? But what's he mean—what you say here in your letter? Ain't I the oldest? And yet, here he goes and tries to leave everything to Jack Chenault! Not that it matters a damn, though," Weems added.

Mr. Killburn eyed his visitor in cold distaste, but let none of it appear in his humorously plaintive drawl as he replied:

"H-m. Reckon you'll just have to make allowances, Hugo," he said. "Everybody had to make allowances for Cæsar Chenault. And then again, Hugo, it was his property, you know. What's more, what he wanted done with it is mighty liable to be done. I am his executor, and he was my friend. Now, about his last will and testament that don't quite meet with your approval.

"The old gentleman's success came late in life, you remember, so that when he founded what he called his estate he was a little mite too late to found a dynasty to go with it. But just the same, he did not want it broken up, d'you see? He'd gotten right fond of those acres of Burley tobacco out there, and his blue-grass with the blooded colts frolicking around, and the stately old house he'd made comfortable once more, and the modern barns and stables, not to mention a few bales of gilt-edged fodder in the exchequer. No, sir, he didn't want any of all this broken up, any more than if it was his monument. And it *is* his monument! It's his little kingdom, sir, and there can be only one heir."

"All right—but why don't the oldest get it?"

"Now, now, Hugo, you should read up. Things like the Salic law, primogeniture—all these interesting little curlicues. Your Uncle Cæsar did, until he could teach me a few. I don't reckon there ever was a duke or king so strictly legitimatist as that old file got to be.

"Now, the trouble with you, Hugo, is that you're not in the male line of descent. No, sir, you can't deny that you are only a sister's son, the son of Cæsar Chenault's sister, while Jack is the son of his brother. Therefore it's Jack who comes into the estate, providing—providing he presents himself here as claimant within one year from the date that the will went to probate; in other words, one year from the date of my letter to you and to him."

"But what if he don't show up? What if Jack Chenault don't show up?"

Mr. Killburn's old eyes lifted searchingly. "Why won't he show up?" he demanded.

Hugo Weems never winced. "Jack Chenault won't show up," he stated stolidly. "He's a deserter; he daren't risk prison."

"H-m," mused the lawyer. "Then he will lose the estate. I mean to say that, if at the end of the year he hasn't been here, he will lose the estate."

"And then what?"

"You will get it, Hugo. The will gives it to you, in that case."

"What I understood, from your letter," said Weems. "I'll be coming here again at the end of the year, Mr. Killburn, to get—"

"All that's coming to you, of course," the lawyer conceded, dry as a prune.

Hugo Weems returned east by the next train and went back on his job as night watchman.

He was well content. The woman in his affair would not see him, but he was still well content. Nance Chenault had sent for an aunt to live with her until Jack came back. But in a year she would not be so sure that Jack was coming back. And by that time Weems could offer her a paradise in Kentucky. Meantime he could wait.

He could wait! He could carry his secret. Did he not have his victim's word

for it? And he was safe. No murder was suspected. Jack Chenault's threats to desert were remembered, but he was not searched for. Due to certain items of gallant conduct with the convoy, his application for discharge had been granted, though he could not have known this when last seen by two of his shipmates the night of his disappearance. He was considered, therefore, to have taken matters into his own hands before receiving his discharge papers.

But, even if murder were suspected, still was Weems safe. There had been no witnesses, and no circumstantial evidence could convict unless the body were produced. And to produce the body— Weems imagined their doing that, and laughed.

He was safe, even from himself. He did not need to fear the morbid fascination of confession. Grant that he did confess—what of it? No twelve men would hang him on his unsupported word, nor was it likely that the commonwealth would tunnel into underground pillars of stone, sapping a magnificent hotel's foundation, to find the bones that his crazy tale declared to be there.

Increasingly the beauties of Jack Chenault's work of art grew upon him. It was perfection unmarred. Jack had cynically mentioned a flaw, but Hugo Weems knew better. There was no flaw. Nothing mortal, whether in plain clothes or blue, or an accuser within his own breast, could bring a tremor to his nerves or pallor to his cheek. And yet—

And yet he wished, as time passed, that he had obeyed the impulse for a closer look at the slim young fellow in whitish overalls that he had seen boarding the train at Lexington. That would have laid the presentiment cold, he believed. But since then the presentiment was constantly recurring—the presentiment that this, that, or another slim young man seen indistinctly in a crowd *might* prove to be Jack Chenault.

More and more often he felt a touch of ice at his spine, thinking he saw Jack Chenault. And Nance Chenault's calm certainty while waiting for Jack Chenault made it worse. Finally the time came when Hugo Weems gave way to impulse. Catching sight of a slender young fellow across the street, he bolted after him, overtook him, and—the young fellow looked nothing like Jack Chenault. After that Weems was always doing this.

Equally against his will, and increasingly to his distress, he battened on his job. By now the splendid Romanesque new hotel was going skyward, story by story, a thousand ton on a thousand ton. That mounting grave-marker of stone and steel was the one poor antidote he had—the ponderable evidence that Jack Chenault could not rise; Jack Chenault in his pillar of stone deep under the earth.

One morning, when the night watchman had lingered as usual to note the inexorable adding of weight, a section of cornice being hoisted slipped from the tackle and fell, shattering into fragments on the pavement. To his consternation, Weems clapped his hands to his eyes, shivering drunkenly. He dreaded to look, although he recognized the fear upon him. Absurd, fantastic, yet it was there.

He could not bear to look lest the shattered rock reveal human bones embedded there. Beside him gay, mocking laughter rang out—as like Jack Chenault's as two notes struck upon the same key. Weems turned murderously on the bystander, but checked his clenched uplifting hand. The man was only a push-cart fruit-vendor laughing in sheer relief that the falling cornice had killed no one. But after that Hugo Weems walked with this fear, unreasoning yet terrible, of shattered stone, like the torturing fear another might have of a closed room or an edged tool.

IV.

WHEN months had passed, the new Jean Bart Hotel towered in its rich completion. The opening night had arrived, to be made an occasion commensurate with the city's pride in the sumptuous edifice, and this despite the rain, at times torrential, which accompanied a northeaster of days' duration.

In the basement the former night watchman labored, stoking the furnace. He was

gaunt, begrimed, raw-boned, a hulking giant of a man; yet, for all the tireless strength of his stringy sinews, he seemed the wreck of a man, as if a sickness were upon him.

His muscles twitched and jerked beyond his control. At a step behind him or a voice in some remote corridor, his head went to attention as if snatched by wires, and his eyes held a wild, startled look. Almost, it seemed, he was about to whimper for mercy. At other times he was merely sullen, his lips muttering obscenely.

He would do any work, he had said, and in contemptuous pity they had put him to shoveling coal. In a dungeonlike place, mid sooty columns rising from a blackened bed of concrete, the man who had been the sluggish night watchman toiled, dreading the intervals of rest. Even when toiling he ceaselessly calculated which sooty column would be the projection of a certain column of concrete beneath, tapering deep into the earth.

At midnight of the gala opening night, his shift being done, he was ordered out of there, but he deferred the eviction as long as he might. In the service washroom he bathed his body from the waist up, and gave to his toilet a care unusual with him. Going up the steps to leave by the servants' entry, he heard strains of music. He had been hearing music since early in the evening, when his shovel was not clattering or in a lull of the beating rain and grumbling thunder. Faintly heard, the music had sounded ethereal then, but now he perceived that it was festive, a rushing and feverish blare. It was music of a dance. There was dancing.

Dancing! Hugo Weems's deeply seamed features twisted into an awed and fearful grimace. The fools did not know—they did not know! Yet Jack Chenault would have laughed; it was a merry whimsy that would have been to Jack Chenault's notion. And if he did laugh—Jack Chenault in his pillar of stone there beneath!

Hugo Weems was of a mind to see the dancing. Why, he did not know, but the grisly irony of it drew him. By a back hall he came, unobserved and unrebuked, into the dazzling brilliance of the lobby. Guests invited from the city's smartest, wittiest, and prettiest were gaily lending to the occasion all that made for *éclat*—a housewarming notable, by every token known to the society reporters also among those present. Dancers overflowing from the café were an eddying whirl about an electric pool in the center of the rotunda. A statue of Jean Bart rose out of the pool, a huge rock its pedestal. Done in stone after the manner of Rodin, rugged and strong, France's gallant sailorman stood, not ungenial, above the revelry. Lightning rent the heavens above, while in the earth beneath—

Weems backed limply against a marble counter of an alcove recess, where he leaned and never ceased to stare until a voice behind him spoke his name. His head jerked round as though pulled by invisible wires. Yet it was a woman's voice, shocked and compassionate.

"Hugo Weems! What in the world—"

Except for pity, he knew at once, she would not have spoken. And for his part he looked upon her without emotion—none; least of all, desire. He was dully curious about this, but it was so. Yet she was more than pretty. There had been a change of some sort in her. It was as if the high tempestuous spirit of old were mellowed by an abiding patience and a habit of much thinking. The fine fighting light could not now be imagined in her eyes, although loyal and courageous they were, as ever; and there was a hint of sadness about the mouth.

She was not numbered among the guests, yet this far we may describe her: that in her beautiful red hair she wore a sharpened lead pencil, upon her arms starched sleeve-protectors from wrist to elbow, and a tracery of fatigue in her creamy skin. On the marble counter were pads of telegraph blanks, and a table within the marble booth was equipped with two telegraph instruments.

"How's this, Nance?" he asked. "Are you pounding the brass again?"

She lifted her combative chin a little.

"Don't think it's for the money," she warned him. "It's to keep me busy while —I wait." The sadness became almost

more than a hint, but she banished that, and a quizzical little smile blended with the mist as she said: "Suppose—oh, suppose Jack happened in with a story, then I'd send it for him! I would, I would, like I did when—when I first laid eyes on that blessed rascal."

"You are—you are still waiting for him, Nance?"

She nodded, and then was held by his strange look. "Hugo Weems, what *is* the matter with you?"

His palsied hand went out to her like a beggar's.

"I'm rich, Nance. I'd forgotten, but that calendar on the wall behind you—the date there! I'd clean forgotten, but according to that calendar the year was up last week, and it's mine—all of Uncle Cæsar's money is mine, soon's I go and claim it. But, Nance, I want you to have it. I want you—"

She stood back from his gripping fingers. She breathed unsteadily, a good woman believing herself wantonly hurt.

"It's yours by right, Nance," he pleaded doggedly. "Uncle Cæsar first left it to Jack, but seeing that Jack—"

"So?" she stopped him. "So that explains it—those checks Mr. Killburn has been sending me? You had him do it! Oh, oh, you underhanded rotter!"

"Checks?" he echoed stupidly.

He could not understand. He had had no communication with Mr. Killburn since that one time in his office. Why should the executor of Cæsar Chenault's estate be sending checks to Jack Chenault's widow?

Then the dazzling light of the rotunda was overcast as by a smoked glass. Somewhere in the happy throng a voice, thinned to a yelp of panic, broke stridently above the music and merry-making and sounds of the storm.

"Look! Fire!"

The rhythmic scuff of dancing feet changed to a rush and scurry. Up in the mezzanine balcony dense smoke tinted with queer and changing hues was pouring out over the lobby. Spectator guests up there were overturning chairs and tables. Crowding down the stairs, they chattered of a burst of flame—something that had gone *puff!* The manager of the hotel clamored among them, the crowd, as usual in such cases, his worst problem. It was nothing but painter's trash, he tried to tell them—turpentines, oils, varnish-cans, shavings left in an empty room. Out in a minute. Clear a space, please. Let those men get the hose going. Just keep cool. No need for—

But there is always some one who knows better. An alert young gentleman of the dancing set climbed up on Jean Bart's rock.

"Hey, folks, folks!" he shouted, gesticulating as if his soul were at stake. "Listen, will you! The shack's doomed! No matter—build 'nother shack. But statue? Beautiful statue, friends—priceless! Got to save statue—can't be replaced. Honor of our city. Got to save Jean Bart! Who'll help? Who'll help? Who—"

The idea took, and beauty in bare shoulders was there to gasp and applaud. Shirt fronts were wrecked in the eager jostling and crowding. There was some inchoate notion of tackling Jean Bart gridiron style and dragging him out; but Hugo Weems shouldered among them. He bellowed at them in a strange frenzy of rage and terror.

"Quit it—stop! You'll let him fall, you fools! You'll smash him! Get mattresses—mattresses and a rope!"

They got mattresses from bedrooms, dumping them over the mezzanine rail and spreading them helter-skelter around the pedestal. Then, with ropes to steady his descent, they were tilting Jean Bart off his rock when a new fury of the night's restless elements burst upon them.

Torn loose by the gale, a piece of scaffolding from the roof came hurtling down upon the rotunda's canopy of glass, showering the débris on those below. Unnerved momentarily, the impetuous young gentleman holding Jean Bart's ropes let go, and that was the second crash, as Jean Bart toppled backward. The sailorman of stone lay broken, its massive fragments still preserving the human outline.

Hugo Weems stared dazedly, then put an arm across his eyes, and with head down charged like a blinded bull toward the door. "Dance, would they? Dance, would they?" he sobbed, cursing.

He reached the columned portico out-

side, which was crowded with guests seeking escape but halted there by the sheeted downpour. Unmindful of that, Weems started down the half-dozen steps to the street when from behind him resolute fingers fastened on his arm and he heard Nance Chenault saying:

"Are you crazy? The fire's out. Come back. At least come back till you're in your right senses again."

He turned upon her a look of agonized question. "The world is crumbling! That sailorman—that sailorman in there, turned to stone—"

She shook him angrily, drawing him back. He yielded dumbly.

"Anyhow," he stammered—"anyhow, there's one rock steadfast in the world—you! No, not in there! Not in there!"

His distress was so evident that she led him into the recess of the nearest window, a little apart from the group huddled about the doorway.

Up Commercial Street, from the direction of the water-front, the new hotel's impressive motor-bus was returning on its initial trip to meet and gather in its first batch of paying guests. Like a gorgeous blue and bronze beetle it glided along the glistening wet asphalt, breasting the driven rain, coming steadily nearer. But neither Hugo Weems nor Nance Chenault saw or were concerned.

"You got me wrong, Nance," Weems was saying, "about that I was telling you in there—about Uncle Cæsar's money. No, hold on! Wait! I got more to say." He caught her arm. She saw that the look he bent upon her was desperate.

"I hope I did get you wrong, Hugo," she said, humoring him. "Now, hurry, please. I'll listen, if it will make you feel any easier."

Some one in the crowd watching the new bus spoke up, generously informative to the world at large:

"I know now. It's been down to the Spanish Line docks. Reckon there's a ship just got in."

The bus arrived and backed to the curb under the sheltering spread of the marquise. Cab-starter, head porter, hopeful bellhops, all in bright new vermilion, began helping passengers from Spain to set foot—a dry one if possible—in America.

But back in the window recess Hugo Weems and Nance Chenault scarcely noticed. Weems's voice, low and heavy, rasped with earnestness.

"I'll fix it, I tell you, so you'll have all that Cæsar Chenault left. And I tell you I don't want a thing—not a thing, except to give you what's yours by rights. You won't even see me again. Can't you understand? I'm not asking you shouldn't wait for Jack—"

"Jack can't stay away much longer now," she said quietly. "Why, what's the matter?"

Weems had uttered a groan—a hoarse, strangled cry, it seemed.

"Don't, Nance, don't!" he moaned. "God, I wish he could come back! Hell for mine—hell for mine gladly—if he only could!"

A hand and wrist in the beam of light slanting downward through the window moved between them. From out of the shadow it had come, extending there between them. Along the back of the wrist a long, jagged scar, reddish and white, zigzagged up the forearm into the shining wet sleeve of a raincoat. The raincoat would identify its owner, very probably, as one of the passengers off the Spanish ship, but for Hugo Weems the hand itself held other identification—a thing that glittered, a cigaret-case of blistered gold. Suddenly every nerve in Weems's body seemed to curl and shrivel. Then from the shadow came a voice—a trembling voice, not trusting itself.

"Nance—Nance, old girl!"

Weems thrust forward to peer into the man's face, but Nance brushed him aside. She was in the stranger's arms, sobbing, laughing, losing her breath, tiptoeing up, pulling down the man's head, finding his lips with her own.

By what narrow margin Weems had been saved from insanity no one may say, but only stupefaction was his present state. He stood and gaped, and as if he walked in his sleep he put out a hand and touched the man; then his eyes widened and his fingers gripped the man's arm. Weems was

panting. He seemed to have been running desperately to overtake this man.

"Tell me, Jack Chenault—tell me, what was the flaw? That flaw—tell me, tell me!" he exclaimed.

Only that, but the question had possessed his soul. At last like a fiend, it had possessed him. Whether this Jack Chenault were specter or flesh, that could wait. It was not important.

Jack Chenault turned and regarded him over Nance's head burrowed against his wet coat.

"Flaw?" he repeated.

His voice was quiet and measured. It came with none of the old lilting mockery. Jack Chenault was a sobered man. His cynicism, that had hurt him worse than others, was gone—dissolved, you would say if you knew, in the milk of human kindness. The change was in his eyes. The light of deviltry, rapiers' points at play, no longer flashed there. They were tired eyes, kind eyes, dark pools of suffering, yet placid in the steadying calm of renunciation.

"What flaw, Hugo?" he asked in his changed, quiet voice.

"In that Kremlin business. You said there was a flaw. I asked you then. What—"

Jack Chenault smiled. "Now, I remember," he said. "Too gaudy, wasn't that it?" Brain and tongue worked as before, of habit, but the keen edge of mockery was gone. "Yes, gaudy—burying the girl alive, you know. Should have killed her first. Otherwise, can't ever be sure. Serious flaw. Mustn't ever let it occur again, that way, Hugo."

Absolutely, there was nothing sardonic in his words as he spoke them; and Hugo Weems, listening, began to nod acquiescence, eagerly, hungrily.

"That's it!" he burst forth. "*I* wasn't sure. I always thought I was seeing you, and it—was driving me crazy. It wore me away down to these damn jumping nerves, and down to a soul—something like a rat—that was always watching and ready to turn and squeal and run. But"—he gaped anew at Jack Chenault—"but perhaps I did see you?"

"No," said Jack Chenault; "or at least you only saw me once—that morning in Lexington, remember?"

"The slim fellow in overalls? Then that was what started it—my always seeing you!"

"Only that once, Hugo. I was headed West then, around the world. War aftermath stuff for my paper. Sobering work, let me tell you."

"For your paper?" Nance interposed. "But how could you, Jack, if you thought you were a deserter?"

"But I didn't think I was a deserter. When I left that letter for you, Nance, there were two for me, on the old stand in the hall. One was about my discharge from the service, and the other was about poor Uncle Cæsar's death. About his will, too. So I stopped off in Lexington to see Mr. Killburn. He had me qualify as the sole heir right there, after which I deeded the whole ca-boodle-um over to you, Nance."

"You mean," gasped Hugo Weems—"you mean you'd just been there before me?"

"Certainly; I wanted to provide for Nance. And I told Mr. Killburn about—well, about our last meeting, Hugo; but I made him promise not to mention to you that he'd seen me. Reckon the old persimmon enjoyed your visit, Hugo."

"Why in God's name didn't you tell him to turn me over to the police?"

"No; my way was more—artistic." Jack Chenault looked intently into the other's face; at the corroding ravages there. "A diabolical masterpiece, my way," he added. "I—I could almost ask you to forgive me, Hugo."

"Then—all this time—there never was a chance for me to—to—inherit a cent!" Abruptly Weems jerked back his head in a spasm of cracked and hideous mirth. "A neat thing!" he laughed. "A neat thing—neat thing—"

Jack Chenault pressed a hand upon his shoulder. "There, there," he said. "Futility of murder, you know—something you can't ever beat. Not you—not any man—ever! *That's* the flaw—*the* flaw—you poor fool!"

Nance Chenault lifted her head and

gazed up into her husband's face with widening eyes.

"Murder?" she repeated. "What are you saying—murder?"

He stroked her hair. "You didn't know, did you, that I am a murdered gentleman? That I wasn't coming back?"

"As if you could help coming back!"

"Maybe I couldn't—finally. But I did have it all mapped out that you'd be happier, Nance. I honestly did, dear old Cherry Thatch, and I never supposed you'd still be in this town. But just now, when I saw you and Hugo—you two together here at a hotel—"

"Jack Chenault!"

"Even at that, I had to stop. I stopped here in the dark for a look at you, Nance. You wouldn't have known, and I was going right on, only— Well, I heard what you were saying, you two, and so—"

"And so, Jack Chenault?"

"Nothing more, Celestial Carrots. Only—my little old faith in heaven and earth and all that in them is was restored; that's all."

"Jack, I'll never forgive you—never!" Her arms tightened fiercely about his neck. "And I never—never—want to see your—your—darling face again!"

"Spitfire—dear old girl!"

"What's this scar?" She proposed to have a full accounting.

"Oh, that?" He held up his wrist. "That's what saved me."

Saved him? Again Hugo Weems's dazed mind grappled with a question. It was the one that had not seemed important before.

"How could anything save you?" he demanded.

"Oh, a plenty saved me, Hugo. Cosmic forces were at work a million years ago to save me. There was the earth cooling off, mineralization, the deposit of a certain particular handful of iron ore. That handful of iron ore became a ragged edge of metal projecting from the wire-ribbed lining of a certain pile hole, and thus it slashed through a narrow leather belt that bound the arms of a man shooting feet first down that particular certain hole. It slashed his wrist also.

"As I've said, Hugo, the only flaw—speaking now from the standpoint of art, not morality—was that the man was alive. Being a jumping-jack, and with his arms free, he did not stay down there. He bubbled up like Aphrodite—wasn't it?—out of the sea. And by the way, Hugo, thank you for the cigaret-case. Put my hand on it first thing, climbing out."

"What are you telling?" cried Nance Chenault. "Who—"

"You like this story, don't you, Vesuvius?"

"I don't! Who was the—"

"But you were still down there!" Weems's voice broke in hoarsely. "I saw you! The next morning I looked, and I saw—"

"You saw my pea-coat and hat. I'd chucked 'em down, and borrowed overalls and jumper from the cab of the pile-driver—"

But he had to hold Nance.

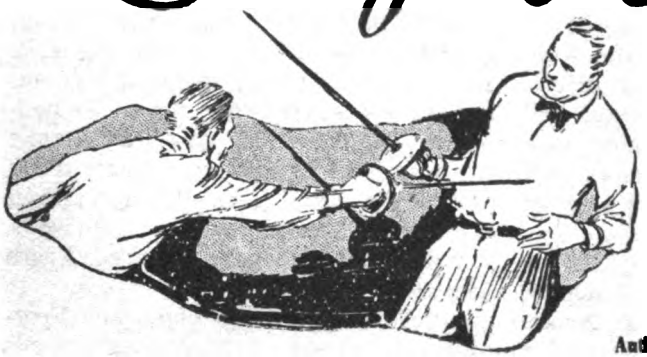
"Then it was Hugo who— Oh, the murderer! The coward!"

"No, Nance, no!" Jack expostulated. "Wait! Think! What he did was—it was Fate's own cure for us both! A blessing, Nance, a blessing!"

Weems nodded sodden assent. "Maybe so," he said. "Anyway, I hope so. And I thank God for the—that flaw. Because now I'm free. I can quit this—this cursed Kremlin. I couldn't before. I was chained to it. But now I can go. I've been wanting to go to my mother. Now I can go."

"Yes, now you can go, Hugo," said Jack Chenault gently. "And I—" He bent his head, whispering the rest to the woman in his arms. "And I am in the home port. I'll never go anywhere from here."

Stay-Home



Part IV

by Edgar Franklin

Author of "Regular People," "The Chase of the Concession," etc.

CHAPTER XIII.

TO THE DEATH.

THERE seemed to be a way of doing these things. Gardez and Huera rose, and having squared their shoulders in military fashion shook hands with much sober dignity and formality. Howard also arose and seemed to be watching them for a cue. James dragged himself drearily out of his chair, to find Gardez hurrying to his side.

"Huera will attend the Señor Dawson," he explained. "I, yourself, with your permission. You will use the famous rapiers of my noble grandfather, Pancho Gardez. You know of them?"

"I suppose I've—heard about them," James muttered. "I don't just place them now."

"The one with the little ivory cross set in the hilt, *señor!*" Gardez whispered mysteriously. "This one you must contrive to select. There is a tradition. Thirteen duels my grandfather fought, and in twelve of these, by pure fortune, this sword was in his hand. In each he killed his man. But at the thirteenth encounter—a matter so very similar to this that one must think of history repeating itself—my grandfather's opponent selected—"

"You don't have to tell me the rest of it," James said with a small shiver. "I can guess it all."

"Yes—*ay de mi!* He died, *señor.* But, ah, she was, I think, well worth this, for she was very, very beautiful. Beautiful even as the lovely Señora Dawson. Her portrait hangs in my little study, just over there. Come! You shall see it!"

"No, not now!" James said firmly. "Somehow I don't think I could appreciate her just now, no matter how beautiful she was. I'm kind of fed up on this beautiful lady business and—I suppose I can go to bed, now the obsequies have been planned? It must be well after one."

"And sleep soundly, *señor,* that the hand may be of steel and the eye as an eagle's!" his host advised.

Huera bowed low and gravely, as James passed. Howard, somewhat doubtfully also bowed. Then, marching along as steadily as might be, James crossed the large room and passed to the corridor, and climbed the stairs to his own apartment—and there, with a thud, dropped into the nearest chair and devoted a considerable space to time to gazing blankly, with round eyes, at nothing in particular!

He was about to fight a duel with Howard Dawson!

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for November 19.

Yes, it wasn't imagination or a dream or a fever or anything like that; it was just plain, incredible fact! He was about to fight his first duel or—or else drop out of the window and hide somewhere in the slums of San Palo until he could get clear of their accursed country. Really, if one were to be perfectly sane, that last was the sensible thing to do. James groaned wretchedly; for some reason or other he couldn't do it.

And yet—a duel! He was going to some hellish spot at daylight and grab a sword and try to butcher old Howard Dawson, just like something in a romantic drama or a comedy movie. Although, unless there was a pronounced drop in Howard's temperature between now and the time of the big show, the comedy element wouldn't necessarily be so marked. Howard really did know something about swords!

The detail had not passed through James's mind for years, for he had never felt the slightest interest in fencing, but first and last Howard had done quite a lot with tools of that kind. When old Boivain, the French teacher, had started the fencing team in the high school Howard had been there with the bells on, so to speak, coming through the tournament at the end of the second year with the only two medals that had been awarded for sword-play in the history of Wallington. Ah, yes, and more, too, come to think of it! There in the Y. M. C. A. gym, he had been mixed up with that broadsword shark from Georgia, and with the foils champion of one of the bigger colleges; James recalled now that they had spoken of Howard as a born genius with cold steel!

Well, that made the prospect just so much more cheering, didn't it? It did, indeed! Howard was mad enough to do murder. And it was an accumulated fury, built up layer by layer, and no mere sudden rage. Howard, with a good reliable sword, and a lonely spot, such as doubtless would be provided, would have the means of murder at his disposal. Following the thing to its logical conclusion, it really looked as if Howard was about to do murder, with James Berry, figuring prominently as the one murdered!

James sagged down in his chair, and sagged farther. His eyes did not grow less round; his throat grew distinctly dry, so that he was forced to clear it every few seconds; his forehead glistened, in spite of the two electric fans which hummed monotonously, and the cool breeze which was coming through the window. It was a thing almost impossible of belief, yet this night had every appearance of being James's last one on earth!

It would have been at least pardonable had James set about wringing his hands and bemoaning his fate; twenty-six is an early age at which to set out upon an investigation of existence's next plane, and James had a good deal to live for on this one. Such an idea, however, did not even occur to him. He shook considerably and perspired freely for a time; but once having grasped in full the grim reality of the whole affair, James merely groaned and rose, and dragged over to the little desk in the corner—for there were things to be done.

There was, first, the letter to Judge Starr. James thought hard, and wrote neatly and concisely; frowned over it when he had sealed it and then, just as neatly, inscribed it: "To be mailed in case of my death." There came next the letter to Betty Carson, and this was a long and hard one. In a few words James outlined the catastrophe that was scheduled for daylight and stated his forecast of the outcome quite frankly; in a few more he bequeathed a full half-interest in Dawson & Berry to Miss Carson, stating that Judge Starr had been instructed to look after the details.

Then James edged closer to the desk, and went at the vital part of the communication, which dealt, broadly, with his sentiments toward Miss Carson at this critical moment. They were, to omit details, even more fervent than they had been at their last meeting—and when he had quite finished the last sentence James sighed heavily again and gazed through the window, which faced toward the east. Over there on the sky-line the first gray hint of dawn was showing!

This second letter's disposal gave James some trouble. For various reasons, he did

not care to leave it with Judge Starr's. He pondered and finally pinned it neatly inside his shirt; he pondered again, and removing the shirt, pinned it inside the back, between his shoulders, rather than at the front. James was ever a tidy soul; if there was one thing he hated to receive it was a messy letter!

And now the eastern gray was more than a hint. James shuffled to the window and gazed out again. It wasn't possible! No, it wasn't possible—that was all. Before this Howard Dawson had come to his senses, or he had told Dorothy about it, and Dorothy had brought him to his senses and—no, it wasn't likely that he had discussed the matter with Dorothy, was it? Well, then, he must have sobered down of his own accord; Howard was half-mad with jealousy and all that, but enough of the normal Wallington business man must remain to—somebody knocked! James quickened and started for the door. He knew it; that was Howard now!

It chanced, however, to be the very dark butler of the establishment. Quite reverently, as he stepped into the room, he bore before him, partly wrapped in old silk, an aged, much ruffled shirt of a bygone day. Teeth showing delightedly, he bowed before James Berry.

"The Señor Gardez, with his compliments, has sent this," he stated. "He felt that you might care to wear it, *señor!*"

"What is it?"

"It is the shirt of his sainted grandfather, *señor!*" the servitor breathed. "It was in this shirt that he fought every duel. Great good fortune attends the wearer of this garment in such matters."

For no reason at all James's skin crawled as he turned back the silk and examined the shirt. There was quite a hole on the left side, just about where the sainted grandfather's heart had been, once upon a time. James shuddered.

"Well, his luck wasn't running so awfully strong the last time he wore it," he said hastily. "No, thanks ever so much, but I always fight duels in this kind of a shirt—just a plain American shirt, you know, and—no, I don't want to wear that!"

"As you wish, *señor,*" the attendant said coldly. "I am instructed to say that the others will be ready in ten minutes."

"I shall"—said James, and swallowed hard—"be there in about eight!"

So it had not been Howard—and all the rest of it was real. James closed the door with a ghastly smile. Just ten minutes, and they'd be moving toward the appointed spot. He ruffled his hair and looked around the beautiful room, and swallowed again. Something very serious and uncomfortable had happened in the pit of his stomach this last minute or so; an iceberg, he believed, had formed there and was chilling all the rest of him. His hands were frightfully cold; he blew on them—and flashed back for a second to that particularly cold winter when he was about eight years old, and Howard Dawson had taught him to skate on the old mill-pond. That was the first time he ever remembered blowing his hands to warm them. Betty Carson was a baby in her carriage that winter. Wasn't it funny that he should remember Betty and her sweet little mother, who had worn a big sealskin coat, and whose cheeks had been like two red apples when—well, this wouldn't do! This wouldn't do at all! James felt one hot tear running down the right side of his nose, and suddenly cursed horribly!

He was not at all addicted to profanity. The sound of it, coming from his own lips, had something the effect of a stiff drink of brandy upon a total abstainer. It both startled and pleased James. He cursed further and more horribly; he cursed, in fact, quite incredibly. He gave a wicked laugh and sought to impinge upon his brain the fixed conviction that he was a distinctly tough character, about to go out and put up such a fight as would go down in the history of Orinama—the sort of thing minstrels would set to music, and old men tell their grandchildren about, fifty years hence.

As an experiment in auto-suggestion, no failure could have been more complete. Having reached its conclusion, and waited a second for the warm and confident glow that should follow, James shook all over once more—and snarled at himself, and having combed his hair and taken one last,

long look in the mirror, jammed on his hat and descended the marble stairs.

One folded one's arms at a time like this, apparently. There near the main entrance, Huera was standing with his arms folded, and so was Howard and so was that sinister-looking stranger, with the black case at his feet. James's breath wheezed as his eye caught sight of the case; it was only a doctor's kit, of course, and before long he'd probably be thankful that it was with them —but there was nothing stimulating about it, all the same!

Gardez was just a mass of suppressed delight! He took James's arm; he bowed, and the others filed out of the house; he whispered:

"The garment of my ancestor, *señor;* you have declined it! You of the north are a strange people."

"I know. But about shirts—I'm kind of hard to fit—" James stammered.

"It is not that of which I would speak, *señor,*" the host raced on. "It is of your opponent. He feels, I think, fear! Thrice I have observed this!"

"He's got nothing to be afraid of!" James mumbled.

"Ah, *señor*—this modesty! How well I know this modesty! It augurs well," Señor Gardez observed happily. "See! Watch his eye—hold his eye, *señor!* Peer your hate into his very soul! Then will his hand turn to water and his arm be without strength!"

"Um—yes!"

An instant Gardez detained him in the doorway, studying him quite curiously.

"You do not care to talk, *señor?*" he mused.

"I don't feel as if there was anything to be said just now!"

"So it was with my grandfather before a duel!" Gardez purred. "This I have heard, again and again. I never saw him, you know, *señor.* He was young when he died."

"So am I. Don't rub it in!" James said briefly. "Let's go get the thing over with."

One did not converse at a time like this, either, it seemed. The other three were already settled stiffly in the car, a trio of stone images. James endeavored to enter jauntily and stumbled; Gardez, quite tenderly, assisted him to his seat and followed, and the car rolled off.

In point of distance this ride was lengthy, yet to James it seemed the shortest he had ever taken. They merely sizzled out of San Palo, and whizzed into the suburbs, and out of them again and along an extremely white, hard road, which made for the fastest time—and stopped. They were in open country, on the narrow plateau just above the city; to the right lay a wide space, unfenced, but hedged by thick growth. Gardez stepped down nimbly; James stepped down, but not so nimbly.

And that unbecomingly hurried effect had not ended with the ride. They were marching across the open space now; they had reached the prettiest little dell in the world. Tropical trees swayed and whispered in the early breeze; there was a noisy brooklet, somewhere off there, which babbled and plashed enticingly. But more to the point, there was Howard Dawson who, while Huera whispered energetically to him, shed his coat and rolled up his sleeves and nodded dignified assent. James shed his own coat and rolled up his own sleeves, lighted a cigaret, glanced airily at the skies and, having stated rather carelessly that they were about to have a fine day, examined Howard out of the corner of his eye.

Well—one thing, anyway—there was a white spot just in front of either of Howard's ears. That meant that he wasn't quite as calm as he tried to appear, because James knew those white spots. And he was examining James, just as James was examining him, which was also encouraging. But his eye was bad. Meeting that eye squarely, James ceased to be encouraged, and found himself turning cold again. He had seen Howard when he was angry, but he had never seen that purely cruel light in his eye before. No, he was out for business and—

"The swords, *señor!*" Gardez said gently.

The chauffeur, who vibrated excitement, who proffering a long black leather case. The seconds glanced at one another, glanced at the doctor then; the doctor accepted the

case and opened it, revealing and extracting about as wicked-looking a pair of rapiers as had ever been forged. The doctor extended them—and Howard Dawson, without a second glance, snatched the nearest one, whipped it tentatively in the air, smiled his complete approval and stood with the point resting on the ground, quite ready. James also took a rapier and, struck by a sudden thought, examined the hilt carefully, turning it over several times. There was no ornamentations on his hilt. He looked at Howard's sword; the first beams of the sun shone upon a very handsome, conspicuous little ivory cross. James turned a strained smile in Gardez's direction and his host shrugged.

"The fortunes of war, Señor Berry," he breathed. "Perhaps—who knows?—in the matter of my grandfather it was but evil chance. Let us believe this, *señor*. We are ready?"

There seemed no reasonable cause for further delay. Gardez, having stepped forward, was talking; Huera was talking; the doctor was talking, and Howard Dawson was putting in an occasional remark. The chauffeur, lacking social equality, was talking to himself—and by golly! they were face to face and the show was on!

James took a new grip on his trusty weapon, which had been about to fall to the ground. It was all to happen, and he hoped that it might happen quickly! Here was where Dawson & Berry dissolved partnership! James shut his teeth— He wondered what Betty Carson was doing just then? Getting up, maybe, if morning came at the same time up there that it did down here. Which it didn't. Or did it?—There were fourteen unmarked cases of goods on the spur platform the day they left Wallington, and James, who had meant to tell the shipping clerk that they were for Simmons & Parr, had forgotten all about it, and it was dollars to doughnuts they'd been sent to the Carey-Adams Company, because they— James's father had owned a shirt with a little ruffle down the front; curious that he should have thought of it now; probably suggested by that thing of Gardez's ancestor— In the boarding-house every Sunday morning for breakfast they used to have buckwheat cakes, and when Millicent brought them in, which she did as a rule—

James started. Gardez had barked something, and Howard Dawson had whisked up his sword, giving James quite a shock, because for a second he fancied it was coming his way. James raised his own sword hastily and it struck Howard's with a loud crash—causing Gardez to gasp ecstatic pleasure and Huera to lean forward with what really looked like abnormally keen interest, even for such a time.

And now Howard's blade was shuddering and chattering against his own quite dramatically, and Howard was gazing steadily, horribly at him, squinting his eyes and showing his teeth. James warmed, just a little, annoyedly. Assuming that a man didn't know enough about this business to do it with decent dignity, was it necessary to grimace like that? Or was it meant for a fighting face? If it was that, James could beat it seventeen ways from the jack without half trying, and make noises as well!

James suddenly bared his teeth and also his gums; his eyes contracted to a little pair of blazing points; he snarled! And Gardez exclaimed, and Howard, plainly startled, stepped back a pace and then caught himself and stepped forward again and lunged deftly at James Berry.

It was a wicked jab. For an instant it frightened the very senses out of James. He leaped aside and pounded at the infernal blade, with all the strength of his arm behind his own—and the rapier left Howard's hand and shot through the sunshine for a dozen yards, to land quivering, point down, in the soft ground!

Gardez relieved himself of one mighty shout. The chauffeur squealed. The senior partner whirled upon the junior partner.

"Don't kid yourself about that!" he snapped. "That was an accident! That wasn't skill!"

"I didn't say it was, Howard," James replied. "I beg your pardon. I—I didn't mean to do it. Get the thing and let's get started."

"You hear?" Señor Gardez shouted triumphantly at Señor Huera, who scowled. "He will continue! This I have predicted!"

The amazed-looking doctor was returning with the rapier. He handed it to Howard, and bowed to James.

"If you pray to the saints, *señor*," Gardez was saying to his local friend, "ask now their protection for your principal."

He seemed pleased at the little mischance. To James's tortured mind it was about the most unfortunate thing that could have happened, because if Howard hadn't been hotly infuriated before, he was now! He grasped his weapon and peered at James; it seemed that he would have hurled it straight through James's body from where he stood. He darted forward then and James threw up his blade, and just in time. And he was coming forward again, from the other side, and again James's rapier whistled through the air.

And if that wasn't great luck, what was it? The steel had missed him by about two inches that time, but—it had missed him. What was the idea of this new stuff? Howard was crouching now, his elbow high, his shimmering blade pointing in a straight line at James. He was squinting down its length; it really looked as if he meant to pull a trigger presently and shoot the thing. He—he lunged!

And this was a vicious one! It caused James to duck and throw up his own sword with a wild swing, and it struck something soft, and there was a roar of pain, and Howard Dawson was jumping back with blood—yes, real blood!—ugh!—trickling from his bare arm.

"Gosh, old man!" James gasped. "I never meant to—here! Wait! Hold on! I think they're trying to stop the fight!"

And, in fact, Gardez and Huera had hastened forward and seemed about to come between the combatants—and they stepped back again swiftly, because the blades were hammering and clattering and clashing quite crazily!

"Not that—kind of—a fight!" Howard Dawson panted savagely. "I'll rip you up—now if I—swing for it!"

His sword swirled down again and missed its mark. It was drawn back once more, with a lightning twist and raised high, the general idea being apparently to drive it down through James's skull and pin him to the earth. And perchance this would have come up pass, but that James, choking with excitement, stumbled.

It was more of a headlong plunge than a stumble. His foot had caught on a little hummock just as his blade pointed at Howard; now, with a yell, James tried to stay his forward progress, found it quite impossible and yelled again.

Because now no power under the sun could keep that beastly thing from driving right into poor old Howard Dawson's having chest!

CHAPTER XIV.

HONOR IS SATIATED.

FURTHER impressions hurtled down upon James's consciousness in that dreadful moment. It flashed upon him that the retrospective performances of the drowning man have been greatly overadvertised; to know real, high-speed retrospection it is necessary to stumble toward one's old friend and partner with the sword which means his sure demise!

In the littlest twinkling of time James saw Wallington, the factory, the office, Betty Carson, her home—saw Howard, the boy and the man—saw Dorothy, the girl and the bride—whizzed out of the zone of retrospection, and, shooting into the future, saw Howard lying, still and gory, on the grass before him—saw Dorothy, the widow—saw himself being lead, heavily manacled, to one of the black dungeons—saw—

Howard Dawson, with a hoarse shout, flung up his free and uninjured arm.

Down James Berry's blade, which slowed suddenly, there came the most horrible sensation, the most indescribably disgusting thick shuddering—and in the selfsame second instinct prompted James to hurl himself to one side, and at last he had gained footing again and was coming to a standstill, panting, sword still gripped.

"As the cat plays with the mouse! As the cat plays with the mouse!" Gardez cried exultantly.

His words, of which there were more, died in Howard Dawson's shriek. Howard, to the best of James's foggy understanding,

had thrown away his own rapier; now he was dancing around rather insanely, hugging his left arm with his right hand and—James turned weak. The—the—the blood was trickling between the fingers of that right hand!

Together, Huera and Gardez were shouting excitedly. The doctor, having set his case upon the ground, was opening it with methodical haste. James turned still weaker. He had finished old Howard, without ever having meant to hurt him; no man could bleed like that and live for more than a few minutes! James's heart ceased its beating; and having ceased, resumed again almost instantly, for Howard's clutching and dancing had stopped most abruptly. His hands were down and working; he was looking straight at James Berry; and of all the dreadful expressions with which Howard had favored his milder partner in the last hectic ten days, this one was far and away the most terrible!

Why, the man was actually, literally out of his mind! No man with one grain of reason left in his cranium could ever look like that! He was mouthing, bellowing, snorting, all at once. He was gazing around wildly—and now, apparently, he had found what he sought. With a series of maniac leaps, Howard Dawson was at the roadside and the car; with one maniac rip he had torn the cover bodily from the running board tool box. The chauffeur, chattering indignantly, essayed to follow, thought better of it and merely stood and watched. Gardez hurried to James's side, smiling brilliantly.

"*Señor!*" he cried. "You are too merciful!"

"Huh!" James gasped, and dashed the perspiration from his forehead. "What?"

"By far, *señor*, by far! As he stood, vanquished, you should have run him through, so neatly! You have the hand of the master, the—"

James, watching his old friend, was not even listening. Fifty different tools Howard had sent whirling into the air; now he had located the one he desired—and he turned and leaped back toward them, and in his hand was gripped a monkey wrench, hardly less than eighteen inches in length!

Gardez stared in utter perplexity; James stared, but without even a suspicion of perplexity. James, in fact, understood so perfectly that he could almost feel that wrench descending upon his head at that second! Yes, and about five more seconds and the "almost" part of it would be eliminated and—James Berry, with one gasp, whisked about and started for some other section of Orinama!

The sainted grandfather's rapier all but tripped him; he threw it from him and dashed onward. Huera seemed about to reach out and stay him; then Huera was merely one of those in the general area to the rear of James, and James was letting out another notch of speed. There was rather thick growth over this way; he went through it like a projectile. Ah, and here was an open space again, with the brook at the far side! James thudded madly across the open space, leaped the brook and thudded onward, up a gentle slope, and up and up.

Just where he meant to stop he did not pause to think for some time, but presently, as breath threatened to fail altogether on the grade, he slowed down for one little second and glanced behind. The landscape was pleasingly bare of Howard Dawson and his wrench. James stopped entirely.

Gasping, he smiled dizzily. Assuredly, he had covered a considrable distance in a short time. He was far above the dell now and several hundred yards to the north; gazing downward, the figures in the group of which he had recently made one were quite small—but Howard Dawson was among them. That was really the main consideration. Howard, so far as he could see, was standing in very nice, docile fashion while the doctor wound yards and yards of bandage around his arms.

Phew! James seated himself upon a rock and loosened his collar. That, indeed, had been some duel! Was it over now or was this the pause between rounds? Or, in a case like this—what was Gardez doing? Gardez seemed to be beckoning to him, and—well, it was probably all right. They'd jabbed something soothing into Howard Dawson, and he could descend

without courting disaster at the steel end of that wrench. James rose and made his way downhill again, not too swiftly.

What in the Sam Hill was the matter with them now? The doctor, after one glance at James, wiggled his nose oddly, and went on packing his tools back into place. Howard Dawson favored him with just one more awful glare, and did not move. Huera sneered openly at him and shrugged his shoulders. Even Gardez's plain annoyance was tinged with visible contempt as he stepped toward James.

"That, *señor,* was—shall we say?—ill considered!" he stated.

"What?"

"I have said that you possessed the hand of the master, *señor,*" his host remarked, with a smile of bitter sarcasm. "I should have added that you had as well the heart of the timid—"

"Well?" James said wonderingly.

"Let the subject be considered as closed. I apologize, of course, even for the thought."

"You're sore because I left when I did? Is that it?"

"It is not the part of a gentleman to run from battle, *señor,*" Gardez informed him icily.

"Well, is it the part of a gentleman to grab up a monkey-wrench, and try to brain a man?" James demanded hotly. "I'll go in for a duel, if I have to, and I'll go in for a garage fight, if I have to. But I can't mix 'em!"

Gardez's lips curled contemptuously.

"It would have been correct and quaintly amusing, *señor,* to have caught his arm once more upon your blade, and then to have laughed again in his face!"

"Maybe so!" snapped James. "But—"

Gardez's smile stayed him, and froze whatever further sentiments he may have been about to express. The smile persisted, too, until it became quite clear that James was all through talking. Then Gardez bowed stiffly and turned back to the group, and James followed sullenly.

"Honor," his host stated formally, "has been satisfied, I think?"

Huera bowed even more formal assent.

"It may be considered that my principal is the victor," Gardez pursued, "since he has deliberately spared the life of the Señor Dawson." He addressed Howard, whose arms, happily uncrippled, were mainly bandage. "You, *señor,* will of course permit the Señora Dawson to divorce you?"

"*What?*"

"It would seem—"

"Say, you keep out of my family affairs!" Howard Dawson snarled. "Where the hell's my coat?"

An astounded glance flashed between Huera and Gardez; the former shrugged again.

"This matter were indeed best considered closed and forgotten with all possible speed!" Gardez murmured sourly. "It is the custom, Señor Berry, to shake the hand of the opponent."

"I'll be darned glad to do that little thing," James agreed heartily, and advanced upon his old friend. "Howard, I—I guess this was pretty much your own seeking, but I never meant to carve you up like that. On the level, I never did. Do you feel all right or—or sick or anything?"

This last Mr. Dawson ignored altogether as he fixed a black stare on his old associate.

"I don't shake hands with any one who pulls all the rotten foul tricks known to fencing," he stated. "If I'd had a chance to brush up on this stuff a little, *you'd*—here, wait, Berry! Don't go off. I want to speak to you," be pursued, lowering his voice. "You've about busted up my family. You've probably done a lot more I don't know about yet. But if you'd played this thing fair, I was going to stick you in the hospital for the present, and settle the rest of it later on."

"Eh?"

"Because I've started out to found this branch, and you or ten thousand like you can't stop me!" Mr. Dawson informed his partner, from between set teeth. "You—you blithering idiot! Can't you even raise a hand without crabbing this thing worse than you had it crabbed before? Can't—"

"Hey! You've raved long enough!" James interrupted. "You haven't known what you were talking about for a day or

more. I'm going to have the doctor dope you good and proper, and then you—"

"I don't know what I'm talking about?" Howard hissed. "Say, if you'd heard what they were saying while you were running off like a scared tabby-cat, you'd think I knew what I was talking about. I was going to play Huera for the best bet on this branch business and if he fell down, then fall back on Gardez. Now you've got Gardez so plumb disgusted with your white-feather stuff that he acts as if he meant to throw us all out of the house. These are queer, hot-blooded birds down this way, Berry. We'll never do any business with him now!"

"But—"

"And I'm going to get you for that, too, Berry!" boiled out of the senior partner, as he moved his arm and winced. "You've done all the wrecking you're going to do for me! I thought I had you dead to rights this morning; but—I'll *get* you, Berry, and I'll found that branch if—"

"*Señors!*" Gardez put in very sharply, and the tinkle of ice in his voice was more pronounced. "The *duelo* has once been fought with swords; it must be repeated with less dangerous words? Yes? Pah! Let us return to breakfast!"

He stalked away, quite consumed with disgust. He motioned Huera into the car before him and took his own seat. The rest were left to follow.

There was nothing exhilarating about this homeward ride through the hot morning sunshine. Once or twice Huera grunted at Howard Dawson and Howard Dawson grunted back. The doctor, silent, seemed both puzzled and amused. Gardez sat with folded arms and lips compressed, but every few seconds his eyes opened wide and gave a snap, and then were half closed again. James Berry, who was very tired and distinctly limp, huddled down in a corner and gazed at the landscape. Since the rest of them did not care to converse with him, he certainly did not care to converse with them, either in an explanatory vein or with a torrent of self-justification. So far as James was concerned, the whole crew of them could go to—wherever it is that such blamed fools properly belong.

He was on the side nearest the house. He stepped out alone when they finally stopped and walked straight into the cool foyer and on toward the *patio*. And so walking, he came suddenly face to face with Dorothy Dawson, who started back and then screamed faintly and turned ghastly pale.

"Howard! Howard!" she choked! "Where is he?"

"Well, Howard—" James began drearily.

"What have you done to him? Where is he? He—he—said he was going to teach you a lesson and—and he was coming back alone? What have you done to Howard?" the young woman demanded, in a series of unreasonable gasps, while her eyes widened and widened, and her cheeks grew even paler. "He— Oh! Oh! He stopped—on his way out—and he said he was going to—to wipe the stain from his shield! He said— Oh! I wouldn't kiss him good-by! I wouldn't even let him kiss me good-by or—*Howard!*" shrieked the lady, in conclusion, as at last she spied her slightly damaged husband and sped toward him.

Well, they seemed to be reconciled again, James reflected acidly. *She* was, anyway; *he* didn't seem to be bubbling over with tender sentiments, but at least he was letting her hug him and—oh, to the dickens with them!

James turned on his heel and plodded into the *patio*. The plain fact was that he wanted a cup of good hot coffee and a roll, and a chance to go up-stairs and lie down for a while until he regained his balance. Their infernal dining-room was back this way, and—he stopped. That path seemed to be blocked. Hands clasped tightly, back almost toward him, Carmen Huera was standing there tensely; and James turned about and tiptoed softly—and stopped again, because quick steps were pursuing him; and now, as he turned with a shudder, one of Orinama's most brilliantly beautiful young women was quivering before him and crying softly:

"You return alone! Alone! He is dead?"

"Huh?"

"And without a mark!" the young woman gasped ecstatically, and somehow

had captured both his hands as she breathed: "Ah! A man—*a man!*"

Ice-water trickled down James's spine. Maybe it was meant for a compliment; maybe it was just a statement of obvious fact; but it sounded a lot more like a victorious battle-cry! He looked around feverishly; he relaxed, because the rest of them were coming now. Miss Huera slipped a hand through his arm.

"See! I could not resist; I must come, when I knew. They will breakfast now; afterward, you will tell me!" she said, after a brief, disappointed stare at the still animate Howard. "And then—I have it! In my car! We shall be alone, *señor!* You shall see San Palo and the wild country behind, and—"

"Yes, I've been looking over some of that wild country this morning," James remarked. "I don't know that I want—hello, everybody!" he concluded.

Huera gave him a cold and appraising glance and passed on. Gardez merely ignored him. But Dorothy Dawson paused for an instant and allowed her eyes to flame at James.

"You *coward!*" she hissed. "Howard has told me all about it!"

"Hey? Well—well, perhaps you'd better let me tell my side of the case as well, then!" James Berry rejoined. "It's just possible his memory may not—"

"I don't wish to hear your side of the case—this case or any other case!" Mrs. Dawson observed rather superbly, and passed on with her bandaged husband.

Miss Huera's hand pressed James's arm suddenly, as he stared after the bride of his old friend.

"*Caro amigo,* no!" she breathed, hotly and imperiously, into his very ear. "You would stoop to answer this pale, silly wife of the weakling! But no! That is absurd!"

"Maybe — maybe it is!" James muttered. "I'm blest if I know!"

A little geniality all around would have rendered this breakfast much more pleasant. As a meal, it was well enough, and James was hungry, but the general atmosphere left a great deal to be desired. The young woman at his side was too friendly; she had a way of touching James, of looking at him, that chilled him more thoroughly than it had last night. Ridiculous, doubtless, but there was something in the air about Carmen which suggested that her plans were all complete now!

But the rest of them were not friendly at all. Huera was naturally silent; Gardez, naturally talkative, was even more silent. Dorothy, who had plainly surrendered, fluttered beside her husband, even feeding him when raising his arms became difficult; and Howard, who in his heart must know the completeness of his wife's innocence, was unbending bit by bit. Only—when any one of that four chanced to look at James Berry, it was with an expression which suggested that some one had brought in and there abandoned a peculiarly noisome reptile!

What in Hades was the matter with 'em? If they were still fussed up about the duel, couldn't they look at him and then look at Howard, and tell at a glance which one had come off second best? Or was it according to etiquette here to treat the victor as if he'd just stolen a herd of sheep? Or—was it because James had absented himself at a moment when holding his ground would have been sheerest idiocy? Born utterly practical, even now James could not wholly grasp that point, but it seemed to be what was bothering them, all the same.

Eventually the pall descended to some extent upon Carmen Huera as well; her murmurings grew softer and less frequent, but not less ardent. From them James gleaned that she meant to call for him at noon with her car, to show how it was possible even at that hour to ride coolly to a certain spot in the uplands where refreshing breezes blew. He gave scant attention; he desired no more at present than to escape from that frozen circle. When he rose, mumbling his excuses, Gardez favored him with the shadow of a suggestion of a nod; the rest of them, save Carmen, did not even glance his way.

And now—praises be!—he was in his own room and privileged to think it all out if he chose. James stretched wearily on the long wicker couch. Did he choose? He did not—because thinking it out was

unnecessary. The long and the short of it was simply that he once again dodged serious trouble by taking to his heels. A low groan escaped him. What on earth *should* he have done, then, to be correct? Stood his ground and stuck another hole in Howard Dawson? Slaughtered the poor old maniac in cold blood? Actually, even now that he knew how they felt about it, it seemed to James that getting out of Howard's way just then was about as fine and charitable an act as a man in his shoes could have performed!

But the rest of 'em didn't share that view! Nope, that was a dead sure thing—they didn't. In common with the rest of creation, they seemed to cherish the view that a man, once in a fight, must abandon reason and everything else, and finish the fight, and—perhaps they were right!

James rolled over drearily and gazed out of the window. Damn it! They were right! This thing of using reason and discretion hadn't been paying dividends to James Berry, had it? At this minute he should have been home in Wallington, hustling the business along while Howard squandered money on San Palo branches. Instead of that, he was groaning in a billion dollar house in South America, where he didn't wish to be, where they didn't want him, where—well, what then? Was he—James yawned—was he a free, adult citizen or some sort of stuffed dummy, to be put here and kicked, and then set over there and kicked again? James scowled and yawned once more.

And Betty Carson entered the room quite unexpectedly; and James rose with languid grace and embraced her. Betty did not explain how she came to be in San Palo, and James did not ask; instead, he drew her down to his side and for a long, long time they breathed tender sentiment at one another; and James understood that her Uncle Henry had just fought a duel with Gardez's grandfather, and been killed, which seemed to amuse James tremendously. But before the duel Uncle Henry had pinned a letter in the back of his shirt, explaining that he withdrew all opposition to James. That was odd, wasn't it? Betty had the letter with her, and together they read it again and— James sat up suddenly and blinked.

He—he had been asleep, of course. Yes, that was it; and with the second waking yawn he understood that his fevered brain had cooled, too, which was much to be thankful for. He looked at his watch, and became fully awake. It lacked but twenty minutes of noon! And at noon that exotic female was coming to take him for a ride!

Only she wasn't, if James saw her first! No! And neither was anybody else, black, white or yellow, in San Palo going to force him to do anything else he didn't want to do—because James was about to start for Wallington, in the U. S. A.! The decision, apparently, had quite fixed itself during his slumbers; never mind how it had happened, though: it was fixed now! It might, too, involve that same old idea of running away from trouble. That didn't matter, either. All James desired in the whole world was to get back home to Betty Carson!.

Nor would this be any spectacular, well-planned escape, involving the hiring of boats and that sort of thing. Nay, James would start walking—and take a chance on the rest of it. And it would work, too; he knew it! He felt it in his very bones. The means would present itself, once he was under way!

He considered his grip. That would have to stay behind; carrying that thing would attract attention. He thought of the marble stairs; they wouldn't do, either. There were back stairs, down which the treacherous Pedro had led him once upon a time. James glanced at his watch again. In just ten more minutes now it would be noon!

The corridor was empty. The little stairs, which he located after a brief hunt, were also empty. Somewhere behind him a piano was playing; it sounded like Dorothy. Just ahead of him a black gardener was working, as James opened the door to the free outer world; and the gardener peered at him for in instant, then bent to his work again.

And now, as James passed, he had straightened up once more and raised a hand—or had he? James seemed to have seen

something like that out of the corner of his eye, but as he turned the fellow was squatting comfortably, quite absorbed in the shrub before him. Oh, he was imagining things! He smiled and hurried on, out to the little gate in the wall—to the street at the side—up the street, and not a duel or an ogre or an earthquake or anything had appeared to stay his progress.

James Berry drew several great breaths. For the present he would stick to these little back streets, which were deserted. Later, he fancied, he'd dive into the business part of town and look for a sturdy hack of some sort. The city of Molara, smaller and less important, was only eighteen or twenty miles up the coast; once there, the probability was strong that quarantine regulations wouldn't be quite so drastic. There was still nearly five hundred dollars in James's inner pocket. Surely, with a little care, he could buy himself aboard some smaller north-bound vessel? Well, there was a good hunch! James brightened further—and listened.

Behind him came the monotonous thump-thump of an abused motor, traveling slowly. It reached his side; a decrepit, old-fashioned car slowed down; a stupid-looking person regarded him without interest and muttered:

"You ride, *señor?*"

"You're a—a taxi? Hack?"

The stupid one pointed apathetically to the gaudy license-number on his sidelights and sagged farther down behind his wheel, while the engine thumped on. James nodded happily.

"That thing go as far as Molara?" he queried.

"Molara, *señor?*" cried the driver, and regarded him reproachfully. "It is far in the great heat. Yet—for the Americano, twenty dollar, *señor*— Estados Unidos!"

"You're on!" said James, and opened the door.

The old gears rattled and the thumping quickened; the driver, making himself comfortable for the ordeal, dropped until his head touched the back of the seat. And they were off! Yes, siree! They were bumping straight north! Ten minutes more and, if she didn't fall to pieces, they'd be leaving the city. James settled down, and sighed tremendously — and the car thumped ahead, up a narrow street, along a narrow street, into a wider one, upon which there was only a house or two—and slowed down.

The driver, apparently, was trying to get into first-speed again. James leaned forward to watch him, grinning. And as he leaned, without more than a whirr, a second car, sped to their side and stopped short, and James, turning suddenly, noted that not less than three total strangers seemed about to board his vehicle!

He rose quickly. An instant he spied what certainly looked like a well-wrapped length of lead pipe, just above his head! And then ten thousand stars flashed into James's vision and he could feel his knees giving way. He tried to shout—and found something stuffed suddenly between his jaws! He tried to struggle, and found that he was being wrapped in something thick and hot and heavy, head and all.

And now he was being lifted bodily! Now he was being dropped upon a hard floor! Now, even in his distinctly confused state, James understood that he was moving swiftly, and that in a car which owned no thump at all.

CHAPTER XV.

SOME VERY ROUGH STUFF.

CURIOUSLY enough, for a little while James wasted no energy at all upon speculation. Purely primal instinct governed him: somehow or other he had to get air or die! He moved his dizzy head, seeking to push off the tight swathing; nobody objected. He moved it more energetically, and a fold just before his nose gave an inch or two, admitting a grateful puff of air, not more than forty per cent choking dust, and of a temperature hardly over one hundred. Still no one had objected. So James writhed again, quite full of the hope that he could throw off the covering altogether—and just there somebody kicked James sharply in the ribs and snapped:

"Hi, perro! Tranquilo!"

James subsided. Plainly, he was in the hands of persons who lacked a proper respect for him—although, as a matter of fact, this thing of being addressed as "dog" did not particularly rouse him just then. No, the main thing was that he was able to breathe now, and if he did much more wriggling it was at the risk of being entirely covered up again. James moved his feet cautiously and grew more startled; somewhere in the excitement those feet had been tied together. He tried to move his arms and failed; they too were trussed together, and the job had been done by an artist.

So therefore, being unable to move but privileged to think as much as he pleased, just what had happened?

For the life of him James could not guess. There was a flitting suspicion, just before consciousness became complete, that Miss Huera, finding him missing, had followed and kidnaped him and—no, no, no! That was all rot, of course. She might be an unusual girl, but she wasn't as unusual as all that.

Nevertheless, who else had done it and why? That was really the puzzler: *why?*

Were they carrying him off to hold him for ransom? It didn't seem reasonable. Down this way, so far as he had observed, about two-thirds of the population were millionaires already; if a few members of the other third wanted to augment their income in this fashion, they would select a person of known wealth or, even more likely, one of his children. Was it a plain, ordinary hold-up, then? There was little more cause for thinking that. The street wherein James had so unexpectedly changed cars had been entirely deserted; two minutes, at the very most, would have sufficed to empty his pockets after that brutal rap!

Had he been mistaken for somebody else? That seemed a good deal more probable. By all accounts, they have some red-hot little plots in places like Orinama—vendetta plots, during the execution of which the captors, carried away by enthusiasm, ship the victim back to his friends in small instalments—that sort of thing!

James grew alert and interested, despite the terrific heat, and the difficulty of breathing. Really, he fancied that he had found the answer. That thumping taxi had been no accident, nor had its stop upon the deserted street; the accidental factor lay in his own identity. He was enjoying a party carefully planned for somebody else! Unless they happened to be the sort of bloodthirsty criminals who slay from mere peevishness, about the time they examined him more closely the loud laugh, for once, was going to be on some one other than James Berry. He tried to wriggle closer to the airhole; he hoped that the examination might come soon.

There was no indication of this, however. The swift and easy-riding car must have covered ten or twelve miles of fine, hard road by this time, all of it slightly uphill, which meant that they were making in the general direction of the mountains behind San Palo. James breathed a prayer of thanks for that road; crushed down in this huddle, he would have been shaken to bits on a rough track! As it was—James gasped aloud and tried in vain to brace himself. His prayer had been premature! They were off the smooth road now, and still climbing at a pace hardly diminished; but where ten seconds ago their progress had involved merely a rolling and a humming, they were pitching and rocking, rattling, roaring, tossing, bouncing! Springs squeaked, a suddenly opened cutout took up a machine-gun solo directly under James's right ear. Had the steering-gear smashed, sending them off the road? Apparently not, since the change seemed merely to amuse his hosts; up aloft James heard gay, spasmodic laughter. Feet kicked around, too, with entire disregard of his personal comfort; one of them, settling in the small of his back, found a satisfactory brace for its owner and remained.

There followed a rather prolonged period wherein, so far as James was concerned, coherent thought became the one absolutely impossible thing. Not that James did not try to think; there was more that needed thinking out just now than at any previous moment in his whole existence. But as each young thought sent out its first green sprout, the car seemed to be

driven over a giant boulder, to land with a staggering crash and roar on again, while James gasped and choked and wondered dazedly whether that last shock really had left one complete bone in his skeleton. In the end, he did the wisest thing by turning quite limp, physically and mentally; and so, for another long space, he merely thumped about, rolled around, collided with feet and solid parts of automobile body, and struggled for breath and—what was happening now? Ah, they had stopped!

"They" were men of action, too. Rough hands jerked up James Berry's feet and cut the cords, permitting him to kick weakly. Hands utterly without respect for his feelings gripped his legs and dragged him half-way out of the car—and stopped dragging and held a lively conference over him. Minute after minute Orinaman Spanish, far too rapid for his understanding, was hurled across his swathed figure; then they reached a decision, and somebody pulled off the stifling robe and permitted James to gaze at the sky.

Without exception, it was the prettiest sky he had ever seen. Blindingly blue, radiating furnace heat, nevertheless he could not recall any patch of sky— He ceased his dazzled blinking at it suddenly, for a man's body was bending over him. Without apology, he jerked James's head from the floor and quite deftly twisted a strip of cloth about it, raised it farther and knotted the cloth at the back, gave a final jerk, and left James sitting upright, blindfolded!

Somebody spoke near by in a sharp and commanding tone. James, who was taking in his tenth gulp of real air at the time, gave no heed whatever. A rude hand slipped under his armpit and jerked him to his feet.

Once more the lingual tornado began to blow. Now that they had him here, they seemed in some doubt as to just what to do with James, and—no, they were not, either. He had erred again. For reasons he would never understand, they were about to hurl him over a cliff; three or four of them were picking him up and hoisting him bodily into the air. Either a cliff, or they were going to tear him to bits. The gentleman who gripped his right ankle was pulling directly away from the gentleman who gripped his left ankle.

"Hey! That's too much of a good thing!" James shouted as the power of speech reawakened. "Leggo there or—"

He committed himself no further at the time. With a thud that jarred his very teeth, he had landed astride the only solid cast-iron saddle ever manufactured. His legs dropped swiftly, his heels met hard ribs, and the animal beneath him stirred irritably—and James relaxed. All things in this world being relative, he was distinctly relieved.

To judge from the volume of sound, dozens of men were in the immediate neighborhood. Swift, unintelligible native jokes were being interchanged apparently. Great roars of laughter went up. Hoofs pattered about; sulfuric Orinaman curses were directed at the owners of the hoofs. Rank cigaret smoke floated to James's nostrils; some one scratched a match on the sole of his shoe, without even asking permission. Several steps receded from him then; he listened and, ever so slyly, tried the bonds on his hands. A sudden rap on the knuckles reminded him that he was, after all, not alone.

Now, off in the direction the steps had taken, the engine of the automobile started again. Two doors slammed. Another gust of laughter went up at a distance and was echoed all around him.

"Seet—steel!" advised some one to whom James had never been introduced, and his mount trudged forward suddenly.

Conversation rattled ahead of James and behind him; some one rode at his side, too, and relieved him of an occasional comment in a rasping voice which suggested that he was not at all the sort of person one would care to know.

But at least James was able to think again and—what, as before, was it all about? He gave it up. He was traveling, and not of his own volition: that was the sum of his present information. Possibly it wasn't a case of mistaken identity, after all. The individual who had blindfolded him had not gone into any frenzy of amaze-

ment at the sight of his red and doubtless somewhat soiled countenance, that was certain.

Then possibly— James hunched down farther and merely sighed. Faintly curious as he might be about the whole matter, what really absorbed him just then was the screaming need of a more resilient perch and a large cotton umbrella; this Orinaman sunshine, wonderful as an illuminant, permitted one to know precisely how one's back would feel if tucked cozily into a red-hot frying-pan!

And now, as a conservative guess, the caravan had been moving uphill for a good bit more than an hour.

General talk had languished. Several efforts of James's own to establish communication with the unseen companion who rode beside him had been rewarded with nothing better than a brief bark, which might have meant anything and certainly meant nothing amiable. Perchance they were on a tour straight across the continent? Perchance, in the course of time, they would scale the Andes and remove his bandage and let him glimpse the Pacific? Perchance— Aha; there was the sound of water!

They were pulling in, too. To the best of James's guessing, animals were fording a stream; his own started forward again at a jerk of the bridle. And a cool puff of air came to James—and then a cooler one, and his mount scrambled up something nearly perpendicular, and they had removed the sun from his suffering back.

Overhead, parrotlike chatterings, assorted squealings which he could not identify, came into being; the glorious air was no warmer, no more moist, than the steam from an ordinary teakettle. James breathed deeply of it. They were on a forest trail—yes, and a steep one.

James's steed had changed the angle of his interesting back until staying aboard required some effort—and some one far ahead shouted, and several of James's escort shouted back—and now they were clattering downhill somewhat crazily.

They stopped finally, and, with a grunt, the cloth was twitched from James Berry's eyes, and as he squinted painfully he noted that a knife-blade was sawing at the bonds on his wrists. Sight coming fully, he observed that the person at his side was motioning him impatiently to descend from—what was the thing, anyway? Ah, yes, from the ugliest-looking, most underfed burro in Orinama. James descended very stiffly.

Six men were in his immediate neighborhood, his escort apparently. They were decorative persons, too, running to high-colored handkerchiefs for headgear and mostly with well-worn shirts and trousers far from dressy. They were all rather young and, as a matter of fact, not so very bad-looking. James had expected a rather desperate-appearing company; this crowd looked like a rather good-humored, adventurous collection of half-breeds, leaning toward the original Orinama Indian. They grinned at James; James found himself unable to grin back.

"Now that we're here," he forced out of his dry throat, "just what's the idea of it all?"

"Ha, *señor!*" laughed the youngest of the company. "You are—*que es la palabra?*—guest! You are—"

The rasping person rasped directly at him, in his native tongue. The youngest member subsided abruptly; and the rasper, laying a hand upon James, started him forward afoot. And James was of some mind to argue the matter out on the spot, but that the prospect ahead, as they rounded the giant rock in the path, held him quite dumb for a moment.

Twenty feet below them, in the midst of all the thick, dank green of the forest, there was a natural clearing of two or three acres. It was rocky at the far side and near the rocks stood half a dozen ragged tents, and at least one quite substantial and very rough log hut; a makeshift field-kitchen, contrived of an aged cast-iron range and several dubious pots, smoked lazily beyond the hut; down the center of the picture a little brook sparkled. Eight or ten more of the same general type of citizen wandered about the near tents; they were gazing this way now and waving their hands—and James was in motion again and picking his way down the slippery little slope.

He was expected, too. Or else this thing of picking up San Palo people and carting them here was just an every-day matter. At any rate, their appearance created no excitement at all. Several of the bright young men strolled forward and glanced over James as he advanced and commented among themselves; there was a little amiable shouting between the expedition and the resident population, and some gentle laughter. James was halted before the log hut.

His rasping acquaintance knocked respectfully. Within, some one yawned noisily, and there was a soft scrape of feet, and the door opened, and James Berry was permitted to gaze upon as picturesque a person as he had so far met. Rather taller than himself, not much over twenty-five, with straight black hair, and straight, really handsome dark features, there was something about the gentleman which stamped him at once as a personage.

It may have been the brilliant sash, so jauntily knotted about him; it may have been that the knees of his trousers had not yet frayed through, or the fact that his shirt hinted at some sort of laundry experience within the memory of man, or it may have been the long six-shooter which was thrust through the sash on the right side by way of counterbalance to the knife thrust through on the left. At any rate, he bore himself with the languid assurance of a king—and he failed to impress James Berry. Aye, even though he looked James over from head to foot, he failed to make any impression at all!

"El Señor Berree?" he queried.

"That's me," cried the guest of the encampment. "You're the boss of the gang, are you? Well, you listen to me, because I'm going to give you what they call an earful back home, and—"

A dark, slim hand waved upward annoyedly. The fingers snapped in James's very face. The hand indicated the general region toward the tents. The personage yawned again and sauntered gracefully into his hut. James's escort jerked him about and marched him away.

"Hey! What—" James began.

"*Bastante!*" remarked his escort shortly.

"*Bastante* be hanged! You—*hablar* any English, you?"

"No!" said his escort, and hurried him forward.

The particularly forsaken-looking tent at the end seemed to be their immediate destination. James's escort pitched him roughly in its direction, then stretched comfortably, quite unawed by the fact that James doubled his fists and panted. Several of the company were near; the rasping person, who seemed to have some authority himself, snapped a word at them and indicated James with his thumb. Then he loitered away.

Young Mr. Berry continued to pant for some seconds, and then ceased panting; that youngest member of the band, with the twinkling eyes, was gazing warningly at him. He advanced lazily.

"*Señor, if—please!*" he said uncertainly. "Muy mucha better you—quiet!"

"Huh?"

"You not—hurt, I think," the other labored on, frowning. "Make fight—mucha—mucha—danger!"

"In a way, I get your meaning," James responded. "But don't fool yourself about any one hurting me. I'm a citizen of the United States, and before we're done with this thing—"

"*Señor! Señor!* You do—not know?" gasped the other. "You—not know—who is *he?*"

"The party up in the log house? No. Who is he?"

"*Señor,* it is—Benito Acardo!" the young man whispered. "It is El Pavor!"

"Huh?" cried James Berry.

"*Si, señor!* El Pavor—he is feared! But if you—quiet—you stay so long, I think."

He retired then. James Berry, watching him rejoin his friends, sat down upon the uncertain camp-stool in the doorway of the tent.

There was no denying the fact; temporarily, at any rate, he was the victim of the same old chills! For reasons beyond any guessing, he had been selected for attention by El Pavor! Yep, the same old El Pavor the women were talking about last night—the son of a gun that shot up

wayfarers—stuck knives into planters and raided their plantations. Um-yes! And *he*, James Berry, was the captive of that individual!

Numbed, he gazed at the soft turf for a long, long time.

How had this latest incredible thing happened? Well—it had happened because he was trying to pussyfoot his way out of Orinama and possible further trouble with Howard and that black-eyed she-devil! If he hadn't been stealing off, nobody would have had the opportunity of stealing him away.

And something of the kind occurred every blessed time he indulged his life-long vice and tried to duck trouble! *Didn't* it? Of a certainty, it did. Why, all his life he'd been pulling the same fool stunt, over and over again—just stepping aside for trouble and urging it to pass quietly! All his life! Yes! Just shaking and getting out of the way and devoutly thanking his stars when nothing really serious happened. And just what had this policy gained him? Briefly, his love affair virtually wrecked, his business threatened, his oldest friendships broken, he was here probably awaiting execution or something at the hands of a cheap little hill bandit.

Something rattled in James's throat; he looked suddenly at his bare arms. It was not as if he were weak or a cripple; he fairly bulged muscle and—*all right*, then! And it was doubtless at this instant that James's brain-cells turned completely inside out. From this second onward James Berry's life was to run on a new plan! If anybody had any superfluous trouble on hand, or a few little extra, unused battles that needed fighting, let him come to James Berry—or if he couldn't come, James would go to him. And any man or woman or gang of bandits or regular army who felt inclined to hand anything unseemly to James Berry— He bounced up from his stool!

. The trio also nimbly gained their feet and wasted several seconds in staring after the well-knit figure that strode so lithely, so swiftly toward the log hut.

At the moment, the gentleman who rasped was engaged in harsh criticism of the black, stout man who pottered about the steaming pots. He spied the approaching James and hurried toward him; and just outside the hut he overtook James and laid a powerful hand upon him.

This, essentially, ended his connection with the incident. James, looking at him just once, and that once to gage his distance, drew back his right fist and then sent it forward rather swiftly; and its forward movement slowed appreciably as it met the other's chin, and without one word of protest the person stretched restfully upon his back and closed his eyes to the hot sky.

And though a normal James should have paused and trembled and wondered whether he had committed murder, this one did not. This one whirled about to greet the amazed and rather majestic figure of El Pavor himself, looming in the doorway. He opened his lips.

"Can that stuff!" James Berry said, sinking into the depths of discourtesy. "Listen! You've got one chance before I start. I want to leave this place, quick, with a guide and a horse. Do I go or not? You know what I'm talking about; you know enough English for that. Well?"

He who had struck a certain amount of terror into the heart of the San Palo district smiled faintly his supercilious amusement and raised a graceful hand to summon his followers.

"For the last time, do I go?" James wheezed.

The regal head shook an impatient negative.

"All right, then! We'll see who's boss here—and I'll start afterward," young Mr. Berry said briefly.

And although there were a number of well-developed and ostensibly faithful members of the band somewhere just behind, James once more drew back his fist, and this time, with mathematical precision, he settled it between the eyes of Benito Acardo!

Following which there was a shriek and a stagger and a crash, which latter was caused by El Pavor's sudden sitting down upon the center of his home floor; and immediately following that there was a swirl

as the gentleman bounded, however groggily, to his feet; and more than this, there was a shadowy glitter as he snatched out his long knife and made directly for James Berry.

CHAPTER XVI.

REVENGE!

EVEN to himself, even in that moment, the pleasing thing about the new James Berry was that the knife was merely a matter of interest and a subject for some calculation, rather than a cause for alarm. That first punch had been a bad misfire; it should have reduced little old El Pavor to the same peaceful state as his friend outside was enjoying. However—it hadn't, and there were countless punches where that one came from.

James stooped quite suddenly and laughed gently. The apparent intention of that blade had been to remove his head from its body; it had merely sliced out a great section of the Orinaman atmosphere, and its owner was recovering himself just in time to prevent its further journey on through the floor of his cozy little dwelling. He really was quite a bad one, then, this El Pavor—wasn't he? Well, although he did not yet grasp the fact, he was pitted against another bad one, who had quite a quantity of accumulated steam to devote to this argument. James shot up suddenly and caught the knife-arm just on its second downward swoop and turned it outward, and gripped the wrist as in all his days he had never gripped a wrist before.

And now a steely arm had whisked around his neck—which was an error of judgment on El Pavor's part, because James's free forearm, crashing up under the El Pavor chin, bent back the head so viciously that only a quick release, a quick backward step, saved the El Pavor spine from cracking. Catlike in his speed, he was reaching over for his knife with the free hand; and that was irritating, because they couldn't well devote the afternoon to a struggle for the possession of that one blade. James Berry set his teeth and drove his energetic fingers into the wrist until they all but met—and a scream escaped the bandit chieftain and metal rattled noisily on the floor.

So that part of it was settled, and all that remained was the *coup de grâce,* which resided in one or the other of James's fists. The fraction of a second he spent in estimating distance again. He wasn't nearly enough accustomed to this kind of thing; he'd get better with a little practise, but he never should have let the thug put three yards between them, and— Momentarily the junior partner had forgotten all about that long revolver, but it was coming out now; yes, and if El Pavor knew anything about shooting-irons—

Well, he didn't! That was a mercy! James had been able to hurtle across the hut and knock the muzzle upward before he pulled the trigger and made work for the local roofer—and that with at least one-fiftieth of a second to spare. But he couldn't afford any more of this slow-eyed playing around; next time the thing might go off while it was pointing in his direction. James hurled himself bodily upon the terror of San Palo, felt him gasp with the shock of the meeting, snatched at the long barrel—yes, and had it, and was twisting!

Over there, the couch in the corner was wide and low; the loud bump indicated that James's aim had been accurate. Somebody'd have to get down on his knees and poke around a bit before that gun figured further in the battle. So, as he had thought a moment back, all that remained was putting El Pavor out of business and— What on earth was he trying to do now? He must have about fifty fingers, and all of them were wound around James Berry's neck! He—well, two could play at that game. James wrenched and twisted and gasped—and rather unexpectedly came free and reached for the active person's own throat—and missed it completely.

It was bad! It was rotten! How can a man who has selected trouble as a career ever expect to succeed with such crude work? A red surge came before the James Berry vision. He had been irritated before; he was mad now. From his lips came such a whoop as caused even El

Pavor to pause for an infinitesimal instant. And James was upon him in earnest!

He was maneuvering toward the door. So much the better. There was more room out there. James Berry's right jab sent him straight through the door and staggering out upon the turf—and there was a suppressed yell from the visible gathering company—and there James ceased his observations. His fists, his feet, had passed beyond his own control. The fists had but one mission, which was to reach El Pavor; the feet also but one, which was to move the fists to the best position with the least delay. And—Lord! How many times had he landed on the tough little cuss, anyway? His knuckles were raw and tingling, his breath was getting shorter, and still old El Pavor was wabbling around, ahead there, waving his hands, gulping occasionally, but on his feet and—*bang!*

Well, he wasn't on his feet now! Nay, El Pavor had curled up comfortably. His mouth was open, his eyes closed, the rest of him spread around limply. James studied him with the critical eye of an artist. El Pavor had been quite handsome. He was not handsome now. In fact, it would be some weeks before El Pavor could even walk through a crowd without having people open their eyes and draw away. Fine! Elegant! James thrust out his chin and examined the company. There was one man, a large man, who was muttering ominously and reaching for the knife in his side pocket.

"You're next!" the new James Berry announced, and leaped toward him.

Only—why, the fellow was running, wasn't he? Surely enough, he had stood his ground for about two seconds, then turned and galloped off wildly. And the rest of them were clustering around James Berry! Why? He backed off suddenly and prepared for further action, and then relaxed ever so little.

Frankly, they puzzled him. They were a wild and care-free lot, but he had done some wicked things to their chieftain, and there was no plain reason for the sparkling eyes and the not unfriendly chatterings and the outbursts, every few seconds, of crazy Orinaman gabbling. They were stirring anew; the decent-seeming boy who knew about sixteen words of English was hurrying forward, quite transported with joy or excitement or something or other.

Oh—joy, was it? Maybe it was worship; it looked like that. By thunder, it *was* that! The kid was on his knees before James Berry. Even more, he was kissing the hem of James's coat!

"*Jefe!*" he cried.

"What?" said the new James.

"It is law—our law!"

"What is?"

"Him—who conquer—chief!" the youth puffed. "We—follow him!"

"Is that right?" gasped James Berry.

"It is law, *señor!*"

"Well—say, what do you know about that?" James roared, quite consumed with mirth at the absurdity of the notion. "I'll say it pays to stick up for your rights! I—ha, ha, ha! That's a funny one!"

"It is—law. *Jefe!* I—servant. You consent—I instruct—" the boy stammered on.

"What? Phew!" The conqueror lowered the damp handkerchief from his brow. "What do you mean? Teach me how to run the outfit? Well, wait, kid; I guess you don't understand why I did all this. I don't want to take charge of the gang. I've had a lot of ambitions, but I've never wanted to be a bandit chief!"

The boy rose slowly, disappointment sending down the corners of his mouth?

"But—it is law, *jefe!* You do not—you do not—"

"No, I do not—not by a long shot. I may be sore on the world, but I'm not as crazy as all that. Listen, kid! All I want is to get back—see? San Palo! Horse or a jackass or something, and a couple of the boys to guide me to the town. Get it?"

The youth nodded sadly and spoke at some length to his associates, while James watched impatiently. There seemed to be much disapproval of his eccentric course; but at last the thing appeared to have been settled. Two of the interesting band trotted off. James stepped into the cabin and, as a slight precautionary measure, retrieved both knife and pistol, and, chuck-

ling, thrust them through his belt. He emerged to find the rasper partially conscious, sitting and swaying in pensive gloom over the form of his vanquished leader. He sauntered to the boy, who stared reproachfully.

"Do this thing pretty often, do you?" James said. "Hold up people and bring 'em in here, I mean?"

"Bring?" The boy's eyes opened. "But no, *señor!* Only—when paid—as you."

"Paid?"

"*Sí, jefe!*"

"Somebody paid your boss, old El Pavor over there, to bring me up here?"

"But—*sí, jefe!*" the boy said wonderingly. "To—to capture the Señor Berree—mucho *dinero*—mucho money!"

"Kid," James said thickly, "who paid him this money? Do you know that?"

"Who?" The boy's forehead contracted. "This—I not sure, *jefe.* I think—some time El Pavor work—as this, for the Señor Huera, but—"

"*Huera?*"

"*Sí, jefe.* But—oh, I not know. Not now Huera—I do not know. There is much talk, *jefe*—among men. A—*una señora?* I think she is cause?" He smiled hopefully. "*Unu bella señora, jefe? No puede ser—*"

"Wait! You're getting off the track," said James. "I want to know *who* paid money—have—me—brought—here!"

The boy, nodding energetically, grew downright distressed.

"These—these name!" he cried. "I hear—so many time, it has been said. *Pero—ai, jefe! Yo lo tengo! Es nombre—Dawson!*"

James Berry's jaw set suddenly; in his temples there was a strange pounding. The boy, meeting his hot eye, seemed quite disturbed.

"*Jefe*—it may be—" he stammered.

"Hold on! I've got to get this thing straight!" James snapped. "A man named Dawson paid the money to have me brought here? Yes?"

"*Sí, jefe! Marido de la bella señora, no es?* You—it comes to me again! It is said you—you have love for this—"

The new chief was paying no attention at all. The new chief's complexion, which had been brick-red for some seconds, was turning to a peculiarly savage pallor. So this—this actually was Howard's job! It passed belief, and yet it need not do that, in view of many of Howard's other recent acts. Maybe Huera had something to do with it—maybe not. Likely enough, he had; for it had been a case of love at first sight between Huera and Howard, and if Huera, rich or poor, wasn't inherently a bad egg James was prepared to devour him at one gulp.

But what was the point of it all? What was to have been the end of it all if James had remained passive? Had they brought him up here to put him out of the way permanently—and why? However deeply the motives might be shrouded in mystery, the idea itself wasn't so far-fetched. Whatever had happened to him, Howard Dawson had been quite prepared to slay his old friend in that ridiculous duel. Unquestionably he would have put in the rest of his life fighting off biting remorse—but that did not at all alter the solid fact of his mental state this morning.

The boy talked on, mainly in Spanish now, gesticulating freely, eyes sparkling. Berry stared blackly across the clearing.

The pair who had left were reappearing now and leading a very decent little roan horse with what looked like a comfortable saddle. That, it was rather safe guessing, was El Pavor's animal, being brought out for his own use. Yes, they were strapping the pads on a couple of mules, too, and glancing in his direction and—um!

It had been his intention, these last ten minutes, to have himself taken back to the San Palo neighborhood and there to renew his interrupted journey toward Molara and freedom and Betty Carson. This the old James Berry would have done, giving up fervent thanks at every mile of the back track. The new James Berry stood and rumbled ominously. There was an account to be squared before he did more traveling.

"Hey, you!" he barked to the boy at his side. "Cut out the song and listen."

"*y es la bella señora—*" the boy concluded as he ran down. "*Sí, jefe?*"

"I've changed my mind!"

"Come?"

"I—stay—here!" announced the new James. "For Heaven's sake, try to understand me without all that fool gaping, will you? It's a darned sight easier that way than for me to try to talk your darned lingo; take my word for that. I—stay!"

"With—us?"

"Yes!"

"*Jefe!*" cried the lad, and seized James Berry's hand and kissed it humbly. "This is great joy, *jefe!* You—stay! With you—we make great fear—all Orinama! *Si!*"

And he turned and shouted wild words at his friends, and from various quarters of the clearing little cheers arose.

"Don't get excited about it; I'm not going to make a business of it," said James. "This is just one job, but I want that job done right or there'll be hell to pay in this camp, kid! Get it straight: Dawson!"

"*Marido de la bella señora, jefe? Si!*" the boy cried eagerly.

"Yes! Well, I—want him here! Get it? Here! Bring here! *Pronto! Muy pronto*, in fact! Here!"

He picked off the first bill from the roll in his pocket. It chanced to be a fifty, yet the new James Berry merely glanced at it and tossed it in the general direction of the boy. And the boy, with what approached a salaam, swooped and caught it up and sped across the clearing. There, for three minutes, he delivered instructions to the pair with the mules; and they summoned two more and conferred further. And then, glancing across at James Berry, who eyed them steadily, there was a considerable stirring, which ended in four mules being urged up the little trail and out of sight.

Well—unless any one of ten thousand things slipped, he would have Howard Dawson with him in a matter of four or five hours. And, somehow, he did not feel that there was any great chance of things slipping! This was an intelligent and well-organized and instructed little company, evidently with shady connections in San Palo. They worked well and swiftly; or they had in the matter of getting him here, at all events.

And was it all rather bizarre and—just what did he mean to do with Howard Dawson, once he had been delivered? Well, it might be bizarre enough, but no more so than his own kidnaping. And as to what he meant to do to Howard—well, just what *did* he mean to do?

Hands behind his back, James pondered. Get him here first and have a little heart-to-heart talk with him; Howard was likely to be in quite a chastened frame of mind by the time his own hired machine had finished work on himself! And then it might be well to inject some such fear into Howard as Howard, for example, had tried recently to inject into his partner; and, decidedly, keep Howard here under control until James had managed his departure. That was planning enough for the present? How was El Pavor getting on?

Thanks to much water, brought from the brook by the rasping person, El Pavor had revived, eh? He was sitting up now and dazedly smoothing back his thick black hair while he took another drink from the proffered tin cup. His clouded eyes met James Berry's, and he staggered to his feet.

James looked him over rather more insolently than he himself had been looked over by El Pavor a little while ago.

"How about it, old scout" he demanded. "Got enough?"

So far as one could judge, El Pavor was endeavoring to look disdain at him.

"Oh, you haven't, hey?" James cried brightly, and spat upon his palms and flexed his arms. "Here's where you get some more, then!"

The monarch of the mountains tottered back, three quick steps, and raised a hand, the while he shook his head.

"How about you, then, pretty voice?" the new leader inquired.

"*Es nuestra ley—jefe!*" the rasping person stated grimly and bowed his head.

"Yep. So I understand from the kid," James responded cheerfully. "Well, you just keep your laws in mind and remember that I'm boss here, and there isn't likely to be any more trouble. I've never held down just this kind of job before, but I've

been running a factory for some years, and I don't imagine there's anything about this chief business I can't pick up within a day or so. What's the stout member got to eat over there?"

He sauntered on, and the plump black cook bowed before him. The menu, apparently, included stew. And he was probably happier for not knowing what was in it, but it was darned good stew, James concluded, as he settled on the cook's own bench and ate quite informally.

Good bread he'd managed to make, too, even if it was about the color of the cook —and wherever they stole the butter, it was better than the stuff Gardez was able to buy down in the city. All in all, James had encountered many worse meals right in Wallington; at its conclusion he barked an order for cigarets, and they were offered from five directions at once—rank brown cigarets that were better than none at all.

And now—what did a bandit chief do with his late afternoons? This one had worn very nearly to its close. There were no books to be made up, no goods to be shipped; apparently the boys were not committing any further crimes this afternoon, so that chance of excitement was lacking. Doubtless it would be a breach of etiquette and discipline to call in a couple of the more intelligent-looking and try to deal a few hands of—whatever they played. James yawned mightily. If all afternoons were as quiet as this one, the bandit business must be a good deal of a bore.

He looked around for El Pavor. The retired terror was hunched down on the door-step of his log hut, head almost between his knees, silent as a wooden man. More than anything else he resembled a well-beaten dog, and possibly he should have aroused sympathy in the bosom of his conqueror. He did not. It occurred to James Berry that El Pavor really had no further business in that doorway. That was the chief's house. He walked briskly toward it and El Pavor, meeting his gaze with his one open eye, rose hastily and walked off. James seated himself on the door-step and yawned again, while El Pavor settled on the turf at a distance and once more dropped his head.

A full half-hour James rested his own head upon the rude door-casing and surveyed the pretty, peaceful scene and pondered. Why had he ever let them take him away from Betty's side? Why hadn't he marched into her house that night and cleared himself before Uncle Henry? Why in the name of all that was wonderful had he permitted himself to be led out of Wallington, out of the country, like a pup on the end of a string? To save his soul—his new soul, that is—James could not tell. He passed from blank wonder to anger, and from anger to rage. He looked around; the boy was standing before him.

"*Jefe!*" he cried. "No—so impatient! They come!"

"Huh?" said his chief amazedly. "What are you talking about? They haven't had time to get down there, much less catch him and bring him back."

"You—listen!" said the lad, and pointed toward the trail.

James, listening, opened his eyes. There was some loud talking going on at a distance, anyway—yes, and there was the sound of hoofs, too! He rose and strolled over the clearing, across the brook, to the mouth of the trail. If they'd acquired the senior partner in that little time, they were wonders; but it certainly sounded as if that was what they had done!

James paused some fifty feet from the spot where Howard Dawson must first appear and smiled strangely. Five minutes hence the senior partner would have been welcomed with phrases such— James stared hard.

There was only one animal emerging, and that one a very fine little pony. And the rider, in breeches and shiny leggings, was a woman! James Berry gulped; there was still at least one thing on earth that could scare him, if only for a second or two, and that one was slipping from her steed and—and running toward him now; and he was looking into two blazing black eyes and hearing:

"Jimmee! I have come to you!"

The speaker was Miss Carmen Huera!

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

Blue Eyes and Blue Imps

by Edwin G. Wood

THE people that Jimmie had to face daily at meal times were not just to his liking, and he was becoming thoroughly disgusted with them.

Jimmie was close to his twenty-first milepost in years, and he was of esthetic temperament—so he considered himself, at any rate. He was also of a very romantic nature and a firm believer in love at first sight. He was no less firm in his conviction that he would know instantly the girl that fate had set aside for him, which let him in for a good deal of light-hearted banter.

There was Dillingworth Peckworth—nicknamed Dill Pickles by the blond Fanny, who sat next to that young man—a particular thorn in Jimmie's flesh. Dill persisted in calling Jimmie "Our romantic James," and delighted in tormenting him to the verge of committing manslaughter. Fanny would openly egg on the assaults of Dill. She especially annoyed Jimmie by being slangy. She was pat with such expressions as "Y'betcha," "I gotcha," and, in displeasure, "Y'u poor fish!" and when her teeth were not otherwise occupied, chewed gum, which she frequently brought to dinner and stuck under the table edge.

There was one other at the table, who completed the little circle of boarders—Tillie Brown. Tillie, like Jimmie, had not been in New York very long. Jimmie liked Tillie fairly well—but she was not *the* girl. She had brown hair, and eyes rather wide apart, that were gray, soft and pleading and a little wistful, as though she were asking you to be friends with her, as she was already friendly to you and everybody and everything; just the girl who would pick up your sorrows or burdens and swing them on to her own slim little shoulders and carry them for you without a murmur, and be glad to do it. But her nose in its upward gaze formed too much of an obtuse angle with her lip, and her mouth was a little too large, and she had freckles.

It was a pity, Jimmie thought, that such a nice girl as Tillie really was, should be so plain and should have such an ordinary name. Anyway, everybody liked Tillie. Even the landlady's cross little poodle that snarled and snapped at every one who touched it would never think of snarling or snapping at Tillie. No. If any one teased the little beast it immediately ran yelping to Tillie for protection, and from the safe refuge of her arms showed its vicious little white teeth in defiance.

To-day Dill Pickles was hot on the trail of Jimmie's goat. "Well," was his opening, "how fares the romantic James? Hast met the fair damsel yet?"

Jimmie ignored the challenge.

Fanny tittered. "Oh, do, Mr. Blake, tell us all about your be-autiful idear. How

y'u gonna know her an' all that. I betcha she'll be *some* looker."

"Bunk," snorted Dill. "Whoever heard of a man's recognizing the one he's going to marry right off the reel that way. Jimmie's a nut."

"Oh, am I?" bridled Jimmie, rising to the bait. "Well, it's been done before. I'm not the first one with that idea, as you call it. You're just too dense to understand, that's all."

"Then please enlighten me," begged Dill in mock despair. "We're all just bugs to know more. Aren't we, Miss Tillie? What do you think of it, anyway?"

Tillie, on being suddenly addressed, blushed till she covered her freckles, and looked down at her plate. "I think," she answered timidly, "that it's a very pretty idea."

Encouraged by Tillie's coming to his defense, Jimmie proceeded to expound. "It isn't *my* idea, as you call it. The belief is old, that there are two particular people born for each other; they may be thousands of miles apart at birth, but they must come together. And if this is so, why shouldn't at least one of them know when they meet? If they are designed for each other, their souls must be in perfect harmony; then why not recognize each other by a glance, a smile—"

"All right, all right," cut in Dill; "suppose you should pass her on Fifth Avenue, or any other place, gonna walk right up to her and tell her all about it?"

Fanny snickered wickedly.

"A way would open for the two to meet, of course," retorted Jimmie. "For my part, if I should ever pass *the* girl on the street, I'd make a way. There could certainly be nothing wrong in my keeping her in sight until—"

"Yeah," jeered Dill. "Follow her, eh? And if she was one kind, she'd call a cop and have you pinched for being fresh, if she was wise to what you were doing; and if she was another kind, she'd probably tip you a wink, and when you got home you wouldn't have any more watch or coin."

And so it went through dinner. After the meal, the two pests went out to a movie, and Jimmie strolled in another direction, leaving the plain little Tillie to shift for herself during the long evening.

Jimmie was fond of his notion. He loved to think that somewhere in the world was this one girl. She might be within a few squares of him now, while he was thinking of her and wondering what she was like. She might be in China, anywhere, on the seas; but wherever she was, inevitably the two must meet, and he, on his part, would know her instantly. It could not be otherwise, for it was fate.

On one of his half holidays Jimmie attended a matinée, and on coming out of the theater he saw the girl. She was within a few feet of him, but separated from him by a barrier of humanity. Her hair was of reddish gold, her eyes of deep blue, veiled by long lashes, which were instantly lowered at the intent earnestness of his gaze. He fought his way through to the edge of the throng and hurried to the street exit, thinking to reach it before her. Outside, he eagerly scanned the faces as they went past him, but she was nowhere in sight. Jimmie groaned.

When he went to sleep that night the vision of reddish gold hair and deep blue eyes was before him. And what eyes they were! What depths of feeling would they be capable of revealing! He had seen her at last, and he would find her—of that he felt certain.

He was very careful of his toilet after that glimpse of the girl, and began to haunt Broadway after the day's work was over, searching every face for a sight of the deep blue eyes and the reddish gold hair. He was often late for dinner, began to lose his appetite and missed several meals. Don't laugh at Jimmie. There are thousands of him in the world, and always will be as long as youth is youth, and love is love.

II.

ONE evening he suddenly felt sick and strangely tired. He was elbowing his way through the crowds and seeing faces, faces, everywhere, and not a familiar one. The great, throbbing monster of a city usually takes a bite at the stranger, soon or late. Unaware of it, Jimmie was homesick.

He went to his little room and threw himself across the bed, declining the call for dinner on the plea of not feeling well. He lay there for some time, longing for something, he knew not what, besides the girl of the deep blue eyes. In some vague way the thought of the girl's eyes and hair reminded him of morning glories and sunrise back home.

There came a *tap-tap, tap,* and, too miserable to get up, he called, " Come in."

The door was pushed open hesitantly, slowly; a brown head appeared, followed by the plain little face of Tillie. She was carrying a tray of toast and tea.

" I—I made this myself," she said softly. " I really was afraid you were sick. It would be awful to get sick here with no mother or sister to do things for you—"

" Thank you," he said almost crossly. " I don't care for anything." Why couldn't these people let him alone?

" See," she went on, " I'm going to leave it here on this table. You'll feel lots better if you take a little of it."

She set the tray down and then went quietly out, glancing back once with those wistful gray eyes, which seemed to say as plain as plain, " I'm so sorry for you. Do try to eat a little bit—please," and was gone before Jimmie's muttered thanks could reach her.

He got up with a shamed feeling and choked down some of the stuff. The few thoughts that he gave the kindly little girl of the gray eyes were soon pushed back by the eyes of blue.

After Tillie's visit with the tray, Jimmie appeared at the table regularly and tried to stomach the gibes of Dill and the giggles of Fanny.

Then one hot, sticky afternoon he dropped into an ice-cream parlor for something cool. He had barely seated himself when *she* entered. Tall and slim, she carried herself with that sinuous motion so often described as feline. As she sat he studied her features eagerly.

The brows over her deep blue eyes were delicately arched; her nose was straight, with finely-cut nostrils; her lips were thin and of the Cupid-bow type; her face, oval. Her hands—Jimmie sighed deeply—ah, what masterpieces of that master craftsman, Nature! Slender, with long tapering fingers, they were the hands of the artist. How enchanting it would be to see those hands wandering over the keys of the piano. No, not the piano; the violin, that king of instruments in expressing the human emotions.

Jimmie feasted his eyes and forgot his palate.

The girl was through with her ice, and was leaving before Jimmie came to himself. He must not let her escape this time without at least hearing her voice.

He followed her at a little distance, admiring the ease with which she threaded her way through the throngs. She turned into Forty-Second, Jimmie faithfully keeping near enough not to lose her. At Fifth Avenue they were halted by the traffic. At last! He worked his way near her. Something must happen to give him the privilege of hearing her voice.

There came a slight movement in the crowd, and Jimmie was jostled against her. Just for a breath her head rested against his shoulder; he caught the perfume of her hair, a thrill running through him, tingling to his finger ends.

She raised her head; the glorious blue eyes looked straight into his; the thin, curving lips parted, revealing white rows of even, pearly—

" Say, y'u big boob! Whatcha tryin' t' do? Cantcha stan' on y'u own feet an' keep offa a loidy's?"

III.

THAT evening Jimmie's place at the table was again vacant. Nostalgia and the blue imps had him in their grip once more. He was positive that if he went to dinner he would be satisfied with nothing short of murdering Dill Pickles, so he wandered around until past meal time, then started for his room.

In the hall he met Tillie. Somehow, Tillie appeared to be different—she was not plain at all. He was looking at the real Tillie now and not the shell that contained her. Then something hit him—hit him hard. It had been lying around in wait

for him for quite a time, only he did not know it. That's one of little Dan's tricks, to sneak around and then suddenly spring on his victim.

Before Jimmie was aware of what he was doing he had seized both of Tillie's hands. She looked up at him wonderingly, her gray eyes wide.

"Tillie," he stammered softly, "I—I've seen the girl I want more than anything in the world—"

"O-oh;" said Tillie.

"It was weeks ago, but I didn't have sense enough to know it. I reckon she'll turn me down for being such a fool. She ought to—"

"You haven't asked her?"

"N-o. Will—will you— Oh, hang it all, Tillie, will you go to a show with me to-night?"

Tillie blushed to the tip of her upturned nose as she said she would.

The Super-Swing

Part VII

Exploits of the Shadowers Inc.

by David Fox

Author of "The Man Who Convicted Himself."

CHAPTER XXI.

ETHEL TAKES A VACATION.

"ALL I've got to say is that you seem to have a darned intricate code of ethics!" grumbled Cliff. He was seated before the desk in his study, idly scrawling detached letters and odd curves and slanted lines in imitation of the handwriting in the will which Phineas Sneed had himself drawn. "You know you got the dope about the Gull's death from Red Jim or his daughter. If they had nothing to do with the anonymous letters or the murder itself I can't see any breach of faith in your questioning them about the Gull's other friends and associates. You are sure they are out of it, but you're equally certain that the letters at least were partly the work of some one who meant to avenge his memory. You were keen enough to find Red Jim and the girl in the first place—"

"What if I was?" demanded Phil belligerently as he paused in his impatient stride about the narrow confines of the room. "I didn't say I found Red Jim or got any dope from him, either, but even if I knew where he was do you think I would go to him and worm my way into his confidence to try to find out if maybe one of his own pals croaked old Sneed for railroading the Gull to his death? Not me! I'm not that much curious about how it happened to try to make a pal turn snitcher!"

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 29.

"We're not turning him over to the authorities, you know, whoever he is!" Cliff retorted. "What Rex said about self-defense is on the level and we'd all have to testify to the evidence that a duel had taken place. You're running this show and I should think you would take a sort of pride in carrying it on to the finish."

"I'm going to find out who croaked Sneed, all right, if I can do it without dirty work, but if I can't I'm willing to quit!" Phil's eyes were ominously bright and he was about to amplify his remarks when the panel behind him opened and George appeared.

"What are you two arguing about?" he asked, dropping his damp hat unceremoniously on Cliff's scattered papers and depositing his lanky frame in the nearest chair. "Lord, but I have had a day of it!"

"Did you get away with the formalities safely? Was the death certificate accepted without question?" demanded Cliff anxiously.

"Absolutely. To-morrow I shall remove my poor uncle's remains from the undertaker's to their last resting-place. I don't mind telling you, though, my brethren, that I had some squeamish moments!" George passed a capacious handkerchief over his face and emerged from it to ask suddenly: "But what is on the mind of our honorary member? I see she is at her desk again in the outer office, but she looks as though she had been caught in somebody's jam closet and the stolen sweets had not agreed with her."

"You remember the despatch-box we took from Sneed's safe last night?" Cliff spoke in a cautious undertone. "She is the only one of us who was alone with it for a minute, and immediately afterward we discovered that its lock had been picked and the contents taken. Added to that she lied about the injury to her hands and a few other little details of her stay at the Burlingame. She doesn't know yet that we are on about the despatch-box, but Rex is going to have it out with her, and if she refuses to come clean and tell us why she has tried to double-cross us the Shadowers will be looking about for another secretary. She's a nice kid, and I warned Rex that she was too young and impressionable to take into our confidence, but he wouldn't listen."

"Too bad!" George shook his head. "She might have made mistakes, but I would have banked on her loyalty! Where is Rex, anyway?"

"He's been out since morning on some trail he picked up yesterday that he thinks may lead to Raeburn, and Henry and Luce are back at the hotel in their former rôles to see if they can get any clue to Sneed's daughter. Phil has still got the Gull's prison number on the brain and I am practising our late client's handwriting." Cliff moved the rain-spattered hat ostentatiously as he spoke. "Ridgeway has been literally hanging on the telephone all day to learn if he is safely out of the woods, and I might conclude that altogether a pleasant time has been had by all!"

"Somehow, I can't believe that Ethel has turned crooked!" Phil ignored Cliff's flippancy. "Whatever she thinks of the rest of us, Rex is a sort of god in her eyes and she wouldn't sell him out for all the money in the world!"

"I don't say that she would sell any of us out, but she's an obstinate little—" Cliff broke off to add in a hasty whisper: "There's some one in Rex's consulting-room. Do you suppose Luce or Henry—"

He had no time to complete the query for a light tap sounded on the panel, and the next moment it was pushed aside to reveal Rex himself.

"I hoped you had returned, George!" There was a note of repressed excitement in his tones. "Come in, all three of you. I want to present to you our new client!"

Phil and George crowded unceremoniously through the narrow space, and Cliff followed in a more dignified manner, but at sight of the figure standing by the table the trio halted in common amazement.

"Raeburn!" Phil exclaimed when he could find his voice.

"Did you say 'client'?" Cliff turned with slightly raised eyebrows to Rex, but George smiled broadly.

"So you have decided to take the advice of the great Zadkiel?"

"I have been persuaded." Their erstwhile neighbor from across the corridor bowed gravely. "Gentlemen, I am in your hands. Had I consulted you when I first learned that your organization existed, much that has happened in the last few days might have been averted, but I have lived through an experience which taught me to trust no one."

"I gathered that from your admissions to Zadkiel—" George began, but Phil interrupted him.

"Did you ever hear of a fellow called the 'Gull'?"

"Do you know where Mr. Sneed's daughter is?" Cliff supplemented.

"One at a time!" Rex warned. "I have convinced Mr. Raeburn that our interests are identical with his and have brought him here that you may hear his story from his own lips. It will save time, however, if I tell you that he knew nothing of Mr. Sneed's death nor the manner of it until I told him, and he is as ignorant as we are of the whereabouts of Eva Sneed. Needless to say, he was unaware that her father kept her sequestered in his own apartments."

"And she is as sane as you or I!" Raeburn's enforced self-control was for the moment lost and his voice broke in a harsh cry. "Unless that beast has driven her crazy by his cruelty during the last five years, her brain is as normal as that of any woman alive! How she managed to escape just at this time I cannot imagine, nor do I dare to think what may have become of her; penniless, weak from long confinement and utterly friendless in a strange city! It was hideous enough, God knows, to think of her as penned up in some sanitarium, but now—"

"You must try *not* to think of that, Mr. Raeburn, or you will not be able to help her," George interposed. "Sit down and collect yourself so that you may tell us as clearly and concisely as possible just what you know of the events of the past fortnight. Remember that while we were working at cross purposes there was small chance of either you or our organization being successful in our search for Miss Sneed, but cooperating we cannot fail!"

He had unconsciously called into play all the power of mental suggestion which in the past had rendered his séances so popular, fraudulent though their aim then had been, and his resonant voice rang with a sure conviction. Raeburn's haggard face lightened as he seated himself.

"I'm afraid I can tell you little of the past two weeks that you do not know already, and nothing which has any bearing on Miss Sneed's escape. I dictated the anonymous letters; I confess that freely, and a friend of mine wrote them. This friend is located temporarily at the Burlingame, as you have surmised, but further than that I shall give you no information concerning him until I have seen and talked with him. He has acted throughout solely in my interests, with a loyalty which, two years ago, I would not have believed a human being capable of!" He paused and then added hesitatingly: "You have heard Sneed's story; perhaps it would be as well for you to hear mine."

"We know much of it now, for we were able to read between the lines while we were listening to Sneed, even before we knew that you were on the level," George remarked. "I believe you met Miss Sneed at a house party in England while she was visiting a school friend during vacation?"

"Yes." Raeburn flushed. "A man doesn't find it easy to bear his innermost thoughts and emotions to others, but I loved Eva Sneed almost at first sight, I think, and she cared for me. I know that, and nothing, not even these years of separation and mental anguish could have changed her! That faith is all that has kept me from going mad myself! I had met her father previously here in New York through a financial deal, and although I liked neither his business methods nor his personality I did not dream what a treacherous, despicable creature he was at heart, nor the depths of depravity of which he was capable! I wrote to him, asking permission to marry his daughter. I was in a financial position to take care of her in comfort and even some luxury, with big promises ahead. Sneed replied in a non-committal but cordially pleasant manner, and followed by the next steamer.

"For a month or two he temporized; Eva was too young, a mere schoolgirl, and my future was not yet firmly enough established for me to assume responsibilities; we could both afford to wait for a while and be sure of our own minds. It sounded reasonable, and he interposed no objection to our seeing as much of each other as we wished, but instead threw his home open to me and made me a favored guest. Gad, what a credulous, trusting fool I was!"

Raeburn paused and struck his palm with his clenched fist. He then continued:

"My liking for the man did not increase, but the thought never once occurred to me that he could be secretly working against me, bringing all his wealth and influence to bear on ruining me! Even when my prospects mysteriously failed and my small capital was swept away I did not suspect that he was at the bottom of it! His sympathy was so ready, his suggestions for the future so soundly based!

"A proposition was made to me to look into some mines in the Balkans, and when I returned to England I found that Eva had been taken ill with some sort of fever and removed to a nursing home. I was not permitted to see her, but the reports which her father transmitted to me were reassuring at first, and it was only when my importunities became too pressing that he told me her reason was affected and that she might never regain her sanity. I was compelled to believe his statement of her condition, for he backed it up with written diagnoses by physicians of high repute—forged, I am convinced, but how he obtained them I do not know.

"What I did not believe, however, was that her mind was permanently affected. I was certain that time would bring about a cure and that when she came to herself she would be my own girl again, with her love for me unchanged!" His voice broke and for a moment he covered his eyes with his hand. His hearers said no word, but waited until he had regained control of himself and could continue.

"That moment would have been well worth waiting a lifetime for, gentlemen, but meanwhile my affairs were ebbing lower and lower. Everything I touched seemed doomed to disaster, and still I laid it to a mere run of hard luck. The reports of Eva's condition grew more and more depressing, and although I did not lose faith I felt that England was stifling me and as long as I could do nothing for her nor even see her I would be better out of the country for a time.

"Then came the South African proposition. It was so rosy, so alluring, that I should have suspected the truth there and then, but the offer came through a firm of unquestionable standing, and there had been no whisper of any connection between it and interests controlled by Sneed. I jumped at the chance and went to a living hell!"

Again he paused, but this time there was no sign of weakness. His firm jaw set and his eyes flashed as the past rose before his mental vision, and still his listeners refrained from interrupting his train of thought. After a minute or two he went on more composedly:

"The expedition was more in the nature of exploration than development and took me into the very depths of the most fever-infested district known to civilization. I was taken with it, of course, as every white man is, and why I did not succumb, as the majority do, I don't know, except that it may have been because of my determination to live, to make good and return to the woman I loved. I had three years and a half of it, three years and a half of such torment as I could wish no other man must endure, and then an accident necessitated my going to Cape Town for a consignment of machinery and supplies. There I ran into a miserable wreck of a man who had been in the London office, but who had been turned adrift and going to the devil fast. From him I learned of the whole vile scheme which Sneed had set in motion against me and guessed the motive for it and the truth about Eva!

"But I was helpless! My body was wasted and racked with fever and I was penniless and without influence. My strength failed and a fresh attack laid me low for months. I made my way back to England at last, and so few people even recognized me that I was able to make in-

quiries about Sneed and his daughter without arousing undue suspicion. He had taken her back to America with him; that was all I was able to learn for a long time, and then another victim of Sneed's duplicity crossed my path. He was a physician, once reputable, but now a hopeless drunkard, and from him I dragged the truth that Eva had never been insane, but he had been bribed with the unfulfilled promise of a sanitarium of his own, to make the way smooth for her to be adjudged incompetent! In an unguarded moment Sneed had told him that if ever a certain undesirable lover of his daughter reappeared on the scene to claim her openly he would crush him again, as he had once before, and place her in an asylum from which she could never be taken!

"You see now, gentlemen, how my hands were tied, and why I could not openly go to the authorities and demand her release. I could not prove her sanity; I was still a mere penniless adventurer, while he was a man who had been prominent in the financial life of the country for a generation. I returned to America, but did not reveal myself to him, for an erroneous report of my death had gone out from Africa, and I preferred to have him believe it until I could strike.

"Then luck came my way at last; this Western proposition loomed on the horizon, and I got in on the ground floor. In a few months I was rich, even for these times of colossal fortunes, and two weeks ago I came back determined at last to claim my own. While out West I had made a firm friend in whom I was forced to believe in spite of my past bitter experience. I had confided in him to a certain extent, and he returned a few weeks ahead of me. He installed himself where Sneed lived—it was easy enough to locate him—and the first of the anonymous letters was sent.

"In the mean-time I had heard of your organization, and almost decided to put myself in your hands, but the demon of distrust which Sneed's damnable persecution had planted in my consciousness held me back, and I took that office across the hall so that I could watch you and try to satisfy myself that you were on the level."

"You had nothing to do with the attempt made a week ago last Sunday to break into Sneed's safe?" Phil could contain himself no longer.

"I did not even know that he possessed such a safe until your colleague here told me about it an hour ago," Raeburn responded. "I obtained as complete a list as I could of the private establishments for the insane in and near the city, and made the rounds in the intervals when I was not spying upon you; but I was not as diplomatic in my inquiries as I should have been, I am afraid, and I could obtain no information. I trailed this gentleman"—Raeburn gestured toward Phil—"but the result only tended to increase my doubt and distrust. The next day I followed you, sir, to Coney Island."

"I know it, but you didn't bite until Monday, and by that time we knew that you were taking a personal interest in our activities, and I was ready for you!" George grinned again. "I thought I had succeeded in convincing you that whatever the nature of your problem was, it would be safe in our hands, but I must have overreached myself."

"No. I knew it was bunk, of course, but I didn't think you had recognized me, and there is a grain of superstition in the most practical of us. I have the gambler's instinct, and I had fully decided to consult with you on Tuesday morning when I encountered Sneed himself issuing from your offices here in your company. I realized, of course, that he had been before me in engaging your services, and now I would have you to fight as well as he, and I determined to bring things to an issue. That was when the second letter was written."

"But what did you intend to do?" George asked. "The signal was given as you suggested, but had it not been what move did you contemplate?"

"I hadn't definitely decided upon the details, but I determined with the aid of my friend to force my way into Sneed's presence, and under threat of death if necessary compel him to reveal the whereabouts of his daughter. I was desperate, beside myself!

"I don't say that I would not have killed him myself if he had resisted me, but the issue never came. The shades of his windows were up all day yesterday, as I knew because I haunted that corner of the avenue as much as I dared without attracting your attention, knowing that some of you would be on the watch, but I didn't get away with it as successfully as I thought." He nodded toward Rex. "Mr. Powell traced me to the lodgings where I had gone from my hotel, and it was there that he found me to-day. I had learned from my friend of the death of Sneed's servant, but Sneed himself was reported to have gone away for a trip of indefinite length."

"I managed to overhear the conversation between Mr. Raeburn and his friend," Rex observed, and there was that curious note of repression in his voice which his associates recognized. "It was odd, but this friend made a shrewd guess which was not far from the truth. He suggested that some one else other than Mr. Raeburn might have had good cause to hate Sneed and have contrived an opportunity to break in and kill him; that the hotel management probably induced Robert to go away, and arranged for Sneed's burial in his name to avoid the scandal that the news of the murder would cause."

"Indeed!" There was a world of significance in George's unctuous, ministerial tones. "Now, I wonder what could have put such an idea into his head!"

"He must have known—" began Phil, but Cliff interrupted him swiftly.

"He will probably tell us how he came to surmise that there had been foul play when Mr. Raeburn has seen him and persuaded him that we are all working together," he said smoothly, with an almost imperceptible inclination of his head in response to an equally slight gesture from Rex. "There are one or two points about those anonymous letters, however, that I would like to have Mr. Raeburn explain, if he will come into my office for a moment. You and Phil can then be deciding on our next move to find Miss Sneed."

Raeburn rose.

"I'll be glad to tell you anything I can, of course, and I appreciate how you gentlemen have accepted my version of this whole hideous affair. I confess that this latest development has swept the ground completely from beneath my feet, and if it were not for my new-found confidence in you I should feel that Eva Sneed were lost to me forever."

He followed Cliff into the latter's office, and when the panel had slipped back securely into place Phil cried in a low tone which trembled with excitement:

"Who is this friend of his? That is what we've got to find out, and we've got to prevent his communicating with him until we do."

"That's it, exactly," Rex replied. "I not only heard that conversation; I had the next room to Raeburn's, and I rigged up a contrivance of mirrors which enabled me to see what was going on in there. When I see that friend of his again I shall know him."

"It is my opinion that you won't have to look far!" George observed. "I will go to the Burlingame with you now, and with the help of Luce or Henry we ought to be able to satisfy ourselves as to the identity of Raeburn's friend. I have a plan which I would like to put into operation then, and I think it will simplify one phase of our investigation."

"What was that?" Phil started as a subdued thud came to their ears. "It sounded like the entrance door slamming! Raeburn couldn't have gotten suspicious of our good faith and beaten it, could he?"

Without reply Rex strode to the panel leading to the outer office and thrust it aside. Ethel's chair was empty, but placed conspicuously upon her desk was a large envelope addressed to himself in a rounded, childishly unformed hand.

Taking it up, he returned with it to the consulting-room and broke the seal. George and Phil watched his face darken as he read, and finally he crumpled the letter in his hand with a gesture of utter despondency.

"Ethel has left us." There was infinite pain in his voice. "Perhaps I should use her own words and say that she has given herself a vacation without pay for an in-

definite period. I had better read the letter to you." He smoothed it out and read:

"DEAR MR. POWELL:

"I heard what Mr. Nichols and Mr. Howe told Mr. Roper just now. I could not help it because they left that little spring under the desk open so that every word came out to me and I just could not stand it. I know you think I am crooked and yellow and that I have double-crossed you, and you are going to send me away if I don't tell you why I took the papers out of that tin box. I can't tell you, not now, and I am not going to wait to be sent away. I have taken a vacation without pay and I don't know when I will be back. It just kills me to have you think what you do of me and when I can prove to you different maybe I will ask you to give me my job again. I thought I acted right, but I made a mistake, and you won't hear from me till I have made up for it. Thank you for all you have done for me.

"ETHEL."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE DEBT THAT WAS PAID.

"BUT I don't understand!" It was late on Thursday evening, and Raeburn and George Roper were seated alone in the latter's elaborately equipped studio connected with the suite of offices occupied by the Shadowers. "I thought we were all to work together, Mr. Roper. I laid my cards on the table, and I expected that you fellows would do the same."

"Patience, Mr. Raeburn," George counseled easily. He spoke with frequent pauses, and there was an alert expression on his face as though he were listening. "You admit that you yourself are at a standstill; that you don't know in what direction you would pursue your search alone. My associates are merely following certain vague lines of investigation, and it would do no good to raise your hopes with possibilities which may come to nothing. We never report to a client until we are at least on the way to a definite result."

"And mean time I am expected to sit with folded hands while the woman I love may be wandering the streets starving, or seeking the river?" Raeburn cried. "Can't you realize the torture of my thoughts, and how interminably every minute drags itself out? Any action would be better than this!"

George moved slightly in his chair. A sound, faint but unmistakable, had reached him, and he replied in a loud, firm tone:

"That was where you made a mistake, Mr. Raeburn. You should have thought of that before you allowed your passion to run away with you!"

"My passion! What on earth are you talking about? What do you mean?"

"I mean that you should have remembered your sole hope of locating the girl was through her father, and when you killed him—"

"*I* killed him!" Raeburn started from his chair. "Have you gone mad, Roper? You know I had nothing to do with his death; that it was the most unfortunate thing which could have happened at this stage of the game! What are you driving at?"

"The truth!" George rose suddenly and towered over the other man. "There is no use in beating about the bush any longer. We know that you killed Sneed; we have known it from the first, and only waited to make sure.

"I don't say that we have not a certain amount of sympathy for you, from your point of view, but unfortunately the law deals only with facts, and murder is a pretty ugly fact to face.

"You watched Sneed's windows yesterday; you saw the shades were up, and that he was ready to parley with you at last. You bribed his old servant to let you into his apartment; you faced Sneed and demanded what he had so fraudulently kept from you all these years. He defied you, he laughed at you, and in a moment of ungovernable fury you snatched a foil from the brace upon the wall and ran him through the throat.

"When you saw what you had done, you took down the other foil and slipped it beneath his dying hand so as to make it appear that a sort of duel had taken place, and you escaped, as you thought, scot-free, but we have the goods on you now, and you'll go to the chair."

His voice had risen more and more dramatically, and he fairly thundered the de-

nunciation, before which Raeburn stood for a moment dazed and silent. Then he found his voice.

"You are a contemptible lot of fakers!" he cried. "I can understand your game now, and I was a crass idiot to fall for you after all I had seen! You are determined to make out a case against some one, and you don't care who is the goat. You know I never entered Sneed's rooms in my life!"

"Can you prove it?" George sneered. "What is your alibi? Stranger in the city—walking the streets alone for hours—and don't even know what streets! Pah! How do you think that would go before any jury? We've got an open-and-shut case against you, I tell you! You're the only enemy Sneed had; the only person who had—or thought he had—cause to kill him, and you'll go the route for it!"

"No!" A deep but muffled cry came from somewhere in the partition beside them, and the next moment the panel was crashed from its groove, and a figure sprang through the aperture. It was that of an elderly man clad in the conventional dress clothes of formal service, massive despite his bent shoulders, and he flung out his huge, gnarled hands before him. "Mr. Raeburn didn't kill Sneed! *I* killed him! I had waited too long to be cheated at last!"

"Albert!" gasped Raeburn, and fell back again in his chair. The five other members of the Shadowers were filing through the panel space with Phil at their head, and it was he who demanded in a ringing tone:

"What were you to the Gull? To Arthur Wicks?"

"His father!" The old man's hands fell to his side, and for a moment he bowed his head. Then he raised it defiantly and his rugged, clean-cut features took on a rapt look of yearning affection. "His real name was Albert, after me; Albert Waller. He was all that I had in this world and a genius, they said. He would have done great things, but this man—this beast!—got his invention from him and then railroaded him to prison, to his death, so that he might not give to any one else the fruit of his brain!"

"But Albert, I never knew!" Raeburn's tone was husky. "Why did you not tell me? I thought that you and Sneed were strangers—"

"So we were, sir! You've warned me not to call you that, but it can't matter now. I never laid eyes on him till I went to the Burlingame as a waiter, a month ago! I was in England, butler to Lord Granby, when my boy was arrested and he was too proud to let me know. I found out afterward that he wrote a lot of letters, dating them ahead, and gave them to—to some one he could trust to mail them to me, and all the while he was lying innocent in prison, with the damp and loneliness and injustice of it eating his life away these letters would come telling me how fine he was doing and how he hoped to have me with him some day!

"Two years ago there came word that he was going on a journey, and then nothing more. A bit over a year ago his lordship died, and there were many changes, the house being let to them I couldn't abide, so I gave notice and came to America to surprise my boy. But there wasn't any such place as the address he had given, and the only way I knew of to find him was through somebody he had mentioned in his letters. This—this person tried to keep the truth from me, but my boy was dead and I soon learned it for myself.

"It didn't come to me then to take the life of the man who had killed my boy as surely as though he had put a bullet through him. I was just crushed with the weight of it all, for he seemed too big and powerful for me to touch, and there didn't seem to be anything left for me to do but to die and be with my boy!

"I should have, I fancy, but one day by accident I met one of Lord Granby's old friends, a gentleman who had come to America and was on his way to the West to look into some mining interests, and he took me along as butler and general valet for his party. I was taken ill out there, though, and they had to return without me, and then some one stole my money when I got out of the hospital and I was in sore straits when Mr. Raeburn, here, found me. He took me on with him and saved my life in a railroad wreck—"

"Don't, Albert!" Raeburn covered his eyes with his hand. "You were loyal to me, you made me believe that there was such a thing as friendship in the world, after all! Why did you not tell me that the man who was my enemy had injured you also?"

"We were master and man, sir," Albert replied with the class instinct of his kind. "My boy's life and youth and high hopes could not be given back to him again, but when you confided in me, sir, and I learned that 'twas Sneed who had ruined your happiness, too, something began to whisper to me, 'Kill him! An eye for an eye and a life for a life! Kill him!' I knew you meant to come back and force him to give up the young lady, but I did not know there was murder in your heart, too. I didn't even think it until you told me over the telephone the day before yesterday that I was to write him another letter at your dictation, giving him twenty-four hours, and then you would settle the score!"

"But, great Heavens!" ejaculated Raeburn. "You didn't think I meant to murder the man in cold blood!"

"I thought you were desperate enough for anything, sir, and I made up my mind that if there was any killing to be done, mine should be the hand. I'm old and there's nothing left in life for me, but you've everything before you, and then there was the young lady to be thought of. Besides, I owed it to my boy, and ever since I first came face to face with Sneed in the hotel the whispers that I'd heard to kill him had kept getting louder and louder till I couldn't hardly hear anything else.

"He'd never give up his daughter to you while there was life in him, but as I told you this morning in your lodgings, maybe his death would bring out things that would never be known while he was alive to prevent it. I meant that the solicitors would have to produce his daughter, sir, or at least tell where she was."

Albert Waller seemed to have forgotten the existence of the others who were grouped about him and talked only to Raeburn, as though anxious to explain his point of view to the man who had been his benefactor, and the Shadowers wisely held their peace.

"I meant that last night should end it, and I planned that when I went up with the menu for his dinner order I would kill him, and old Robert, too, if he tried to stand in my path. But luck was with me, for an hour before dinner I saw Robert leave the hotel and knew that Sneed would be alone in his rooms for the first time, and my chance had come. When I rang the bell he came down and opened his private door himself and I pretended I had a message for him.

"He took me back up into his living-room, me with my serviette draped over my arm and my pistol held beneath it! It was only when I looked at all those swords and knives hung on the wall, though I'd been seeing them every day for weeks, that the idea came to me to make him fight for it. Boy and man, I'd fenced with his lordship for forty years and more, and for all his wickedness, Sneed looked such a puny, wizen creature standing there before me that it seemed a bit more like fair play.

"I told him who I was and what I'd come for, and he began running around the room and squealing like a rat caught in a trap till I was all but sick with disgust at the sight! Keeping him covered with my pistol I got down those foils from the wall and thrust one of them into his hand. He saw then that there was no escape and he came at me with a rush while I was pocketing the pistol, but I parried, and the bout was on. For all his years he was as light and quick on his feet as a cat, and then he was fighting for his life and knew it, but I had the science over him, even though I was crippled with rheumatism. There wasn't a doubt of the outcome, not from the start, but I played with him for a bit because just behind him as he danced about, sobbing and lunging at me, I could see my boy smiling and nodding as if 'twas a rare game we were playing, that other old man and me!"

He paused to wipe the perspiration from his brow and Luce and Cliff shuddered as Raeburn did at the grim, fantastic picture conjured up by Albert Waller's simple recital.

" 'Twas soon over and I got him in the throat with the tip of my foil; a pretty stroke, and clean, if I do say it! I threw the blade from me and stood watching until he'd stopped wriggling and squirming, and all the while I could hear Albert calling out to me, "Well played, dad!' as he used to when he was just a little shaver."

The old man reeled slightly, reaching out for support, and Henry thrust a chair beneath him and eased him into it. For a long minute no one spoke, and then Phil asked in a hushed tone:

" Was it you who tried to get into Sneed's safe?"

" Yes. The—the same person who had been mailing my boy's letters to me all the while he was in prison told me about it, for he had described it to them, and I wanted to see for myself how it worked. I didn't mean to steal anything, I wouldn't have touched a penny of his cursed money, but I meant to leave a little reminder of my boy there, a letter for Sneed to find and study over the next time he opened the safe. But the person who told me about it didn't know where the spring that worked it was hidden and I couldn't find it for myself, so I did the next best thing; when I wrote the first anonymous letter that Mr. Raeburn wanted me to mail to Sneed I put on the envelope the numbers that had been my lad's in prison, to let him know that there was more than one come back from the dead to make him pay!"

" But how did you get into his apartment on that Sunday?" Phil persisted.

" I had watched and seen Sneed go out and the woman servant, too, and I knew I would only have old Robert to deal with. I went up with the menu, pretending I'd misunderstood about not serving any lunch, and when I came down again I left the two entrance doors open a bit, the ones above and below the private stairs. I knew Robert would take a nap and I waited until his usual time for it and then went back again. Nobody ever knew that 'twas me that was there." He drew a deep breath and then straightened in his chair. " That's all there is to the story, and I'm not sorry you've got me, for now it 'll have to come out what happened to him and the young lady will be brought forward. As for me, I've paid my boy's debt and it don't matter how soon they take me to that chair I've been hearing about."

" Wait! It was self-defense! Sneed had gone suddenly mad and attacked you!" Raeburn cried desperately. " I'll *make* you plead that, do you hear? I suppose I should have killed him in the long run if you hadn't, Albert, and if ever a man deserved his death it was Phineas Sneed! You'll not suffer for it, if I can help it!"

Albert shook his head.

" 'Twas not self-defense, sir. I'll not hide behind a lie, and it only means that I shall be with my boy a little sooner, that is all. You'll find your young lady and be happy, and to-night I shall sleep more soundly than ever since I came to America, with my score settled and about to balance the sheet."

The six Shadowers had drawn a little apart, and after a brief colloquy they came forward once more and Rex addressed the old man.

" Suppose Mr. Sneed had died naturally or by his own hand, Albert, what would you do now? You are old to be in service, and Mr. Raeburn will do much traveling in the future."

" Why, I—I've a bit of a place down in Kent; just a cottage and an old hound or two from his Lordship's kennels, and a few bees. I've always thought to round out my days there—" Albert gazed in a bewildered fashion at his questioner.

" This is Thursday, and a ship sails for Southampton on Saturday. We'll see that a ticket is procured for you to-morrow, and I, myself, will satisfy the management of the hotel that you are undertaking a certain mission abroad for us. Do you think you can make it?"

The old man still stared and his lips moved slightly, but no words came. It was Raeburn who replied for him.

" Make it? Of course he'll make it!" he cried. " It's—it's great of you people to give him this chance! Albert, you are free! You are going home to that little place in Kent, do you hear?"

" Home!" Albert raised himself slowly from his chair, and his eyes sought their

faces one by one in half-incredulous questioning. "Do you mean that I shall be let go? But the police— When they know—"

"They shall never know, Albert." Rex smiled reassuringly. "Sneed's death will be reported from the West in a few days, and the report will be confirmed to the satisfaction of anyone who cares to inquire into it. We do not pretend to be your judges, and we will leave the question of your guilt to a higher court than that of our fellow-men. Go back to the hotel now, and in the morning be prepared to leave when I come for you."

"It's true, then! I'm to go home!" His voice which had been steady all through his confession was suddenly shaken, and his fierce old eyes dimmed. "I cannot thank—I cannot say—"

"You needn't try!" Phil cried gruffly. "You put a foil in that guy's hand and gave him a chance for his life, didn't you? I'm d—d if it isn't more than I would have done in your place!"

"Good-by, Albert. You'll hear from me, too, in the morning." Impulsively Raeburn extended his hand. "Perhaps you have saved me from myself! Who knows?"

The old man looked into his eyes for a moment, then grasped his hand in silence. In silence, too, he bowed to the Shadowers and turned to the door.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ETHEL OPENS THE DOOR.

THREE days had passed; three nerve-racking days and weary nights in which hope and despondency alternated in the minds of the Shadowers and their client, while vague clues and doubtful deductions alike were followed to fruitless conclusions in the vain search for Eva Sneed.

The girl seemed indeed to have vanished into thin air, and when on Sunday evening Gerald Raeburn and his six advisers gathered in the offices of the organization black discouragement rode on every countenance.

"I cannot understand it!" Rex paused in his meditative pacing of the floor, and turned to the others who were seated about the long table. "Eva Sneed has been a prisoner for five years, she has seen no one but her father and the two servants, with the possible exception of a physician or this lawyer, Hodge. It goes without saying that we cannot approach him until we announce Sneed's death, and have arranged for the necessary evidence to prove it, but I doubt that he could help us even if he would. Very well, then. The young woman has no money, no friends to whom she could appeal, she is clad only in a tea-gown and satin slippers, and she disappears in broad daylight in the heart of the city! What is the answer?"

"Obviously, that your premises are wrong somewhere, my dear fellow," Luce drawled. "Miss Sneed *must* have had money and a change of attire, she *must* have had help from some source. These are not the days of magic, though I will admit that her escape from her father's apartment would alone savor of that art. She is in hiding with the connivance of some one, we may depend upon that, and it is my opinion that only with the announcement of Sneed's death will she come forward, if—"

He halted abruptly, leaving his sentence unfinished, but Raeburn understood.

"If she is really sane, you were going to say, weren't you, Mr. Baynes?" he asked. "I know that none of you are quite prepared to credit that part of my story, and I have no means at hand to prove it to you, but I am firmly convinced that it is a fact. One would think that Sneed must have been mad himself to have allowed his unfounded hatred of me to carry him to such lengths merely in order to prevent my marriage to his daughter, when so many other parents have broken up affairs between their children and unwelcome suitors without resorting to medieval methods.

"Eva had a very gentle character, but with the strength of will which sometimes underlies an apparently yielding disposition, and if her mind has become affected during these last five years she must have been subjected to unspeakable torture! Mr. Powell's summing up of the situation

is correct as far as we know and yet Mr. Baynes's argument seems unanswerable. Her father and his man servant are both dead, the woman Jane has run away, and poor old Albert Waller is on his way to England. These are the only people to our knowledge who could have come in contact with her during the past month at least—"

"Until she left her father's apartment," George interrupted. "There are many possibilities, and though I concede that we seem to have plumbed every one of them—was that the bell?"

He broke off as the buzzer sounded faintly in the outer office, and for a moment they glanced questioningly at each other. Then Rex shrugged.

"Might as well see who it is." He dropped his half-smoked cigaret into the ash-tray. "It cannot be anyone for us, though—"

He passed into the outer office leaving the panel wide behind him, and they heard the entrance door open. An instant of electrified silence ensued and then came his exclamation:

"Ethel!"

"Yes, Mr. Powell," a familiar but singularly small and meek voice replied. "I forgot to leave my key in that note to you when I went away, but I wouldn't use it, not knowing whether I—whether you still thought that I belonged or not! I told you that I would c-come back when I could p-prove to you that I wasn't crooked and—and yellow, and when I could make up for a mistake I made, and that is why I am here!"

"Come in, child." There was an unwonted gentleness in Rex's tones. "Don't cry. Whatever mistake you have made, we are not going to condemn you unheard. We are all here, together with some one else who has an equal right to hear what you may have to tell us."

He reappeared, followed by a very downcast and bedraggled Ethel, who darted a quick glance about the table and blushed vividly when her eyes encountered Gerald Raeburn.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "The—the man across the hall!"

"This is Mr. Raeburn, Ethel," Rex said gravely. "He is more interested than anyone in the world in finding Miss Sneed."

"I guessed as much when you came in with him on Thursday, and that is why I—I took a vacation!"—she nodded.

"But how in the world—" Henry began.

"You didn't even know that there *was* any man interested," Phil cried accusingly.

"Perhaps the papers which you took from the despatch box—" Cliff paused.

"No. I've got to tell you all about it from the beginning." She fumbled about in her handbag and drew out a damp and grimy wisp of a handkerchief to wipe her eyes. "I don't know what you're going to think of me, but I am not the one that matters now."

"Sit down, Ethel, and pull yourself together." Rex drew forward a chair. "You look as though you had been through quite an experience."

"I'll say I have!" She sank into the chair and tearing off her hat she let it fall with a weary flop upon the table. "It was coming to me, though! In the first place, I want to tell you that you will never find that wicked old Sneed's daughter, because she never lived! He hadn't a daughter, ever!"

"You are mad!" Raeburn burst out.

"What-t!"

"Then who—" The others stared at the girl as though she had indeed taken leave of her senses.

"The young lady who Mr. Raeburn met in England and who lived for five years shut up in Sneed's apartments was Eva Adair, the daughter of a man who had thought Sneed was his best friend," Ethel explained. "Her parents both died when she was a tiny baby, and Sneed was her guardian. She's got just oceans and oceans of money in her own right, and that's what gave him his start and what he's been using all these years. That is why he couldn't let her marry Mr. Raeburn or anybody else, and he only locked her up as insane because she discovered the truth about herself by accident. She's no more crazy than I am!"

"I knew it!" Raeburn cried. "Thank God!"

"But how is it that *you* know all this?" George had been watching Ethel narrowly and she flushed again beneath his gaze.

"It's all here in these papers." She had recourse once more to her handbag. "They're the ones I took from the despatch-box—the very ones that *she* had seen by accident five years ago in England!"

"How do you know that she did!" demanded Phil. "What made you open that box, anyway?"

"I know because she—she told me so!" Ethel blurted out. "How *can* I tell you if you keep interrupting this way? I hadn't been in Sneed's apartments an hour before I discovered how she got out of it, and then I found *her*, and hid her away from all of you! Then she ran away from *me*, and I could have *died*—"

"But why, child!" Henry exclaimed. "Why on earth should you have hidden her from us when we sent you there to find her—"

"Because of what you told me yourself!" Ethel flared out at him. "You were working for Sneed, and he had made you believe that she was insane. She had told me everything, and I knew she was all right; do you think I was going to be the one to put her back in his hands to be shut up again, this time for the rest of her life? I asked you what you would do with her if she were ever found, and you said that she would be put where she would have every care and attention!

"She's only a girl like me, even if she is a lady, and I made up my mind then that you would never get hold of her if I could help it! You—all of you, even Mr. Powell—had just trusted me to work on a case with you, but she had trusted me with her life and her freedom, and I wasn't going back on another girl even for—for business! I ought to have trusted you and given you credit for as much sense as I had, but would *you* have believed she was all there if she had sprung that on you about not being Sneed's daughter at all, if she hadn't these papers to prove it?"

Henry was silent, but Raeburn cried out once more:

"For God's sake, if you know where she is now, take me to her! I can't stand this suspense much longer! If you have found her again, tell me!"

"I am telling you all I can, sir," Ethel replied meekly. "I found her last week in the linen-room at the hotel, right near that private entrance to Sneed's apartment. That was Tuesday afternoon, and she had been hiding there for more than twenty-four hours, without any food or anything! At first I was going to call Uncle—Dr. Corliss, but she begged so hard for me to just listen to her that I couldn't refuse. I smuggled her into my room and ordered up tea for her and everything else on the bill of fare, hiding her in the closet when the waiter came. Then she told me about—about Mr. Raeburn, and what she'd been through for five years, and I tell you I wouldn't have given her up to Mr. Sneed again if I had had to kill him myself to prevent it!

"I kept her there in my room and gave her some things of mine to wear, so that if any one *should* catch a glimpse of her they would think maybe it was me, and I hid her in the closet again and sent for the chambermaid. She is a nice girl, even if she ain't—isn't overbright, and I asked her if she could get a position in the hotel for a maid who used to work for me. You see, it came to me that the best place I could hide the young lady would be right there in the Burlingame under everybody's noses, for that's the last place they would look for her.

"The chambermaid said that the linen-room girl for that floor had just left and that was why there hadn't been any service there all day. She thought she could get the place for my maid if I would bring her around in the morning, and I said I would. I gave her ten dollars and a dress I had only worn twice, and I knew she would fix things all right for me.

"Miss Adair—or Miss Sneed, as I suppose I had better keep on calling her to you—thought she could get away with it, but she had to have the right clothes, and that was why I borrowed that money and went shopping the next day, leaving her locked up in my room. I'd taken her measure, and I brought the things back myself and a whole bagful of changes besides, and

dressed her all up, even to her hat and coat, before I sent for the chambermaid, so that she would look as if she had just come in from the street.

"The place was ready for her, but before I let her leave me I gave her a hundred dollars in case anything went wrong and she had to make a quick getaway before she could find me. I wished I hadn't afterward, I'll tell the world! All I had to do then was to find Mr. Raeburn, and I meant to do that if I had to advertise for him, but that evening you sent for me and told me Mr. Sneed had been murdered, and that upset everything!

"I went back to my room as quick as I could and sent for her and told her, thinking she'd be pleased to death that all her troubles were over, but she didn't take it that way! She threw a fit! I had an awful time with her, and when she did quiet down she got *too* quiet; there was something about her that I couldn't understand, but she went back to her own room in the servants' part of the hotel after a while and I thought everything would be all right.

"I wanted to stay near her as long as I could, and that was why when I came here to you the next morning I asked if I couldn't remain on at the hotel, but when you said 'no' I saw it wasn't any use. She had told me, of course, about the despatch-box she had opened that time in England and what she had found in it, and when Mr. Nichols sent me into his study for the little photograph and I saw a box just like what she had described standing on his table I—I opened it.

"There were the very papers inside, and I took them to give to her, for you couldn't say she was crazy then if she had them to prove what she said, but when I got back to the hotel I found that she had gone away! I saw then why she had acted so when I told her Sneed had been murdered, and I could have kicked myself for not understanding before; she thought Mr. Raeburn had done it, of course!

"I gave up my room and came back here; there didn't seem to be anything else for me to do right then, for she knew where to reach me if she wanted to, and I had about made up my mind to tell you everything, anyway. It was all getting a little bit too much for me to handle. Then I heard what Mr. Nichols and Mr. Howe were telling Mr. Roper about me and what you all thought of me, and I felt that I just couldn't face any of you again, after having found her and then let her slip through my fingers, until I could at least tell you where she was.

"To-day, though, I thought I had better come to you without waiting any longer and tell you what I'd done already. You had a right to know, as I'd ought to have seen before, and you stand a better chance of finding her than me. I didn't mean to double-cross you; I only did for her what I would have wanted another girl to do for me if I had been in her place."

Ethel paused and surreptitiously applied the rag of a handkerchief to her eyes once more, but it seemed to Rex that they were sparkling rather too brightly for tears and he asked suddenly:

"But how did Miss Sneed—or Miss Adair—get out of the place where she had been imprisoned so long?"

"I can't tell you very well, but I can show you!" Ethel sprang up and took her hat from the table. "Can't we go to the Burlingame now? It isn't late, and maybe if you see how she did it, it will sort of help. You remember when you first told me about Miss Sneed, I said I didn't blame her for escaping, that I would have got out of there if I had had to claw the walls down? Well, that is very like what she did, only it was all fixed ready!"

"Shall we go?" Raeburn looked anxiously at the others. "I have wanted to see for myself where my poor girl was imprisoned for so long."

"Come, then." Rex signaled to the others, and under cover of the general move of departure he added in a lowered tone to Ethel, "Are you *sure*, my dear, that you have told us quite all you know?"

"All except where I've been for the last three days and that doesn't matter now," she replied. "If—if you find the young lady some time, maybe you'll forgive me for what I did? I don't suppose there will ever be a 'next time' for me, but if there

was I guess I would have brains enough to trust *you*, anyway!"

There seemed to be something cryptic in her remark, but Rex did not press her further, and they proceeded to the Burlingame in silence.

Hamilton Ridgeway, the proprietor, beamed upon them, for the burial of Sneed had taken place without a hitch, and only the final formalities remained to be gone through. He himself escorted them to the late financier's apartment and would have entered with them, but Rex, at whose command the rooms had been kept locked since the removal of old Robert's body, diplomatically dissuaded him, and it was Ethel who led the way, turning on the main switch which threw the whole apartment into a blaze of light, with Raeburn at her heels.

"You haven't told us the truth yet about how you burned yourself!" Henry pantingly caught up to her as they crossed the little roof-garden, fragrant and still under the starry sky. "I suppose you know, my child, that you didn't fool me with that explanation of yours!"

She nodded coolly.

"Of course I didn't burn myself," she replied easily. "I just *peeled* my hands sliding down."

"Sliding—"

"Is that where Eva was last seen by her jailors, over there under that pergola?" Raeburn paused to ask.

"Yes, but come on!" Ethel cried impatiently, and there was an odd break in her voice. "This is the kitchen. Do you see that dumbwaiter over there in the corner? It only runs down to the next floor, to a pantry that was built in for Sneed's food to be brought up to, and the pantry is hidden *behind the linen-room*. He was afraid the young lady might try to escape down the dumbwaiter, so he had a lock fixed in the handle of the little door, and Jane always wore the key to it, but he didn't know that there was a second opening to it from the wall on the other side! Come!"

The rest had gathered about in time to hear her explanation and they needed no further urging. Impatiently they crowded forward as she led the way into the dressing-room which the captive had used and went straight to the triangular closet in the corner.

"I'd looked about everywhere else, but unless the young lady got away in an airplane I saw that it just *had* to be through that dumbwaiter, and if the door was locked then there must be another way to get into it. I don't know whether you will find what I did or not, but—but you can look!"

Her voice had risen hysterically, and as she uttered the last words Ethel opened the door. There was a slight movement in the semidarkness within and then a woman stepped slowly forth. She was tall and straight and young, but a streak of white ran across her dark, wavy hair from temple to crown and her eyes were shadowed with the memory of infinite pain as she held her wasted arms out before her.

"Gerald! I knew that you would come to me some day like this!"

As a man in a dream Raeburn moved toward her and then with a great cry he caught her in his arms.

"Eva! Eva my own!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE REWARD OF A DOUBLE-CROSS.

"WHAT I want to know is: how did you do it?" There was respectful admiration in Phil's tones as he gazed at Ethel, who, forgiven and reinstated, sat with the six Shadowers gathered about her in the consulting-room the afternoon of the next day. "I was supposed to be handling this case, but you have taken the wind out of my sails!"

Ethel dimpled.

"Well, I was *looking* for some way into that dumbwaiter-shaft, you see," she explained. "It had to be in that side of the closet wall that backed up against it, so I opened the door, but I couldn't see any sign of a crack. Then I looked at the floor, and I saw that there was a little square of lighter wood set in toward the back, and I tried to pry it loose. When I couldn't, I *stood* on it just as hard as I could, and I had the surprise of my life,

for the whole two walls which met in a sort of point at the back seemed to just fold over and the lower part slid under the upper one, leaving a space at each side. In one of them I noticed what looked like the back of a safe, but the other opened as I thought, into the dumbwaiter-shaft, and I found that the dumbwaiter itself was up over my head. I didn't stop to think, I just grabbed the rope and slid down it to see where I would land."

"Good Heavens!" ejaculated Luce. "You might have broken your neck!"

"Well, I didn't," Ethel responded composedly. "I skinned my hands, though, and landed in that little pantry. I heard a noise in the linen-room and I called to see if the maid was there, to explain that I had got in the pantry in mistake for my own room, which was right beside it, but nobody answered. I thought it was queer, so I went to see what it meant, and I found Miss Adair."

"And where did you find her the second time, when you took us to her last night in that dramatic manner?" Rex smiled.

"That wasn't my idea!" Ethel retorted. "It was hers, and I had to let her have her own way. It seems that all the years she was kept prisoner there she dreamed day and night that Mr. Raeburn would come for her and take her away, and she wanted to have her dream come true. As to my finding her again, it was Mr. Nichols who told me where to look."

"I!" Cliff dropped his glasses. "Of all the little—"

"No, I'm not! When you showed me that photograph of Miss Adair and I said the rock in the background looked like a wolf's head, you said that was what it was; Wolf's Head Rock in the Catskills. Then you told me Miss Adair had been staying with her old nurse up there, and when I thought it over, it gave me an idea. Miss Adair didn't know anybody in New York, and when she ran away from the hotel where I had her fixed, wouldn't her first thought be to get to the only friend she could remember?"

"Great snakes!" Henry rubbed his bald head. "And we've got the nerve to call ourselves detectives!"

"But that was Thursday," George interposed. "Yesterday was Sunday. Where were you all that time?"

"Where was I?" Ethel repeated with a sort of grimness. "If you think the Catskills are like Central Park you've got another guess coming, Mr. Roper! Gee, I never saw anything like those mountains!"

"Beautiful, aren't they?" Luce spoke with pleased surprise at the unexpected appreciation her emphasis seemed to denote.

"Rocks! Rocks and millions of trees and slimy moss and brooks where you didn't expect 'em, and buzzy, crawly things that bit and stung you all day and made funny noises at night!" The bitterness was undisguised in her tone now. "Anybody can have it that wants it; just give me New York where it's flat and you know what's under your feet, and there's lights and auto horns and *folks* at night! That's all! I'd have been glad to see even a plain-clothes bull!"

Cliff choked and Luce turned hastily away, but Rex asked quietly:

"How did you know where to go?"

"I didn't. I just asked the man at the station here to give me a ticket to the nearest town in the Catskills, and when I got there it was only a few little houses with the ground going up all around like the side of a wall! I didn't start till Friday morning and it was afternoon when I got there.

"Nobody had ever heard of Wolf's Head Rock, so I stayed that night at a kind of a boarding-house, and the next day I got on the train again and rode to another place. I don't remember the name of it, but there was a big waterfall there, and they told me that Wolf's Head Rock was eleven miles back over the mountains. If you count the straight up and down part I'll say it was nearer eleven hundred! I found a man with a team of horses, whose legs bowed out in front, to take me there, and then I had to hunt out that house with the windmill. It's all tumbled down now, with weeds growing up all around and the windows broken, but there was Miss Adair fast asleep on the back doorstep!

"It seems she'd got there by another way the day before, and finding her old

nurse gone and the place deserted, had just dropped in her tracks! If I was Mr. Raeburn I'd tie a lunch-box to her whenever she goes out, for she's got the worst habit of hiding herself away where there's no food, of anybody I ever saw! I took her back with me to the place with the waterfall, but she was too weak to travel that night, so we had to stay there until yesterday morning. Now what I want to know is: who fixed the wall of the closet in Sneed's apartment like that?"

"The man who built the safe for him," responded Phil soberly. "I motored out into the country a little way this morning to have another talk with some friends of mine there who used to know him. He told a certain lady just a short time before he died about installing that mechanism in the two walls of the closet so as to provide a way of getting in and out by means of the dumbwaiter-shaft, so I am afraid he was a little deeper in with a crooked crowd than his father will ever know. He must have planned to come back and rob the safe, thinking naturally that Sneed meant to keep something of great value there if he went to all that trouble and expense to guard it, but Sneed had him sent away before he could put his plan into execution."

"And all the time the only thing he wanted to keep in there where nobody could ever find it was that box of papers!" Ethel commented. "Why he didn't tear them up or burn them and have done with it!"

"Possibly because he thought he might need them some day to prove the ownership of his ward's property," Rex suggested. "His will was in the safe, too, you know."

"Yes." Cliff coughed warningly. "I—I have it here. It leaves a hundred thousand dollars to his attorney, Ellsworth Hodge, and all the rest to his ward, Miss Adair."

"Gee, I wouldn't have believed it after the way he treated her!" Ethel's forehead wrinkled. "How is the lawyer going to put it through all the red tape when he doesn't even know that Sneed is dead?"

"But he is," George said reassuringly. "A steamer on Lake Michigan, outward-bound from Chicago, was wrecked yesterday with all on board, as you can read in this morning's newspapers, and Sneed was a passenger. It will take a little time and trouble to verify the fact that he was, of course, but an attorney won't find it difficult, especially one with a hundred thousand dollars at stake, and the alternative of a different will to file, which leaves him nothing. There is another little matter of possible disbarment proceedings in connection with the railroading of a potential crook if Sneed *didn't* die in that shipwreck which may act as an incentive, so I don't think there will be any trouble about the red tape."

"Holy Mike! There isn't *anything* you can't put over, is there?" Ethel beamed about at them with worshipful pride. "Miss Adair says she is going to give me a little string of pearls—*real* pearls, think of it!—when she gets her property settled up, and she is going to send you a big check, too, in addition to Mr. Raeburn's! The only thing that bothers me is that I can't get on to the game yet, for you all took this case at first just like honest-to-goodness dicks! I don't see where the fine work comes in!"

"That is the intention, my dear," George remarked dryly. "If any one suspected who and what we really are the Shadowers would cease to exist."

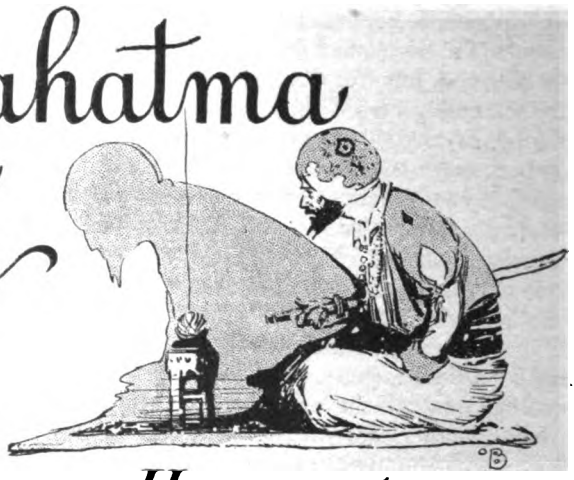
"Remember you are in on those checks, too, when they come, as well as on the one from Mr. Ridgeway for laying the ghost at the Burlingame," Phil reminded her.

"Gee! Just think how I nearly queered myself by hiding that girl and holding out on you!" she exclaimed. "When I thought Mr. Powell was going to give me the air I could have curled right up and died! I would have deserved it, though, for I had no business to forget for a minute that I was working for the Shadowers!"

"Never mind, Ethel." Rex laid his hand for a moment on her shoulder. "Had you failed completely in your search when we sent you to the Burlingame it would have been far worse, for the Shadowers would have lost their case if you hadn't opened that door!"

(The end.)

Mahatma Magic



by *Burton Harcourt*

THE Mahatma Sandra Trimorthan looked at Mr. Maloney for some seconds.

"Ten thousand dollars?" he demanded.

"Ten thousand dollars," said Mr. Maloney. "I'll bet you ten thousand, Mr. Trimorthan, that you can't actually do that trick you brag about."

"I'll accept the wager," said the mahatma.

They sat in the mahatma's receiving-room at the Continental.

"And you will do that trick wherever I say?" demanded Mr. Maloney.

"Anywhere—any time—it makes no difference," said the mahatma. "Space and time do not exist for the initiated, Mr. Maloney."

Terry Maloney eyed him sharply.

"You've got to prove it to me," he said. "You've got to *prove* to me and a bunch of my friends that you can *actually* pull that hoax. I've heard about it. I've read all about it in the newspapers. I've listened to twenty-five damn fools swearing that they saw it. But I want to see it myself, and I want proof. I don't believe it."

"You will believe," said the Mahatma Sandra Trimorthan. "You will believe when you see, Mr. Maloney."

"Yes, when you prove it," rejoined Mr. Maloney, "but not till then."

The money was placed in the hands of a very respectable gentleman—Mr. Robert T. Sellers, in fact, the president of the Lyceum Bureau which had brought the mahatma to town. And Mr. Maloney selected the studio of his excellent friend, Thomas Travers, as the place for the test.

"Terry," Thomas demanded when Maloney had finished explaining, "do you mean to say that you bet that wizard ten thousand dollars that he couldn't do that trick?"

"Uhuh," said Terry Maloney. "I told him he couldn't actually do it, in the presence of credible witnesses."

"You're a fool," declared Thomas Travers. "I saw him do it—twice—at Mrs. Whittington's."

"You're not a credible witness," said Terry Maloney. "I'm gonna have a dozen sharp-eyed fellows watch him this time. He can't bulldoze them all."

"There were ninety-six people in the audience when I saw it," retorted Travers emphatically, "and every one of them saw exactly what I saw."

"Well, *I* haven't seen it yet," insisted Maloney.

Travers was willing enough to see the thing through again. He freely allowed Maloney the use of the studio. And the next afternoon at three o'clock Maloney and Travers and six miscellaneous friends —not to speak of two private detectives

and a clairvoyant—awaited the arrival of the Mahatma Sandra Trimorthan. Maloney had arrived early with one or two men, not now in evidence, and had busied himself in arranging the studio. The center of the room was cleared.

At two minutes after three the mahatma appeared with his little assistant. The assistant, a lad of twelve years and small for his age, was bright and attractive enough as Hindus go. The mahatma, with his frowning, mystical face and his burning eyes, was anything but attractive. The sight of him was disturbing.

He bowed. Behind him came a lanky Hindu servant with a large bag. To him the mahatma nodded. The servant opened the bag. He produced a square rug, a short curved sword, a ball of twine, and a wooden pedestal. He spread the rug in the middle of the floor. The mahatma and the boy seated themselves, facing one another, upon it.

"Silence!" said the mahatma.

He placed the pedestal in the center of the rug between the boy and himself. Then he set the ball of twine on the pedestal. The short curved sword he stuck in to his belt.

"Silence!" said the mahatma again. "And none of you, please, will stir from your places."

The studio was deathly still. The spectators—Terry Maloney as well as the others—were almost holding their breath. The Mahatma Sandra Trimorthan was now ready to repeat that famous trick which we have all read of in the newspapers since his arrival, which some of us have seen, and which, they say, has been practised in India from time immemorial.

Terry Maloney watched it sharply.

The mahatma took the ball of twine in his hand. With a pressure of his thumb he attached one end to the pedestal. Then he tossed the ball into the air. It unwound in a direct perpendicular—up—up—and disappeared through the skylight, which seemed no longer to exist. There it stood, like a wire drawn taut—a tiny string that could not have supported a pound weight. The mahatma motioned to the boy; he pointed to the string. The boy rose, stepped toward the pedestal, spit upon his pudgy little palms, and then, climbing hand over hand, mounted up—up—up—and disappeared.

There was a slight gasp from Terry Maloney.

For some seconds the mahatma sat in rapt attention. The boy did not reappear. He was *gone*. Then the mahatma called. There was no answer. His face grew stern, then cruel, then horrible. He drew the short curved sword from his belt and took it between his teeth. He rose terribly—placed his hand on the string, and then deliberately, murderously, climbed hand over hand up—up—up—and disappeared.

Terry Maloney stared dumfounded at the vacated rug. He turned to the private detectives. Their mouths were open and they looked frightened and foolish. There was blank amazement on every face in the room. There was not a sound in the place—excepting one almost imperceptible rustle.

There came a sudden sickening dull thud. Thomas Travers cried:

"My God!"

A childish leg had fallen, mangled and bleeding, onto the rug. It was followed by the other leg, then the arms and the trunk, lastly the head, of the little assistant, all horribly smeared with blood.

A few moments later the mahatma himself, with the bloody sword between his teeth, came slowly down the twine, hand over hand.

He wiped the sword and stuck it back into his belt. He reached for the bag, which the servant had dropped on the floor beside the rug. Carefully he picked up the mangled limbs, trunk and head of the little assistant, and inserted them in the bag. He shook it; he emptied it.

The little assistant sprawled out soberly, unharmed. The mahatma motioned to him to resume his seat. He did so. The mahatma removed the end of the twine from the pedestal, and as he held it in his hand it wound up rapidly like a spring. He placed the ball on the pedestal. He sat down in his original position.

"That is all," said the Mahatma Sandra Trimorthan.

There was an outburst of applause.

Terry Maloney shook hands with the mahatma.

"It certainly looked like the real thing," he said. "Let's have some tea."

The mahatma acquiesced.

"You poor simp," said Thomas Travers. "I told you you couldn't get around the evidences of your senses. Ten thousand dollars!"

"That's all right," said Terry Maloney. "While we're havin' tea I'll examine the witnesses."

But the examination was all wrong. The entire group—and none more vividly than the clairvoyant—had seen it exactly as poor Terry Maloney had seen it. The accounts agreed precisely.

"It looks as if I owe you ten thousand dollars, Mr. Trimorthan," said Maloney. "But I'm not convinced yet. Our poor old human eyes are easy to fool, and our brains can be hypnotized. But it's damn hard, Mr. Trimorthan, to fool a camera. Thompson!"

A curtain at the far corner of the studio was pushed aside. Three men emerged from behind it, one carrying a faintly developed film.

"I have here," said Mr. Maloney, "a moving picture record of all that took place here during the disputed fifteen minutes, and I have the testimony of two credible witnesses besides the photographer that he honestly and faithfully turned the crank and photographed all that occurred."

The mahatma dropped his cup of tea and rose in a rage. Terry Maloney took the film.

"Although Mr. Thompson and these gentlemen," he said, "thought that they were photographing what we all thought we saw, they got, as a matter of fact, only a picture of the mahatma and the boy in the same positions from beginning to end. Neither of them moved so much as a hair's breadth. He did not *actually* do what he said he would do; he *actually* did nothing at all. So the ten thousand dollars, I believe, is, under the terms of the wager, mine. It is a very difficult thing, Mr. Trimorthan, to fool a camera."

But the Mahatma Sandra Trimorthan had gone—rug, bag, boy, and all!

A Book and its Cover

by Howard Rockey

HER pretty brown eyes were ablaze with the enthusiasm of first success.

She looked eagerly across the table at the man in the dinner-coat. And she almost burst in her anxiety to tell him of her good fortune.

The shimmer of glass and silver — the soft whiteness of the cloth—the dull shaded electric candle at her elbow—and the modulated strings of the orchestra—all these blended perfectly with her mood. The surroundings soothed the nervousness that comes from elation, and Peggy smiled hap-

pily as she thought that the soft music from behind the palms was furnishing what theatrical folk call "'till ready music."

The man looked at her—worshipingly. He didn't know what she was about to tell him, and he didn't care. His interest in Peggy Thompson was purely for her charming self alone.

Peggy knew it, and saw a part of the reason reflected in a near-by mirror. But it wasn't her dainty, elfish image that made her feel proud of herself. It was the letter in the hand-bag that rested on her lap.

"Do you think I look literary?" Peggy finally inquired.

"No," answered Brock Morris, "you merely look lovely."

"I'm going to bob my hair and wear sensible shoes and a flowing tie and tortoise-shell glasses," Peggy announced, ignoring the compliment — or, perhaps, because of it.

"Why mar the scenery?" protested Morris. "If you *want* to look literary, I'll admit that you do—even if you don't—rather than see you costume yourself in the part. Besides, I knew a successful playwright once who hadn't a single freakish fad and looked quite like a human being."

"That's consoling," said Peggy. "I like pretty clothes and foolish high-heeled slippers; but since I've actually sold a real book, I sort of felt I ought to *look* different somehow."

Morris smiled indulgently. "Really?" he asked. "*Did* you sell it,"

Peggy opened the hand-bag and passed him the letter.

"Great!" exclaimed Morris. "Vanderpool's a good publisher, and he'll be liberal with you. But best of all, my firm handles his advertising account, so the chances are I'll look after the publicity for your book. What's it called?"

"I named it 'Helen,' because it's a girl's own story," Peggy told him. "I don't suppose you'll like it. I don't know whether anybody will—"

"Vanderpool evidently doesn't agree with you," commented Morris. "Publishers don't buy book manuscripts just because authors happen to be as pretty as—"

"That will do!" laughed Peggy. "Of course *I* like it, but all the time I was working on the manuscript—and it took me months and months—I wondered whether other people would see it—and understand as I do."

Morris sighed. "It isn't one of these character-study-moral-uplift works, is it?"

"I'm not going to tell you," Peggy said. "But as soon as it's out I'm going to make you read it whether you want to or not."

"That 'll be a new experience," Martin told her. "I never read the books I write advertisements for. I might have a stroke of conscience in advising people to buy 'em if I knew what they were about and how bad they are."

Peggy laughed deliciously, but Martin was far from being facetious in making the remark. He had known Peggy Thompson for almost a year, and each week that he knew her he understood her less and liked her a great deal more. He knew that she wrote for some of the lesser magazines, and he had even managed to wade through some of her stories. He was glad Peggy wasn't like her stories. If she had been, she would have been an unspeakable woman. Not wicked—just impossible.

That she could have written a book that Vanderpool would approve seemed incredible. Martin hadn't imagined the girl possessed the depth or the breadth of vision to paint a worth-while picture in novel length. Yet he knew that Vanderpool was a shrewd judge of fiction. His publications invariably proved best sellers, and netted neat royalties for their authors as well as handsome profits for Vanderpool. As a result, the Bingham Advertising Company, with which Martin was associated, had a very attractive sum to spend each year in popularizing Vanderpool's books.

And to Martin fell the task of writing the advertisements that appeared in the magazines and newspapers, lauding this literature and urging the public to purchase each new masterpiece as it came from the Vanderpool press.

When he said he did not read the books about which he wrote, he was telling the truth. He would talk with some member of Vanderpool's staff, find out what the story was all about, and then glance

through the high spots in order to write some scintillating bit of sales talk that would make the populace hungry to devour this work. And Martin's clever pen and printed sales ability had added dollars to Vanderpool's bank account and prestige to the books produced by the publisher. Authors, incidentally, had not suffered in royalties as a result of Martin's exploitation of their work.

As a result, the Vanderpool account had been turned over to Martin to handle, and even Vanderpool himself hardly knew which of his publications Martin was featuring most. It had always been a pet theory of Martin's that the majority of the public wouldn't know a good book if it read one, and so he set himself up as a supreme and independent judge of what the country should prefer from the printing presses of Mr. Vanderpool.

He had a pet theory with regard to book buying. And that was this: if people are told long enough and loud enough that a book is well worth reading, sooner or later every person worth reaching will read the book—whether or not he or she buys or borrows it. And the very borrowing of books annoyed Martin beyond measure. There is no money for the writer or the publisher in the reading of borrowed books. So Martin had deliberately taken the tack in his advertising, that the borrowing of books is more wicked than the borrowing of money. A book, Martin claimed, was on a plane far above vulgar commodities, such as coin and umbrellas. "Books should be bought thoughtfully, read carefully, and preserved for posterity." He used that slogan in every Vanderpool advertisement.

And as Vanderpool prospered, Martin prospered, too. He had a rather smart bachelor apartment and a Japanese valet which he was ready and willing to swap for a country house and a maid of all work—provided he could find a suitable wife.

Recalling this situation, he came out of his reverie and found that he was dancing on the crowded floor with the author of 'Helen.' "H-m!" muttered Martin. "She would not only make a suitable wife, but an adorable one."

"Were you speaking to me?" inquired Peggy, looking up into Martin's eyes.

"I don't know—was I?" Martin asked as they finished the dance and sat down to the lobster Newburg.

"Now about this book of yours," he said, when the demi tasse had been brought. "Is it so awful rotten?"

"Brock!" exclaimed Peggy, hurt and indignant.

"I didn't mean not nice—or improper—or—"

"Then just what *did* you mean?" demanded Peggy.

"Simply that the worse a book is, the better people seem to like it, and the better it is, the worse they seem to like it—and—well, I want them to like your book."

Peggy laughed. "I think I see what you mean. The things we writers like, our readers usually don't. But this has had the approval of the editors and now it's up to the public—"

"And to me," Martin reminded her. "Peggy, from this moment I promise you that you are a famous author, and that your book will be a bear-cat when it comes to sales, reviews, and discussion. You'll probably make so much money that you'll not be satisfied with a foreign-made car and will begin to wonder whether you can't import one from Mars. Incidentally you'll probably get so swelled-headed, and so disgustingly rich, that you won't have anything to do with me any more."

"I hope not," said Peggy. "You have your faults, but I'm rather inclined to like you."

"For which, much thanks," returned Martin. "Do you smoke cigarets, or would you prefer an after-dinner mint?"

"Are you trying to be funny or are you merely insane?" was Peggy's reply.

"The latter," admitted Martin, with a smile. "I'm crazy about you."

"How utterly imbecile," said Peggy. "My motto is 'Love me—love my books.'"

"I gather the large idea," Martin told her. "I shall proceed to make the public follow my example."

He set himself to the appointed task the following morning. The first copy of

" Helen " was not yet bound, nor even fully printed, but that did not deter Martin from starting its exploitation. He meant to make the reading public hungry for that book. He intended that men, women, and children should stand in bread lines before booksellers' stores waiting for its appearance. He had not asked Peggy to outline the plot or even to classify " Helen." He knew the name of the book and the author and the publisher, and that was enough for Martin.

Before going to luncheon he directed that this preliminary announcement be put into type:

PEGGY THOMPSON
has written
a book.
Wait for it—
Watch for it—
Buy it—
Read it—
Don't let any one
see it.
Out November 10.
Printing orders
already quadrupled.
A SENSATION
" A Vanderpool Publication."
The title is
" HELEN."

At luncheon he still pondered over the matter. " If Peggy wasn't such a nice girl," he mused, " it would make a corking line to refer to her as the writer ' who put the hell in " Helen " '—but I suppose she wouldn't stand for that. Hang it, why do women write books anyway? A man would see the advantage of a phrase like that!"

A week later he received a phone call from Vanderpool. " Say, where do you get this idea that the printing order on ' Helen ' has been quadrupled before release date?" inquired the publisher.

" Well, hasn't it?" asked Martin.

" No."

" Then you'd better do it."

" Why?"

" Haven't you read it?" demanded Martin indignantly.

" No," answered Vanderpool. " It isn't off the press yet. Bill Yerkes passed on the manuscript, but didn't rave about it much—"

" Bill Yerkes wouldn't know a story if it came up and bit him," Martin declared. " Let me alone. I know what I'm doing. This book is going to go big. I'm going to make it the talk of the time, and it's going to drag down more long green than you've ever dreamed of making out of a single novel. What? You say I'm crazy? Sure I am! Just watch me from now on!"

He hung up the receiver and wrote fourteen more advertisements hot off the bat—each one more enthusiastic than the other. Then he called up Peggy and asked her to go to the theater.

" How did you like the play?" Peggy inquired when they were taxi-ing home.

" Punk," said Martin. " But I could make it the greatest hit the town ever saw. With a little judicious publicity it would take an armed guard to keep the public away from the box-office. Even children would cry for it—"

" Why don't you inject some of that stuff into the advertising of my book?" Peggy suggested.

" I'm doing it!" Martin snapped. " You ought to see the advance orders that are coming in now. The bookstores are loading up on it, and when the publicity campaign breaks next week, even blind men will be howling to have it reproduced in raised letters."

" Then you really believe in it?" asked Peggy eagerly.

" Sure," said Martin. " It's great! I haven't read it."

And when he had left Peggy and arrived at his bachelor flat, he sat down and wrote two reviews of " Helen " before going to bed. That was Martin's method. He sent out printed copies to the newsdealers and got them to have the criticisms inserted in their local newspapers.

Fifteen minutes were required to polish off his first one:

" Helen," by Peggy Thompson, is easily the sensation of the literary season. It has all the subtle charm of this popular writer's short stories, plus a glamour and romance that ring real and true to life. Miss Thompson draws a vivid, daring picture of the conditions which make or mar the happiness of a young girl of to-day. Before one has read half a dozen pages, one finds one's self *living* the story. One *feels* the tension of the char-

acters' reactions on one another, and is consumed with anxiety to learn the final outcome of the thrilling events of the plot upon their tangled lives. It took rare courage as well as consummate skill to write "Helen," and in doing so, Miss Thompson has exhibited an astounding keenness of vision and the broadest outlook upon modern American life demonstrated in any novel of recent years. At all booksellers, two dollars and fifty cents net.

"Not so bad," muttered Martin, scanning what he had written. "I hope I haven't slipped up anywhere—that the fool story isn't an historical romance or anything like that. You have to put pep into book advertising these days. If the public isn't curious it doesn't buy. I think I'll advise Vanderpool to slip each copy into one of those intriguing-looking red covers with a big white question mark or a broken heart or something of the sort on 'em. The public always falls for that sort of thing!"

Then he sighed, and decided to go a step further, as he began to write another ad:

"Helen," by Peggy Thompson, is a close-up of a young woman's soul. Just as the master directors of the films bring intense heart-appealing drama before us with appalling realism, Miss Thompson has admitted us to the inner secrets of feminine frailties and frivolities. One hesitates to say how entrancingly entertaining this powerful story is. Perhaps it will not be understood by the very young. There may be those puritanical critics who will shake their heads over the book. Here is a story of stark realism that sees good as well as evil. It ideally blends sunshine and shadow—struggle and success—sordidness and splendor. Its tragedy, its pathos, its spice, its realism, all combine to make it a work that will be widely, if not too openly, discussed and eagerly even if somewhat secretly read.

"Better," murmured Martin, and resolved to make his later advertisements even more tempting in their tone. The book was due to come off the press in the morning. Proof sheets had been on his desk for weeks, but he had been too busy even to glance over them. Now that the book was coming out, he knew he would have to make a pretense of reading it.

Peggy was a nice girl, and like all writers, proud of her brain-children. Martin knew he would have to discuss it with her—not merely to express an opinion, but to comment with intelligence and enthusiasm upon the work in detail. Of course he knew he could pick out a few passages here and there, rave about them, and more or less meet the wish of Peggy Thompson—but he must not forget to look at the book, just the same.

And as he fell off into dreamland, a horrible thought came to him. If he *should* marry Peggy he would have to go on and on reading her books for years and years to come. Every time she finished a new one he would have to read it as well as advertise it. That would mean carrying his work home with him, and Martin was as callous to books as a bank-teller is to money. Despite his high-sounding phrases and dignified discourses upon modern literature, a book was a book to Martin, and he maintained that, properly advertised, a book is a book to the public.

In any event he knew he had done Peggy a good turn. "Helen" had gone to press for the third edition, and there seemed every likelihood that the first re-orders after publication would send the novel back to the printing-press again. The newspapers were full of his advertisements, magazine pages carried announcements of Peggy's masterpiece, and attractive posters in the booksellers' windows called attention to great piles of copies of "Helen." His campaign to make "Helen" a best seller was well under way and going well.

Then Martin thought of the crowning touch. He sat down and wrote letters to half a dozen newspapers, and to one or two religious magazines. He signed them with such disapproving *nom de plumes* as "Indignant," "Outraged," "Incensed," and "Horrified."

"That 'll make 'em sit up and take notice," he said to himself as he dropped the batch of letters into the mail-box. "There's nothing that 'll make a book go better than to have dear old *vox populi* start to pan it. It's just like telling a child it mustn't read Balzac or Laura Jean Libbey. Result, precocious infant has the book off the shelf in a jiffy, and reads it between the covers of the New Atlas of Europe after the war."

He picked up the bound copy on his desk

and began to turn the pages when the telephone rang. It was Peggy on the wire.

"Oh, Brock!" she exclaimed in a voice that was all eagerness. "Do you know I never imagined it would be so thrilling to see one's very own book on display in all the windows. I've been having the time of my life standing about the store counters listening to the comments of people who ask for 'Helen.'"

"They won't be asking for it in another week," Martin told her. "They'll be demanding it—howling for it. You'll have to open half a dozen bank accounts to take care of all your checks."

"But I wanted to talk to you about the review in the *Record* this morning," Peggy went on. "I haven't the slightest knowledge who wrote it, but he doesn't seem to grasp my idea at all—"

"What's the difference?" asked Martin in annoyance, realizing what was coming. "He featured the book in the paper, didn't he?"

"Of course," said Peggy, "but I don't like sailing under false colors, and besides, what he says about the book isn't true. Any one reading the criticism would get the impression that the book isn't—well, exactly proper—"

"Nonsense!" objected Martin, grinning into the phone, "you only imagine that. Why, Peggy, it's the sweetest, most beautiful story I've ever—"

"Oh, you've read it, then?" she exclaimed joyously. "Do come up to-night and tell me just what you think about it!"

Martin squirmed and looked somewhat wrathfully at his copy of "Helen." He wanted to spend the evening with Peggy, but he had a busy day ahead of him, and he simply wouldn't have time even to skim through the pages.

"Sorry," he explained, "but I have to go and review a play. Want to come along? Jacobson has a show on at the Laughter Theater, and it's proving a flivver. Wants me to see if I can't find some way to make the public fall for it."

"Why, of course I'll come, if you *have* to go," Peggy agreed reluctantly; "but do you think it quite fair, Brock, to try to interest theatergoers in a production that hasn't been able to succeed on its own merits?"

"Jumping Jabberwocks!" cried Martin, "if we allowed books and plays to stand on their own merits there wouldn't be any publishers, any producers, or any advertising men. Then there wouldn't be any me, and I couldn't marry you and—"

"What was that you said?" Peggy inquired sweetly over the wire.

"I'll see you about seven-thirty," Martin answered, and wrote "Tiffany's" on his memorandum pad.

That night they saw the play, but neither Martin nor Peggy paid much attention to it. It wasn't such a bad play, but the two were only interested in each other—so much interested, in fact, that they decided they didn't care to go to a restaurant for supper afterward, and it was nearly two o'clock before Martin finished kissing the finger upon which he had joyously slipped a solitaire. In response to parental objections as to the lateness of the hour, Peggy had explained that she and Martin had been discussing her book — that she had been making suggestions for its further advertising.

Her father snorted. He opined that he could have discussed the whole New York Library in less time than it took the two to say good night, and that he could have devised an advertising campaign that would have sold illicit spirits to Mr. Volstead in a much briefer period. But Peggy slipped away to bed, the happiest girl in the world. Her book was a success—and she was engaged! Martin experienced similar sensations of cardiacal intoxication. He was pleased with what he had done about the book, because it pleased Peggy, but the thing that gratified him most was the fact that he was at last to exchange single blessedness for matrimonial bliss.

On awakening the next morning, however, the two read the newspapers with differing sensations of surprise. Martin laughed aloud, to the astonishment of his Japanese servant, who expected him to be silent and grouchy at breakfast. Peggy sobbed over her chocolate cup, and was impatient when she phoned to find that Martin had left his apartment and had not yet

arrived at his office. Her pretty features were a mixture of grief and indignation as she read the flaring head-lines.

CENSORSHIP CHIEF ASKS SUPPRESSION OF "HELEN"

Dr. Josiah Ponderdonk Denounces Novel by Miss Peggy Thompson.

WILL BRING LEGAL ACTION AGAINST PUBLISHER VANDERPOOL AND AUTHOR

In an interview, Dr. Ponderdonk stated that while he had not read the book in its entirety, he was informed that it was not a proper piece of literature. Even the advertisements featuring the novel broadly hinted at this, he said, and he had had his attention called to a number of indignant protests against "Helen" from outraged readers in the various newspapers.

Martin reached his office elated. He at once began the preparation of several statements refuting the charges of Dr. Ponderdonk, and asserting that "Helen" was unquestionably the foremost literary work of the age—"a pen picture that tugs at the heartstrings and points of vital moral which every one should read."

"Guess that 'll hold the old boy for a while!" Martin exclaimed. "Hope he carries it into court. Then I'll have our lawyer read the whole three hundred and seventeen pages to the jury. The newspapers will publish parts of it, and if 'Helen' stops at anything less than eight printings I'm a cannibal!"

But a weeping voice greeted him when the phone bell tinkled. "Oh, Brock!" wailed Peggy. "Suppose they put me in jail! They've just handed me some terrible legal-looking paper!"

"They can't put you in jail!" he assured her. "They're putting you into the limelight—setting you up on a pedestal in the hall of fame. It's great stuff—let them go to it. This is going to *make* the book!"

"But it isn't fair!" protested Peggy. "It *isn't* a naughty book!"

"For Heaven's sake don't tell anybody!" Martin almost shrieked into the transmitter. "Meet me at the Ritz for luncheon and I'll explain everything. In the mean time, don't breathe a word to a soul."

Peggy didn't seem to be satisfied, but she did agree to meet him, and shortly before noon Martin reached for his hat. As he was leaving the office he ran squarely into Vanderpool. The publisher's eyes were blazing and his face was flushed and angry.

"What kind of a blockhead are you, anyway?" he yelled. "You certainly have messed up things in connection with 'Helen'—"

"Yep," chuckled Martin. "I've stirred up some cute little hornet's nest of publicity—what?"

"You've thrown a boomerang!" roared Vanderpool. "That fool Ponderdonk has obtained a court order suppressing the whole edition, and I've got to recall and refund the money for every single copy that is in the dealers' hands."

"You don't mean that he got away with it?" gasped Martin, unable to believe his ears.

"He sure did!" announced Vanderpool. "He appeared before Justice Gregory. You remember he sued me for libel some years ago, because he claimed the author made fun of him in one of the books I put out? All poppycock, of course, but he's had it in for me ever since, and issued the order at once."

Martin gave a low whistle. It wouldn't be so easy to explain to Peggy now, and he saw visions of his solitaire being returned across the luncheon table.

"What the deuce got into you I can't make out," Vanderpool went on. "There isn't a suggestive line in that book, nor a single situation that couldn't be read aloud before a Sunday-school class. Yet you come out in your advertisements and hint that it's a second 'Three Months' and a sort of modern Rabelais. Don't you ever *read* the books you advertise?"

"Why — sometimes," Martin stalled. "But this time I merely talked it over with the author—I know Miss Thompson pretty well—that is—"

"*She* didn't give you any such idea," snapped Vanderpool. "She's been weeping over my wire all morning, and she's raising

Cain about it all. She threatens to sue me for damages for ruining the sale of her book!"

"Wow!" exclaimed Martin. "But maybe it 'll work out all right anyway. You see, I figured that Miss Thompson was practically unknown, and that probably it wasn't much of a book anyway—"

"Wasn't much of a book!" Vanderpool shot at him with contempt. "You may think you know advertising, but you don't know literature, that's a cinch! 'Helen' is one of the finest bits of clean, wholesome literature that I or any other publisher has turned out in many a day. It's a humdinger of a story—a riot—the sort of a book that would have had a vogue for years. And you've gummed the whole game! You're fired! I'm retaining the Crœsus Agency to handle my advertising in the future."

Martin stood there dejectedly as Vanderpool strode angrily toward the elevators and disappeared behind the clanging gates. As the car went down the door of a private office opened, and Mr. Bingham, head of Martin's firm, came out.

"Oh, Martin," he said quickly. "I suppose you know Vanderpool's taken his account away from us. The organization can't stand losing a hundred-thousand-dollar client these days. We won't need you any longer."

"Well!" mused Martin, recalling Vanderpool's estimate of Peggy. "Who would have believed it. She *did* write a worthwhile book after all! I've a feeling that I won't be feeling so chipper after luncheon."

With apologetic and dejected air he made his way to the Ritz. There was nothing to do but confess the truth, and explain how his eagerness to help Peggy had proved to be a boomerang for "Helen."

But to his surprise Peggy was sitting in the lounge saucily swinging her little buckled pumps, her pretty face wreathed in smiles. "Oh, Brock!" she cried eagerly, "isn't it just wonderful!"

"Wonderful! What the—" He stared at her in amazement.

"I've just left Moulton, the publisher," she told him, with a little thrill of excitement. "He's had a novel of mine for nearly four months. I'd despaired of his taking it, and only last week one of his readers told me it was hopeless. But he called me on the telephone this morning and said he's going to bring it out at once. He said it will go like hot cakes after the suppression of 'Helen.'"

Martin gasped and sank down in a chair beside her. "Can you beat that," he chuckled.

"I was telling Mr. Moulton that I knew you, and he wanted me to approach you and see if I couldn't get you to give up Mr. Vanderpool's advertising account and handle his for him. 'He says you're the one man who knows enough about book publicity to make my 'Dream Nights' a sensational success. You'll do it, Brock, won't you—for my sake?" she pleaded.

"Well," hesitated Martin, suppressing an amused smile, "I might—I'll think it over—*after I've read the story*. It doesn't pay to judge a book by its cover."

HILLTOPS

THE sun has kissed the mountain top,
The distant rim of blue,
And, in between, the valley green
Has charmed my window view.

My love has touched your wonder heart
(Dear one, so high it seems);
That all I knew of men and *you*
Lies fairer than my dreams.

Edith Livingston Smith

Wind Along the Waste

by Lyon Mearson

THERE are those who say that the law has no heart, and that those who enforce the law gradually begin to lose all sense of the ordinary human feelings and emotions. They have said that this last is especially true of the Mounted. That may be so, but there was one case—

The sky hung gray and threatening over Blackhorse Peak, resting the eyes at last from the fierce glare of the sun on the white, packed snow, the crystals of which had thrown back the light intensified a hundred fold.

Sanderson, the trader, busied himself in small talk with his friend, Sergeant Waterman, of the Mounted, who was preparing to make his rounds. The door opened and an Ojibway squaw came in. Waterman sat quietly in his corner until the trader had completed his business with the shapeless hag, saying nothing, but noting everything.

Like all Indian squaws in early middle age, she was not an attractive object to look at. Middle age is problematical—she might have been that. So might she also have been a hundred years old. There is no telling with a squaw, for their old age comes on as quickly as night in the tropics—in one instant it is light and in another the heavy velvet black of the equator has fallen and full fledged night is upon you, dense and all-enveloping. Thus it is with most Indian women—they are young, and then suddenly they are old, and that is all there is to it.

She was dressed shapelessly in the odds and ends of bedraggled fur that the females of that section are wont to wear. The skin of her tanned, yellowed face was folded into innumerable seams which surrounded the beady, sharp eyes which could, however, look at you unwinkingly. She was short and fat—rather more than fat, she was formless.

Curiously, there was a tomahawk in her belt. Now, this was peculiar for several reasons. The first reason is that it is many generations since the Ojibways have used the tomahawk. Secondarily, ever since the coming of the white man, the Indian's tomahawk has always had a metal head. The head of this tomahawk was sharpened flint, bound to the haft with a rawhide thong crisscrossed over the hard stone. Even when the Indians used tomahawks, they were in evidence only in war time—only when needed. At the end of a war they were buried, whence arises the old saw about burying the hatchet.

Yet here was this squaw not only doing the trading at the post—which generally is done by the male—but also wearing a tomahawk while she did so. And a stone tomahawk perhaps two hundred years old. It was queer, reflected Sergeant Waterman idly, as he watched her.

Evidently she could not speak, because she gave the trader a sheet of paper with her wants written thereupon, which he busied himself to satisfy. Yet she did not have the vacuous, and at the same time

sharp, appearance of the dumb, and she was not deaf, because the trader addressed her several times, and she answered with nods of her head.

"I never saw her before," advanced the sergeant when she had gone.

"No, she doesn't come in often—but she has been coming for fifteen years."

"Something peculiar about that squaw, Sanderson," said Waterman. "I don't mean her carrying a tomahawk—though that's queer enough, I'll say; I mean in her appearance. Did it ever occur to you that she looks as though she were waiting for somebody—or something. I mean, not the usual look of dumb—"

"She's not dumb, sergeant," answered Sanderson slowly, interrupting him. "She can speak when she wants to. She—"

"Then why—"

"She never speaks to a white man." He turned to rearrange some of his disordered stock, and remained silent for a moment or two. When he spoke again he did not look at Waterman; he was looking out of the window at the long stretch of snow and pine woods. A figure was coming—he could see it in the distance, though it would be fifteen minutes or more before it arrived.

"I always have the impression that she'll talk to a white man again only when that something that you spoke of has happened. She's a little crazy, you know." The younger man looked his interest, lighting a cigaret in silence.

"Yes—at least, they say she is. I got some of her story from one of the Indians. He was afraid to speak of it, because they hold her in a sort of awe, but I got it out of him. You know, Indians treat their insane differently than we do. They make much of them—the Ojibways do, anyway. Sort of medicine-man, or woman." He smiled wryly.

"Might not be such a bad plan for some of us, he commented in his dry fashion. "I've known some who could see things that we sane people could not see—and I would have liked to be able to see those same things. She has her own wigwam, and she's rather set apart from the rest of the band. She doesn't mind, I guess. Rather prefers to be that way. Curious name she has—Wind Along the Waste. How's that for a name? Seems to me I read something like that in old Omar once, but I'm not sure. Most of these Indian names mean something, but nobody around here knows what her name meant when it was originally given to her.

"She was young—sixteen or seventeen—about twenty years ago. Wouldn't think it, would you? But you know how these Indians age. Don't seem to have any middle age—either they're young or they're old. The story says that she was going to marry a young buck, nice looking young fellow with a bit more education than most Indians have. You know, she was partly educated in a convent—couple of years, anyway—I guess that's the reason she and this young buck were so gone on each other.

"Things were going all right until a white man came along—one of those independent traders there used to be around here. He wanted Wind Along the Waste. You know, after a man is here for quite a while, he sees nothing wrong in marrying an Indian—his perspective sort of changes. A woman is always a woman, and I understand that Wind Along the Waste was as good looking as they come. She didn't care about him, but he had money and kept promising her father all sorts of presents and things if he would consent.

"Well, this part of it seems kind a hazy, but I know he did get her after a while, whether she wanted to or not. The young buck she wanted to marry was away somewheres, and when he come back all trace of them was lost. He wound up by committing suicide. He—"

"Committing suicide!" ejaculated the sergeant. This was almost unheard of among the Ojibways.

"Yes—committed suicide. Just willed himself to die, and he died. He—"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, don't you know? Guess there are more ways of shuffling off this mortal coil than you know of. Did you ever hear that a Chinaman could commit suicide by just deciding that he wants to die? He goes and lies down in his bunk and in a

day or two he is dead—and that's all there is to it. Well, some of the Ojibways can do this. That's what this man did. He decided it was time to die, and he just lay down and died. That's about all there is to it, except that here's the girl—suppose she left the white man, or he left her—and she's a little touched." He made a significant motion toward his forehead with his right hand.

"Well, it seems to me that that's hardly all," commented the sergeant slowly. "There's that tomahawk and—"

"Yes," interrupted the trader. "That tomahawk is a couple of hundred years old—handed down from her ancestors. I think she has some sort of an idea that it's her instrument of vengeance—divine vengeance—anyway, she never is without it."

"If she ever comes across the man—" began the sergeant.

"She'll kill him. And she'll hang for it, I suppose."

"Yes, she'll hang. Don't imagine that'll make much difference to her. Beastly shame, though. Dare say the beggar deserves to be killed," drawled the policeman, but his eyes were sober and his lips were stretched in a thoughtful line.

"I say, there's some one coming," he said, glancing out of the window.

"Yes, I saw him ten or fifteen minutes ago."

II.

SERGEANT WATERMAN instinctively disliked and distrusted the stranger from the moment of his appearance. The men of the Mounted sometimes acquire a sixth sense of that kind; and it is said that this sense is more to be relied upon than all their other senses rolled into one. Waterman could hardly say what it was about the man he had disliked, but from the first instant, when he had stamped into the room on his snowshoes, tentatively opening and closing his fingers to restore the circulation, Waterman felt that he was simply not his kind.

The stranger was burly and strong, bearded, about middle age—forty-five to fifty, with that in his small, black, piggish eyes that was not good to see in anyone up north, where a man has to be, to a large extent, his own censor of the moralities and the conventions.

It seemed that his name was Landon—Wilmot Landon—and he had been away in the States for the last ten or fifteen years, though he had been an independent fur trapper in this very section previously. He was on his way to Silver Cross, a settlement that he could reach by nightfall, if he started within the hour, and he had stopped at Blackhorse Peak to get warm and to rest for a few minutes. That, in short, was his story as he told it, but there was a story told in his face, in the sensual, gross lips, and in the lines under the glistening eyes—a story that he who runs could read, if he was so minded. And that was what Sergeant Waterman, of the Mounted, read.

The visitor and the trader engaged in small talk for a while, and Waterman sat in silence. He did not care to talk to this man, for some reason. He disliked him, that was the long and short of it. Landon turned to the sergeant after a bit.

"You're in the Mounted, ain't you?" he asked, and Waterman nodded. "Nearly got into the force myself, wunst. Glad I didn't, though. My idea of a rotten job, I'll tell the world. Poor pay and hard, dangerous work. Too many easier ways of makin' money, I'll say."

"How, for instance?" asked Waterman dryly, looking him in the eye.

The man laughed. "Come, now, sergeant—expect me to tell you that—an' you a member of the Mounted?" He leered evilly for an instant. Then he laughed, but Waterman said nothing. At this point Sanderson, who had left the company for a brief period, came back with a bottle of whisky and several glasses.

"Now you're talkin', friend," said the newcomer, jovially. "Fill it up for the sergeant, too."

"Thanks, no," said Waterman. "I'm not drinking"—quietly.

The other looked at him. "What's the matter—teetotaler?"

"No—I'm just not drinking now." With a shrug of his shoulders Landon turned to the trader.

" Darn peticular some people is, seems t'me, 'bout who they drinks with," he grumbled to Sanderson, who said nothing.

" Curious thing, that, about the Indian who committed suicide by just making up his mind he was going to die," commented Waterman, turning to the trader and speaking to him as though no one else was there. It was as though their conversation had been continued without a break.

" Yes, only case of the kind I ever heard of," replied Sanderson. " Seems to me that if—"

" Why, that's funny," broke in the visitor. " Imagine you're mentioning a thing like that! It just happens I knew of such a case right in this section. Happened about twenty years ago." The other two regarded each other in silence.

" Yeh; just about twenty years ago, I guess. I was young then, an' wuz tradin' around here promiscuous like. There wuz an Ojibway village around here then—don't suppose it's here any more, an' there wuz an Injun gal there that I can honestly say wuz the finest lookin' specimen I ever seen—an' I've seen some, you can bet your life on that. Say, that gal wuz about the prettiest lookin' thing I ever lamped—thin and supple as a reed, small, strong, the blackest hair an' the blackest eyes you ever seen, an' the most regular features.

" Had some eddication, too—got it in a convent. The name the Injuns give her wuz ' Wind Along the Waste '—ain't that a scream for a name? I shortened it to Windy after a while, of course, and—but that's gettin' a little ahead of the yarn.

" Her old man was a regular Injun—the kind that believed his gal had oughter mind him in everything; that's the way they are, among the Injuns. I found that out when I got so I began to hang around Wind Along the Waste. Say—ain't that the darnedest name?—I think they give it to her because she wuz so slim and supple and light, looked as though she might be picked up on any wind that come along and carried away—or mebbe it wuz account of her voice, which sometimes sounded like a wind whispering soft like in the pines, far away—y' know what I mean?

" Anyway, she wuz some looker, I'll say, though I suppose by now—if she's alive, she probably looks more like the old squaw what I passed comin' here than anything else. As I say, I hung around a while and tried to make an impression on her. I'd take her down to the post wunst in a while, blow her to a piece of ribbon now and then, and so on—but it didn't seem to be much of a go.

" You see, there wuz a young Injun buck in the game—these two had it all framed up to marry each other when I butted in an' jazzed up the works. You don't usually hear much about love among the Injuns—that is, the real ones, not the comic opera kind—at least, they don't think of it the same way we civilized people do; but I must say that this gal an' that there Injun buck had a bad case of it, an' if it hadn't been for the old man's havin' brung her up to mind him, they would of went an' got hitched before I ever got there.

" After I got there it wuz all off, because I made up my mind that I'd have that gal whatever happened." He paused for a moment, and moistened his gross, sensual lips with a thick, darting tongue. His eyes leered lustfully.

" I give the old man presents an' promised him anything he wanted if he would let me have the gal. Things wuz pretty strict around here at that time, an' it looked as if I would have to marry her if I wuz to get her at all. But I wuz willin' to do that—anything, in fact, just so as to get her.

" But although I got the ol' man so he was satisfied to have me get her, I couldn't seem to bring the gal around, an' although she wouldn't marry nobody without the old man let her, yet she wanted to wait an' see; maybe he would change his mind about the Injun buck she wanted. But we got around that all right, all right.

" Her Injun went off on a three weeks' trip, an' no sooner does he get away when the old man says: ' She's yourn if you can make her go with you.' I says she'll go with me, one way or the other." He paused a while again, while the others sat in quiet, waiting for him to go on.

" Did she go! I'll say she did. She didn't want to, an' put up a nawful fight, but there ain't none of them can get away

with that stuff with your Uncle W. L. when he makes up his mind he wants a thing bad enough. She went with me down the river, an' I made her be good—you can put that in your pipe. I showed her what was what, an' believe me, I knocked a few crazy notions outta her head while I had her. I learned her how to sit up an' say, 'papa.'"

"Say, but she was one sweet jane, at first! Tried to run away, wunst or twicet, but I got her back agen an' learned her proper. Never tried it no more. After that she knowed who wuz the boss, an' she stuck to me until I got good an' tired of her—five or six years, in all. I sold her to some half breeds over on the Plate after that, an' ain't never heard of her since—guess she's dead by now.

"But what I started to say wuz about that Injun buck. You see, he didn't get back till about three weeks after I had skipped; there wuz no chanst of findin' us then, an' he knowed it, though I don't know what he would have did if he had found us—though, you can't never tell what an Injun is goin' to pull on you. Anyway, her father tells him that Wind Along the Waste has gone with me of her own volition—that she told him she loved me, an' all that there kind a rot, an' he believed it.

"What does he do but say that he's going to pass in his checks — commit suicide; he does it, too. Goes to his bunk, lies down, turns his face to the wall, and in two days he wuz dead. Say, what d'ya think of that? Shows power of mind over matter. I alwuz thought it wuz a kinda curious thing, if you know what I mean."

He finished in a dead silence, his small black eyes gleaming unpleasantly and lustfully at the reminiscence. Shortly after he took his leave and plodded on his way.

Sergeant Waterman sat in the room, quietly, without saying a word, and so did Sanderson. They gazed grimly out of the window at the figure padding its way onward, placing the snowshoes carefully and accurately in the beaten path, until it had passed out of sight in the pines. A little later Sergeant Waterman rose and announced that he would go on his rounds. He drew on his fur coat and took his snowshoes from the wall.

"Guess I'll travel along with you a way—need the exercise," said Sanderson. Waterman nodded, and waited for the older man to dress.

III.

FOUR miles down the trail, in the lee of a big, grim rock they found the man who had called himself Landon. His body was still warm, but all life had departed. Spread flat on his back, his sightless eyes staring up at the brazen heavens reproachfully, he had that in his face that indicated he had seen something that usually comes in the black night—a shade out of a nightmare that had come to horrify him in daylight. The surprise mingled with the horror in his staring orbs. His revolver was in his hand, but it had not been fired.

A great, jagged hole had been smashed in his skull, such as might have been made by a sharp pointed stone, and next to him, where it had fallen, lay a tomahawk. The head of it was a long, sharp, heavy piece of flint, bound to the haft with a rawhide thong crisscrossed over the hard stone.

They examined the body briefly, still in silence, and then faced each other.

"She got him—after twenty years," remarked the trader, and the other nodded.

"The law—your law, doesn't recognize any crime in what this man did," said Sanderson. "Yet it will recognize a crime in what this squaw did—and she will hang for it. Well," with a shrug of his shoulders, "I suppose it must be so."

"Who said she'll hang for it?" asked the representative of the law evenly. "Hang is for murder. This was not murder."

The other looked at him gravely. "It was—"

"Can't you see what it was. It was suicide, of course. A man's liable to do anything on a lonely trail like this; when you're alone you get to see how useless life is—and you commit suicide. Let's bury him."

Quietly the men faced each other. It was Sanderson who spoke at last.

"I think you're right. He committed suicide twenty years ago."

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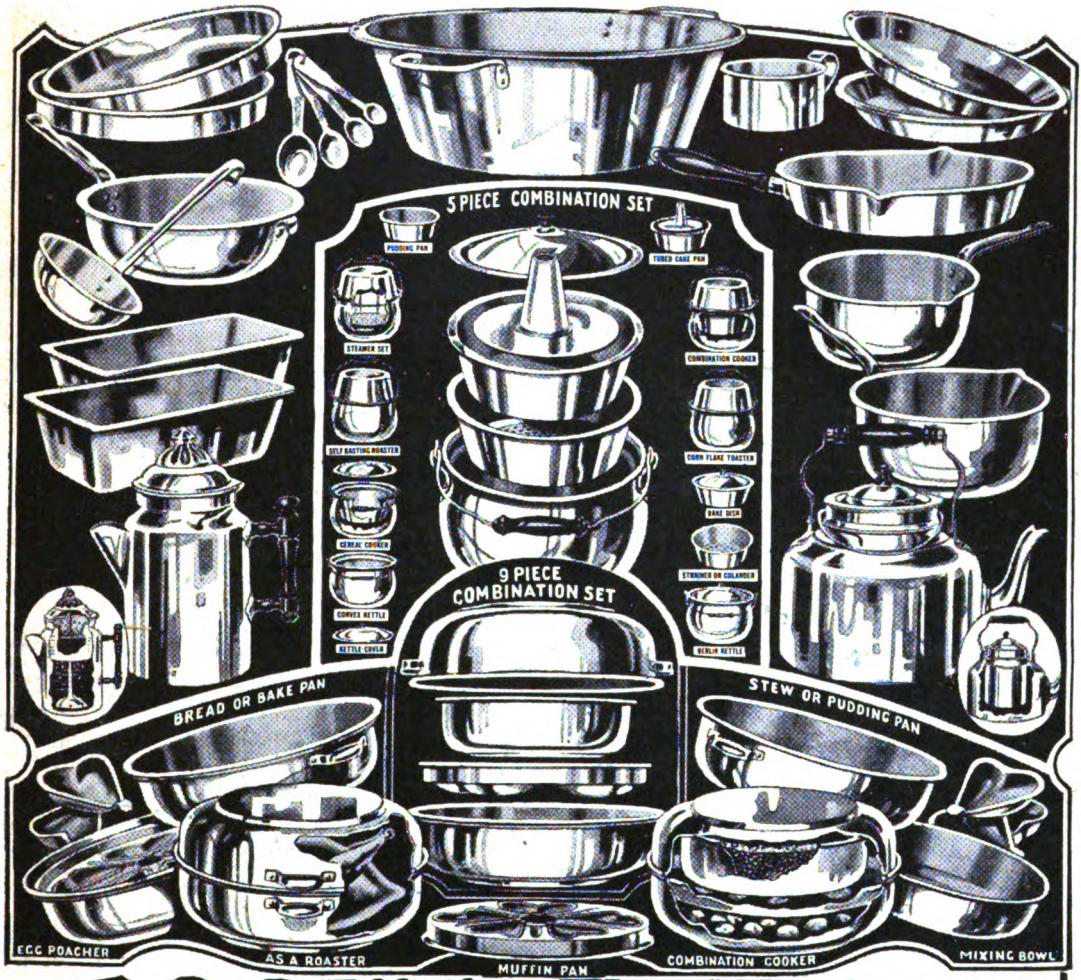

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An amazing value. Each utensil stamped with manufacturer's brand, "Lifetime Ware." **Note particularly the large dish pan, the skillet and the many other useful articles in this set,** most of which you will use several times **every day.** Each piece made of heavy gauge pressed sheet aluminum, extra hard, of a grade never offered at this price before. *Seamless.* Not thin like ordinary aluminum ware. Will not crack, chip or peel. Heats quickly. Polish can't wear off. As easy to clean as glassware. Cooks and bakes better than any other kitchenware. Yours for only $1.00 down, $2.00 monthly. Price $19.85. *Satisfaction guaranteed.* Send the coupon now.

LIFETIME WARE
DIAMOND BRAND
SANITARY BRIGHT DURABLE
PURE ALUMINUM

Combination tea kettle and double boiler (3 pieces) 5-quart size, 8 1-4 inch inside with a double boiler, 2-quart capacity; one Colonial design coffee percolator, (2 pieces) 8-cup size with welded spout, dome cover, fully polished; one roaster consisting of 9 pieces, measures 10 1-2 inches wide and 6 inches high. These 9 pieces have dozens of different uses, some shown in illustration, including bread or bake pan (7 pint capacity); stew or pudding pan (7 pint capacity); pudding pan or mixing bowl (4 pint capacity); egg poacher (5 eggs at a time); muffin pan; biscuit baker with 6 custard cups or jelly moulds; deep locking self-basting roaster, double boiler cereal cooker or triple steamer. The outfit also includes 2 bread pans, 1 lip stew pan (1 quart capacity), 1 lip stew pan (1 1-2 quart capacity). Two 9-inch pie plates; two 9 1-2 inch extra deep cake pans; one colander with 9 inch top, 5 1-8 inch bottom and 2 1-4 inch depth (can also be used as a steamer). 5-piece combination set, having 12 different uses as shown in illustration, consists of 6 quart convex kettle with cover; 2 quart cake and pudding pan with cake tube; strainer or colander. Also 1 extra large 14-quart dish pan (can be used for bread raising or preserving); 1 pure aluminum skillet (not cast), 10 1-2 in. diam. with always cool wood handle; 1-2 pt. drinking cup; 1 ladle with metal handle; and set of 4 measuring spoons. Shipping weight about 25 lbs. All pieces (except the pie plates, cup, spoons and bread pans) are highly polished, made of genuine pure sheet aluminum, extra hard, absolutely guaranteed the famous "Lifetime Ware."

Order by No. A6735A. Send $1.00 with order, $2.00 monthly: Price, 36 pieces, $19.85.

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